

# SECRET'S CHILD

by Kathy Bayne

## CHAPTER ONE

Catherine awoke to the scent of beeswax and leather. In the distance was the steady sound of tapping. She looked at her watch - 10 am. The day had begun hours ago for most of the tunnel population. They spoiled her so, letting her sleep late, and never really finding anything for her to do. Oh, she did the odd chore, a little sewing, a little cooking. She had even taken some of the children Above for an outing or two. But Catherine wanted more, she wanted to be an active part of the community on a regular basis.

She rolled over to the other side of the bed. The worst part of sleeping late was that she missed waking up with Vincent. The joy that she felt, just to see him there when she opened her eyes, was beyond description. Touching him, watching him wake up and make love to her was, she thought, the most exquisitely beautiful sensation she would ever experience.

She smiled drowsily, remembering last night and thought, *That's how it should be for all people who love each other - unconditional giving, receiving, unconditional acceptance.*

Catherine got out of bed and walked over to the table in the center of the room. There she found a note accompanied by a single red rose. She recognized the flourish of his handwriting immediately.

*Good morning, Catherine. I trust you have had pleasant dreams. I will see you in a few hours, but it will seem like forever till I hold you again.*

*Vincent.*

Despite herself, Catherine laughed, "Who says modern men aren't romantic?" Still grinning, she looked into the cradle.

"Good morning. How's my little sweetheart?"

Jacob answered his mother with a big smile.

"What should we do today, Jacob?" Reaching over, she picked him up. "We could help Grandpa straighten out his bookshelves." Catherine had noticed that Father had recently been having trouble going up and down the stairs in his chamber.

"So, how does that sound, Jacob?" The baby responded with a hearty giggle.

"What makes you so happy all the time?" Catherine kissed his belly. "Is it because your mommy and daddy love you so much, and you're their dream come true? Is that what makes you so happy?"

Jacob continued to coo and wave his hands in the air.

"Okay, let's get you fed and dressed." Catherine placed him on the bed next to her.

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"Father?" Catherine walked into his chamber cautiously.

"Good morning, Catherine. Did you sleep well?" The gray-haired man rounded the corner from his sleeping area.

"Yes, but I wish Vincent would wake me when he leaves. I don't want to be treated differently from anyone else. Why should I be the only one who gets to sleep in each morning?"

"Catherine, you have been through a lot in the past few months, and are just now recovering your strength. And you're a new mother, you need your rest more than most. Besides," Father lowered his voice, "Vincent confided to me, he likes to watch you sleep."

Catherine smiled at the older man and placed Jacob in the cradle Father kept in his chamber.

"Would you like some tea? The water is still hot."

"Yes, Father. That would be wonderful."

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Jacob Wells studied his daughter-in-law; she was a remarkable woman. Every hardship she endured made her stronger. Many people would have cracked under less. He wondered how he had ever doubted her, and her love for Vincent. He had always thought of Vincent as a man of culture and refinement. Catherine had made of him a man of love and hope.

He looked over to his grandson and smiled. "A remarkable woman indeed."

"Are you speaking to me, Father?"

"I was wondering how it's working out, you dividing your time between here and Above." He handed her an over-sized cup filled to the brim.

"It's strange. The way of life in the two worlds is so different. Mostly, I miss Vincent and Jacob when I spend time Above."

Catherine laughed when Father picked up his grandson and started rubbing noses with the child.

"You'd better sit, Father, he's getting very heavy." He obliged her by sitting in his favorite chair with Jacob on his lap.

"Vincent tells me that your new chamber should be finished very soon. He's been working day and night to get it ready," Father said. "I'm looking forward to seeing it myself. He's been keeping the whole thing such a secret." He motioned Catherine to come closer. "I did find out from a reliable source, that it is quite luxurious. But you didn't hear it from me."

"I'll miss the old chamber," Catherine mused. "So much has happened there. It's where we first met. What will you do with it?"

"I'll keep it vacant for the odd guest. And for Vincent, while you're Above, leading your other life."

Catherine looked at him thoughtfully. "Well, right now I'm leading this life and I'm going to do some cleaning. I've been noticing that your bookshelves have gotten out of hand up there," said Catherine, pointing to the upper library.

"I've been meaning to get around to sorting out that mess. God knows what I have up there, maybe a rare first edition."

"That would be a nice surprise."

"But not a likely one. You're more apt to come upon a family of mice than a first edition."

"Then all the more reason to get it cleaned up." Catherine had already rolled up her sleeves and

was heading for the stairs.

"You don't have to do this. I can get someone to help me." Father watched after her, as she started to climb.

"I'm sure other people have other things to do, as do you, Father."

"I did promise William I would go over the food supply and see what we needed. Then I should go down to the lower level and check out the newest leaks. Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"I'll be just fine. Now shoo. I have tons of cleaning and sorting to do."

"Very well then, but if you get tired, you must stop. Understood!"

"Yes, Father, understood."

Father looked at her a moment before turning to leave. "I'm so glad you and Vincent found each other, truly I am."

Catherine smiled down from the upper landing. "Me, too."

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The afternoon passed pleasantly and Catherine lost track of time as she became absorbed in her work. It seemed to her that Father had at least one book on every conceivable subject in the universe, and they were all covered with dust. She looked down from her perch and could see Jacob napping serenely.

*Just five more minutes,' she thought to herself, and I'll stop.*

Catherine removed two more books and was about to dust the shelf, when she noticed something wedged tightly between the bookcase and the wall. She pulled with all her strength and was able to free the mysterious object from its hiding place. It was an old manila envelope. Catherine turned it over. There were no markings, but the left side was ripped and she could see the corner of some kind of a book. Carefully, she reached inside the envelope. Besides, the book, there were a number of letters which she removed. Since no postmark was evident, she concluded that they were delivered by Helpers. Some were addressed to Jacob Wells, the others had a name Catherine did not recognize.

Getting down from the stepladder, she walked over to the big upholstered chair in the corner and sat down. She took the book from the envelope very carefully. It was a diary of some sort. Brushing off the dust, Catherine could see letters, a name.... '*The Journal of Anna Kozachenko*' imprinted on the cover. And next to it, added by hand at a later date, was another name - '*Pater.*' Cold chills ran down Catherine's spine. Anna Pater - that was the woman Father had said found Vincent, Paracelsus's wife.

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"Catherine, are you in here?" Vincent was calling from beneath the library balcony. "Catherine."

"I'm just coming down." She looked over the railing and saw Vincent bending over the cradle, talking to his son.

Catherine put the journal back in its envelope and shoved the whole thing into the immense utility pockets in her apron. She was glad she had decided to wear her '*Below*' clothes today.

"Vincent, I wasn't expecting you this early. Is there a problem?"

"It isn't early and the only problem is that I missed you." Vincent walked over to her and kissed her gently on the lips.

Catherine threw her arms around his neck. "I missed you, too."

"I thought, perhaps you would like something to eat. I know your habit of skipping meals, especially when you become absorbed in something. What are you doing in the library anyway?"

"Just straightening out a few things for Father. I was just about to take a break, actually. So there, you don't know me that well, after all." Catherine wrapped herself in his embrace.

"But I know your heart. And what I see there still astonishes me, so much passion and caring. I love you, Catherine."

She stared into his face. Even after all this time she never got tired of simply looking at him. All that made him different to the world Above made him special to her. The sound of Jacob's wakening cries brought them both back to the present.

"Just let me get some of the dust off me, and feed him, and we can go in to dinner." Catherine picked up the baby and turned to leave the room. "Vincent, are you coming?"

"I'll just be a moment. I must leave a note for Father," Vincent said over his shoulder.

"Okay, I'll meet you in our chamber."

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Once inside their chamber, Catherine looked for someplace to hide the envelope. *'Why am I being so secretive?'* she thought to herself. *Why not just tell Father I found it, and be done with it?*

Because deep down she knew it had been hidden deliberately, and her curiosity was aroused. Finally, she put the envelope in her briefcase. She knew no one would ever look in there. Satisfied, Catherine tidied herself, brushing the last of the dust from her hair. She made herself comfortable on the bed, and fed Jacob, enjoying the quiet intimacy with her son. She never heard Vincent come into the room.

"It never fails to touch my heart to see the two of you together, my greatest joys." Vincent's voice was choked with emotion.

Catherine looked up into his blue eyes. "I love you. We both do."

The touching scene was interrupted by the sound of Catherine's stomach growling.

"You're hungry. Come, we're still in time for the evening meal." Vincent was back in control and looking at her with an amused, but stern expression.

"Okay, I'll be ready in five minutes." Catherine got Jacob into some warmer clothes for the evening. She was ready in the promised time.

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"Vincent, do you know anything about Anna, the woman who found you?" Catherine asked, as they walked down the corridor to the dining area.

"I knew nothing about her at all, until Paracelsus mentioned her when he was Below, impersonating Father. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I just thought you many have been curious about her, that's all," Catherine smiled at him reassuringly.

"After my illness, and your disappearance, I never gave it another thought. It just didn't seem important." They had reached their destination, and the subject was dropped.

The evening meal was a pleasant affair. William had outdone himself with a chicken and dumpling dish. There was more meat available now that Catherine contributed to the food fund. She had insisted on helping. Everyone was appreciative, especially William and his kitchen staff, who now had a whole new range of recipes from which to choose.

"Father," Catherine began. "Can you tell me a little about Anna, the woman who found Vincent?"

"There isn't much to tell. She was one of us, a good woman, who loved to go Above." He paused for a moment, then continued. "Anna said the thing she missed most living Below was the wind in her hair." Father seemed uneasy with the conversation.

"Did she meet John Pater down here?" Catherine pressed.

"Catherine please do not insist on bringing up painful memories. John was my friend once, someone I trusted, and so was Anna. I think that's enough said." Father looked directly at her, as if to warn her to cease her questioning.

"Sorry." Catherine leaned over and squeezed the older man's hand. He smiled at her then, grateful to drop the subject.

The rest of the meal was spent in busy chatter about the day's events. Dessert was a spectacular rice pudding with real whipped cream. The children loved it. They squealed with delight at every taste.

"We will be needing an aerobics instructor down here soon, if Catherine doesn't stop contributing all these wonderful goodies," Mie Lin laughed as she took another mouthful.

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After putting Jacob to bed for the night, Vincent readied himself for sleep. He was tired, all those hours working on the new chamber had taken their toll. And he was glad when Catherine announced she would be staying up a little while longer to finish some work. Catherine waited to hear the sound of even breathing that assured her Vincent was in a deep sleep, before she took the journal from her briefcase. With some apprehension, she opened it and began to read

## CHAPTER TWO

*Dear Diary.*

*I am the first one in my family to graduate from college. Now I'm on my way to New York City to continue my education. Mama and Papa looked so proud when they waved goodbye to me at the train station.*

*I must admit I am a little nervous about living in a big city, having grown up on a farm. Animals were my only friends for years, and school was just some place I spent the day. Then I met Mrs. Simco and she made learning come alive for me. After that, my quest for knowledge was endless. I wanted to know the who, what, where and why of everything. Biology became my special interest. I've been very lucky. I even have a job at the college lab. Not bad for the daughter of poor Russian immigrants. No, Anna, not bad at all.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*On the train, I read the note that was put in my lunch basket. Mama says not to get so caught up in my career that I forget marriage and babies. Lots and lots of grandchildren for her to spoil. She consulted a fortune teller before I left, now she feels confident I will meet HIM here in New York. Mama is well-meaning, but she sticks to the old ways. Fortune teller, tea leaves, REALLY. I will be an assistant to a scientist (probably some old man with white hair and a beard). But I'm flexible, and I'll accept what life has to offer.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*I've started my work as an assistant in the Bio Lab. This, combined with my classes will give me very little time for a social life this year. Dr. Pater has not been to his lab since I started work there. He likes to have the new people get acquainted on their own, before he introduces himself. Everyone says he is brilliant, but a sworn perfectionist. I can't wait to meet him. He is renowned throughout the medical profession for his work in the field of infertility. What an honor to work with someone who is making history every day!*

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*Dear Diary,*

*The most wonderful thing happened to me today, but let me start at the beginning.*

*Earlier today while I was working in the lab, the sound of footsteps startled me. I turned and found myself looking into a man's laughing face.*

*"You squealed just like a laboratory mouse." he said, still laughing. "I'm sorry I frightened you."*

*My stomach knotted when he spoke to me, and even more so when he smiled. He had the kindest smile, and the twinkle in his eyes was mesmerizing.*

*We talked for awhile about the work and college, and about New York City itself. Before we knew it, the morning had passed and it was time for classes. I can't believe my boldness, I came right out and asked his name.*

*"Pater," he said. "John Pater."*

*I was speechless. When I caught my breath I apologized for my familiarity. He put his hand on my arm and asked my name. I told him. Then he looked at me and said.*

*'Anna Kozachenko, would you like to have dinner with me this evening?'*

*I accepted. Maybe Mama's gypsy was right!*

Vincent stirred. Catherine closed the notebook abruptly and looked over to the bed. His eyes were still closed, but she knew that with Vincent, closed eyes did not always mean sleep. Cautiously, she opened the book again. The next few entries were references to classes and lab work. She noticed how Anna's handwriting changed when she wrote John Pater's name.

"Catherine, are you still awake?"

At the sound of Vincent's deep voice, her heart beat wildly. Calming herself, she looked around the side of the chair.

"I was just going over some work. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Catherine tried to return to her reading but every little noise made her jump. Finally, she gave up in frustration and placed the journal back in its hiding place.

When she got into bed, Vincent moved close and put his arm around her.

"Goodnight, Catherine," he breathed into her hair.

"Nite." She snuggled up to the warm body next to her and tried to sleep, but the words of Anna Pater stayed with her all night.

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The next morning Catherine was anxious to continue reading the diary, so she feigned a slight headache to excuse herself from breakfast. Vincent was understanding and offered to bring her

some tea and rolls. She tried to tell him she wasn't all that hungry, but he insisted. While she waited Catherine stared at her briefcase, what would she find out today about Anna Pater? Finally Vincent returned with the promised meal.

"I can stay with you today if you're not feeling well?" he said, as he handed her the tea.

"That won't be necessary. I'm feeling better, the tea will help," she smiled lovingly between sips.

"At least let me take Jacob to Mary, so you can rest."

"No, Vincent, I enjoy having him near me."

"Just for a few hours, I think you overdid it yesterday with your cleaning. I want you to rest today." Vincent was persistent.

"Okay, just for a few hours. Now, both of you, kiss me goodbye."

When she was sure she was alone, Catherine took the journal from her briefcase and opened it.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

*Dear Diary,*

*I cannot believe things have moved so quickly. It seems like only a few days ago John and I just met. Now we are getting married.*

*I'm so happy. I love John so much, he's everything I could ever want in a husband. He makes me feel safe and warm and very, very, special. When I am with him, nothing else in the world matters. Most of all, he makes me laugh.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*Mama and Papa arrived last week to help with the wedding arrangements. They were worried that I am rushing things, but John won them over with his easy charm. He promised them he would take good care of me and always make me happy. I believe they're beginning to love John, as much as I do.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*Our wedding was beautiful. Even the day itself added to our happiness, with sunshine and warm weather. John isn't a follower of any organized religion, so we had the ceremony in a non-denominational chapel. Papa was disappointed - he wanted a big church wedding. But when he saw me in Grandmother's wedding gown, he proudly walked me down the aisle.*

*We had a small reception at a local restaurant. I must confess, I got quite tipsy. I'm not used to champagne. There was music and dancing, and magical feelings. Like when John looked at me and said, "I love you, Anna Pater."*

*Anna Pater, what a wonderful name.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*I won't be going back to school this semester. John thinks it is best that I stay home and get used to married life. I told him I wanted to at least help him in the bio lab. It wouldn't take much time and I could earn a few credits. But he feels too much togetherness isn't a good thing.*

*He's become very secretive about his work. He had never stopped asking me to type his lab notes. When I questioned him about it, he told me he was working on a very delicate government project; and that he would give me all the details as soon as he was at liberty to discuss the project.*

*Maybe it is for the best. Right now we are concentrating on starting a family. I can't wait to hold our first baby.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*I'm having dreams again. I haven't dreamed since I left home. I refuse to let old superstitions rule my life. Just because I'm having bad dreams, it doesn't mean bad things will happen. Grandma used to say that the dreams were just a way to caution us about what might happen, a warning to take care. I'm a little concerned about John, he seems more and more distant. Sometimes, I can feel his emotions and they confuse me. Such a paradox of feelings. Maybe he is just working too hard. I hope it is only that.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*Everything is going wrong. John was accused of conducting illegal experiments. He's lost his government research grant. He was told that his research was unnatural, a Communist plot to undermine moral Americans. John tells me that he has done nothing wrong, that the bureaucrats are always trying to stop scientific progress. I have no idea what he was working on, or even thinking about. All I know is that everything is falling apart.*

*It's worse than just losing the grant, we've had the support of family and friends. His family has disowned him, and my parents feel I've brought shame on them. Our only solace is each other.*

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*Dear Diary;*

*All our money is gone. Soon we'll be evicted from our apartment. Employment is impossible, no one will hire a disgraced scientist or his Russian wife, not in this day of Un-American Activities Committees. John says he talked to an old friend from the university, who might be able to help. He knows of a small community of people like us, whom life has not treated kindly.*

*Through all this, John still talks about a child. Even in that, we haven't been dealt a fair hand. No matter how hard we try, I can't conceive a child.*

Catherine was intrigued by the references to a friend from school. She reached into the envelope and removed the letters. Turning them over in her hand, she noticed no return address or any indication who they came from. In the corner of each were dates. She wasn't sure whether these were the dates they were received or answered. She wasn't even sure she should even be reading them. After all, they were addressed to Father. *Don't get all righteous now, Cathy, you've been reading Anna's diary, with no problem*, she chided herself. Catherine opened the envelope with the earliest date. The letter was for Father, and it addressed the problems of John and Anna.

*Jacob,*

*You may remember a John Pater from medical school. He was in my study group. I saw him today, sweeping up a store front. It seems he and his wife have fallen on very hard times. He was accused by the Un-American Activities Committee of doing unauthorized experiments. Experiments according to them, that could 'rock the foundation' of America.*



*Jacob, you know how he feels. To make matters worse, his wife is the daughter of Russian immigrants.*

*I was wondering if there is a place for them in the community. They need a safe haven. Respond in the usual way.*

*Waiting to hear.*

*Yankee*

*P.S. How is Devin? He must be getting big.*

Catherine looked through the collection of letters, until she found the next one. This one was addressed to Yankee. Is Yankee one of the community now, or still a Helper? Why were all the letters here, Below - questions to which Catherine lacked any supposition. Carefully, she opened the next missive.

*Dear Yankee,*

*Yes, I do remember John Pater, and I'm sorry to hear he has fallen on hard times. The wounds are still fresh, and I remember only too well the pain of exile. As for John and his wife joining us, I have some reservations. We are only a small group with few provisions, as you know. They must understand that this is a place of sharing and hard work, not simply a hideout for those who can no longer face life. It is a place of refuge, yes, and a place of renewal. But it demands much of those who live here. Try to make this clear to him, please. Explain to him all they need to know, without revealing too much. If they are still interested, I will consult with the others.*

*Thank you for asking about Devin. He seems to grow bigger every day. Being a parent isn't easy. Sometimes I feel so helpless. But I'm learning.*

*Jacob*

So Father knew Paracelsus in medical school, and they had a mutual friend, someone who knew about this place from the beginning. Only one name came to Catherine's mind. *No, it couldn't be him, he would have mentioned knowing Anna,* she decided.

Catherine felt she'd better rest before Mary returned Jacob to her care. Tonight was special to her because tomorrow morning she had to go back to work Above.

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After Catherine and Vincent ate supper in their chamber, Vincent put Jacob to bed for the night, while Catherine packed the things she would need to take back to the apartment with her. At last everything was in order and she found a book that was a particular favorite. She handed it to Vincent.

"Read to me. I never get tired of the sound of your voice." He took the book from her, and sat in the chair at the foot of the bed. "No, come over here next to me," Catherine patted the bed.

Vincent propped himself up against the bedrest Catherine in his arms. After a while, he closed the book and looked at her.

"How long this time?"

"Two days at least. Maybe longer. I have to go to dinner with a client. And there are two early court dates. You know when I'm in court I have to be available for phone calls." She pushed herself even closer to him. "I miss you already."

"I'll come to you, Above."

"I'd like that; it makes the separation easier."

Extinguishing the last candle, Vincent held her close to him. "I love you, Catherine. Sleep well." She answered him with a kiss that said she was willing to stay awake a bit longer.

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The next morning, Catherine was out of bed even earlier than Vincent. Not having brought work clothes with her, she needed to get back to the apartment to shower and change.

"Catherine, why didn't you wake me?"

"You looked so peaceful, and you never get enough rest."

Vincent got out of bed and walked over to her. "Never leave without saying goodbye, Catherine," he said solemnly.

She could see he was hurt. "I would never do that."

"Do you have all that you need?"

"Yes, I'm all set. See you soon." She kissed him. Through the bond Vincent felt her great sadness at leaving. Then she walked over to the cradle and bent to kiss Jacob and give him the motherly advice to be good for his father.

Vincent had dressed hastily. "I'll walk you to your entrance."

"No, stay here with Jacob. It's too cold to take him out. I can get there myself. I don't have much to carry."

"I'll miss you, Catherine. Be well."

"I'll send word with Benny, and don't forget your promise to visit."

She walked out of the chamber door and down the dark corridors, to the basement entrance to her apartment building. She knew she was leaving the best part of her behind in his underground world.

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Catherine jumped into the shower just as the phone rang. The answering machine took the message.

"Morning, Radcliffe, Joe here. We've had a slight delay in our court appearance today, so you can sleep late. See you at the courthouse at twelve noon."

"Damn," Catherine said aloud. "I could have stayed Below longer."

It was too late to return now. By the time she got there, it would be time to come back. She sat on the bed and emptied her briefcase. Without hesitation, she opened the diary.

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*Dear Diary,*

*We've joined a group of extraordinary people. They've all withstood a great hardship or personal loss, and survived. There's Sarah, a good woman, who survived some terrible accident, and was left a penniless widow. And Fabian and his wife Gina, who are expecting their first child. It won't be the first baby born here though, Grace's was the first. She died in childbirth, but her son Devin is a strong healthy boy. Jacob is raising him because he feels responsible for the loss of his mother.*

*John and Jacob have become friends. They spend hours together making plans, exploring the vast tunnel system, or just playing a game of chess at the end of the day. It is good to see John happy again, he has been through so much. We've made the right choice coming to live here, 'Below.'*

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*Dear Diary,*

*There are more inhabitants every day, as we gather those whom society has tossed aside and invite them to join us. Both John and Jacob see the need for more organization. They are working on a simple statement of policy, and a set of rules. This place must remain sacred, we all have an obligation to keep our world safe from all outside forces. To do so, we must have some 'pecking order,' John says.*

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*Dear Diary,*

*John was so excited when he came back from this morning's exploration. He insisted that I pack a picnic lunch and go with him to see his latest discovery.*

*A winding stairway led down to heavy wooden doors. Inside was a huge room that seems to capture the winds and hold them still. It is magnificent. Like the abandoned lair of some fairy tale wizard. We spread our blanket and enjoyed our meal, then we made love. It was marvelous to be so close again and enjoy the wonder of each other. I asked John what would be done with this room.*

*"Do you like it, Anna? It can be our new chamber." I laughed at the suggestion of just the two of us in all this space.*

*"What about our children, we will need room for them," John challenged.*

*It pains me to see him so obsessed with our having a baby. I doubt we will ever be blessed with a child of our own. But I have learned to accept this, John has not. He still hopes.*

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

The sound of the telephone broke Catherine's concentration.

"Hello."

"Radcliffe, you sound out of breath. Have you been running, or did I just catch you at a bad time?" Joe laughed into the phone.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Joe, the phone just startled me."

"They pushed up the court date again. The judge finished his business early and is back on the bench. Can you meet me in twenty minutes?"

"I'll be there."

"See you in twenty."

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Catherine finished dressing, grabbed her briefcase and left her apartment. Once she was in the hall, she had second thoughts about leaving Anna's diary out in the open. She went back inside and looked for a safe place to conceal the book and letters. Finally, she decided to hide the package in an old hat box in the back of her closet.

Joe was waiting at the curb as Catherine's cab pulled up alongside him.

"What kept you? Come on, we've only got two minutes." Joe took her hand. They walked into the courtroom, and took their places as the judge appeared from his chambers. "Just in time, Radcliffe."

"Sorry, Joe," she leaned over to him and whispered. "My treat for lunch."

"Hot dogs?"

"Hot dogs."

"Okay, you're forgiven."

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The case was going well but Catherine's mind kept wandering. Sometimes, she just longed for the simple things others took for granted. She wished there were a phone line to the tunnels, so she could check on Jacob, or just talk to Vincent.

At the break, Joe reminded her of her offer.

"I don't renege on my promises, Joe. Lunch is on me."

"The best hot dogs in New York City are two blocks over, corner of Canal Street."

"Lead on, it's your lunch."

They stopped in front of a dingy-looking street-front counter.

"Sy, are you in there, Sy?"

"Joey, how are you? Long time no see."

"I'm just great. I was telling my friend Cathy here that you have the best hot dogs in the city."

"Well, I hope she's not disappointed after such a buildup."

"Joe never lies when it comes to food, it's too important to him," Catherine said. "I'm starving, let's order."

"Sy, two specials and two chocolate egg creams."

"Here you are, Joey, two with mustard, onions and sauerkraut. Enjoy."

Catherine took a bite of her frankfurter. "Sy, your reputation is well-earned. These are the best hot dogs I've ever eaten. You'll be seeing me again."

The day was so beautiful they opted to eat outdoors and watch some street performers. A mime smiled sweetly at Catherine and handed her a paper flower. Thanking him, she was about to walk away when he tapped her on the shoulder and indicated she should smell it. Bringing the flower up to her nose she noticed a slip of paper tucked in between the leaves. Catherine placed the note in her jacket pocket and smiled knowingly at the performer.

"What's that, Radcliffe, a love note?"

"No, Joe, it's a flyer, saying that he's available for parties," she lied weakly. '*Joe was so damn observant,*' she moaned inwardly.

"Oh." He seemed content with her answer. "Well, it's time to head back. I wonder if the jury's still out?"

Catherine was anxious to read the note. She toyed with it all the way back to the courthouse. Then excused herself to go to the ladies' room, where she took the letter from her pocket and opened it anxiously.

Catherine,

*I sensed your melancholy earlier today. The separations get harder and harder, yet it is how we must live. For now. Jacob is spending the day with his grandfather and I am helping Cullen and Rigo repair some furniture. You are in my thoughts every minute. I will come tonight. I love you.*

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He always knew when she was feeling lonely, and somehow he was always there for her. She kissed the paper and whispered, "I love you" before placing it back in her pocket.

The rest of the day seemed to fly. Joe noticed the change in Cathy's humor.

"That was a love note, wasn't it, Radcliffe?"

"No, Joe. Who would be sending me love notes?"

"That mime, that's who. Do you have a date with him this evening?"

Catherine placed her hand on her forehead and threw her head back dramatically. "I can't hide anything from you, can I? Yes, we've been seeing each other secretly for months now. It's mad, I know, still, the passion is endless."

"Very funny, Cathy. Well, I hope your night of passion doesn't ruin your ability to come to work tomorrow. I expect you at eight am, sharp."

"Eight am! Oh, Joe, why so early?"

"We have to start work on the Issac's case, you know, the one who killed his wife, then blamed it on the neighbor."

"I thought Donald was working on that," she looked at Joe, pleadingly.

"Don't whine, Radcliffe. Just because you have some secret life that includes mimes and God knows who else, it's still business as usual at the DA's office."

"How long will this case take, Joe?"

"As long as it takes, Cathy, to put this guy away and you and I will be working on it till then. Besides, where are you going? You're out of sick days."

Catherine just shook her head and gave Joe a '*you win*' look.

"See you tomorrow, eight am," Joe leaned over and kissed Catherine on the cheek.

"See you then."

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In the cab on the way home, Catherine wondered if she should tell Vincent about the diary. Then she thought better of it. After all, it had been hidden, and she knew how Vincent felt about privacy.

Even when Father had been missing Above, he couldn't bring himself to read the most personal of his letters. She mused, '*Maybe I should sneak the book back to its hiding place.*' When the taxi stopped in front of her apartment building, Catherine fumbled in her purse looking for money to pay the driver.

"You look like a lady trying to make a decision," a voice from the front seat said.

"I'm sorry, were you speaking to me?" Catherine asked.

"The look on your face, it's the decision-making look. I see it all day. Want some advice?"

"Okay, what's your advice?" she smiled.

"Well, I always say, go with your heart, it never steers you wrong."

"That's what my husband always says." Catherine smiled again, thinking of Vincent.

"Smart guy, your husband."

Catherine handed him the fare. "You have a good evening, and thanks."

"You have a nice night also, lady."

Catherine entered her apartment, kicked off her shoes and threw her purse on the couch. She was hot and tired and twenty minutes later than she wanted to be. It was already dark.

"You're late, Catherine."

She turned to face the man whose voice she loved above all others.

"Vincent, how long have you been here?"

"About five minutes. I felt your fatigue and thought you would appreciate this." He handed her a covered bowl.

"Dinner, how sweet. Thank you, Vincent." She kissed him awkwardly, the dish balanced between them. "What delicacy has William cooked up this evening?" She inhaled the delicious aroma.

"William didn't cook, Catherine. I did. It's vegetable stew."

"I'm glad I had a big lunch then," she teased.

Vincent turned serious. "I can't stay. There's a problem with an old steam vent that needs my attention. But I promised I'd come, and I could not break my promise to you. You could return back home with me, but I don't know how long I will be working."

"I understand, Vincent. Anyway, I have to be in the office early tomorrow." She didn't have to say any more; he knew she would stay Above tonight."

"I must leave, Catherine. Will you be all right? I sense your apprehension."

"I'll be fine," she lied.

"I know you are troubled, Catherine. What's wrong?"

"It's just, I don't like being alone, since...." She hugged Vincent tightly.

"I will stay, Catherine."

"No, I must not let fear rule my life, and I know you're always near. Go back to work, I'll be fine. Kiss Jacob for me, tell him I miss him. Now go!"

She gave Vincent a kiss and pushed him out the French door.

Catherine thought about how tired she was. She knew she should sleep. But instead she found herself in the closet, pulling out the old hat box, searching for the secret package. Sitting cross-legged on the bed, she took out the next set of letters and the diary.

*Dear Jacob,*

*John came to visit the other night. He was quite excited. He spoke of the structure of the underground community, and how there was an ever growing need for a strong leader. John feels that, after everyone realizes he is a genius, there will be no question who that ruler will be. When I asked if Anna was helping him, he said she was too busy preparing for the child. I congratulated him and asked how many months along she was. Imagine my surprise when he answered that Anna would be having a child, but he wasn't sure when she would actually be pregnant!*

*Jacob, what's going on down there? I've known John for many years, but the man who came to see me the other night was changed. He frightened me, there was something in his eyes, something so sinister. Please write soon and let me know you are well.*

*Waiting to hear.*

*Yankee*

*Dear Yankee,*

*The change in John is worrisome. All he talks about is absolute leadership and power. I've tried to explain to him over and over again that we are a simple place, with simple ways. That is why most of us are here - to leave behind the complexities and anxiety of the world Above.*

*As far as Anna's impending 'pregnancy' is concerned. About two weeks ago John sent her to me for a physical, to find out why she is unable to conceive. As usual in these cases I tested both of them. The problem is not with Anna, it is with John. He is sterile. When I told him as gently as I could, he was enraged. He seemed like a mad man, accusing me of doing something to his wife so she would not conceive. He spoke of how I was just waiting to take over, and my so-called son Devin, after me. But that he was going to make sure that never happened.*

*Anna told Sarah that John has fits of ranting and raving lately, and sometimes he frightens her.*

*See if you can talk to him, Yankee, find out what's wrong. Perhaps it's just 'cabin fever,' it can be dark and confining down here. The whole community is feeling the strain, it's pulling us apart.*

*Come visit soon.*

*Jacob.*

Catherine turned to the next page in Anna's diary.

*Dear Diary,*

*Today I spent the day reading in Jacob's chamber. He's begun a wonderful collection of books - before long there will be no room for him in his chamber. I like the classics best, especially the romances. To travel to 'Wuthering Heights' with Catherine and Heathcliffe, to feel the love of 'Jane Eyre' for Mr. Rochester. And 'Shakespeare, Dickens' the poetry of 'Keats, Shelley,' all these people are wonderful to spend an afternoon with and forget reality. Just for a while.*

Catherine noticed that no reference was made to the problem Father was having with Paracelsus. Anna was a woman of her times, always loyal to the man she loved. She went on to the next entry....

*Dear Diary,*

*Jacob has asked me to help Sarah start some sort of formal education for the children. The way I've been devouring books lately, he says, 'I'm a natural to teach literature.' There are more and more children among us every day, cruelly used for ones so young. Maybe the school will help them back to a normal life. I hope so, for their sakes. I wonder what kind of person could abandon a child.*

*Dear Diary,*

*I haven't been sleeping for weeks, my head is too full of dreams and nightmares. I wish I knew what they were trying to tell me. Please, God, don't let me be losing my mind. John had become even more secretive, but I can feel this sense rather than see it. The more he tries to hide his feelings, the more intense they become to me.*

*I need to go Above and breathe the fresh air again, and see the flowers, hear the music of New York City. Sometimes I wish I had never left home.*

Catherine was tempted to read further, but sleep was beginning to overtake her. She thought of Anna as she drifted off to sleep, 'a good woman,' Father called her. And a very lonely one.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

Catherine awoke before the alarm went off; it was still dark. She'd always disliked the dark, even more so now. The room was becoming oppressive to her. It reminded her of being locked in a coffin. *What makes me think that?* It was such a morbid thought. Unable to stand it anymore, she got out of bed and went to the balcony. The cold damp air of early morning was like an elixir, clearing her mind. Suddenly, she felt the need to be near her son, hold him and reassure herself that he was real.

After endless cups of coffee, it was finally seven am. Catherine called Joe's answering machine, and left the message that she had family business and would be a little late. She knew he would either be in the shower, or still in bed at this hour. Either way, it saved questions, just to talk to the machine.

It was a quiet time in the tunnels; all the breakfast dishes had been cleared, and everyone was about their work, Catherine did not stop to look for Vincent. Instead she headed straight for the nursery and Jacob.

Sarah was sitting in the corner, knitting. All the children either sleeping or playing quietly.

"Catherine, I wasn't expecting you this morning."

"I just had to come and see little Jacob. I hope it's not a bother, Sarah."

"Don't be silly, you should know better. You're never a bother." Sarah looked at Catherine and shook her head. "He's right over here, amusing himself with some of his daddy's old toys."

The two women walked over to an old-fashioned crib where the youngest member of the Wells family was occupying himself with a handmade mobile. His eyes brightened when his mother's face came into view. Catherine picked him up and hugged him tightly to her. It felt good to hear his heartbeat. Sarah looked on Catherine, and thought she seemed so upset.

"Are you all right, dear?"

"Yes," Catherine smiled at Sarah. "It's just that sometimes this all seems like a dream, and I just have to prove to myself it's all real."

"I feel the same way, sometimes. It can all be too perfect."

For the next half hour, mother and son revelled in each other's company. Catherine reluctantly put Jacob back in his bed. Her face was flushed and she radiated happiness and contentment.

"I have to leave now, Sarah. I'm already late for work."



"Stay, dear, just for a cup of tea. It's ready and hot, and like you said, you're already late for work." Sarah put her hand on Catherine's sleeve.

Catherine smiled, nodding affirmatively. She sat at a small table and studied her hostess who was pouring the tea.

"Sarah, what do you know about Anna Pater?"

The older woman appeared startled by the question, but answered calmly. "Not much, I'm afraid. I had just arrived myself when Anna and," Sarah hesitated, "her husband came to live with us." She spat out the words like they tasted bad. Regaining her composure, she continued, "I pretty much kept to myself in those days, not the old busy-body I am now."

Catherine laughed. Everyone knew Sarah loved a good bit of gossip.

"What I do remember was her sense of humor and infectious laugh. She would stop by sometimes and talk to me, tell me funny stories about the farm she grew up on. We even worked together to start the first lessons for the children Below." Sarah looked into the distance as she spoke. "I didn't know her that well, but she was a friend. Never deserved what life had in store for her."

"And what was that, Sarah?" Catherine inquired.

"*HIM, HE* did it to her. He made all the laughter stop." Sarah caught herself, hoping she hadn't said too much.

"I was wondering if you remember her pregnancy?"

"I can't recall her ever being pregnant. Oh, she wanted children very much, but was never blessed."

Catherine just stared at her, waiting for her to continue. "After all the trouble started, she took to keeping to herself. She sat for hours, alone, in her chamber, reading out loud stories, songs, poems. She sometimes said that our lives down here were too confining. That she needed to go Above, every now and then, and enjoy the sights."

"Did she go Above often?"

"No, just an occasional visit. Mostly, she spent the day reading and listening to music. Like I said, she kept to herself. Somehow, she couldn't bring herself to leave that man. She loved him, despite all he'd done.

"What had he done, Sarah?"

"What did you say?" Sarah seemed bemused.

"You said, Anna still loved John, despite what he had done. What did he do?"

"I don't know, it was all rumors and, like I said, I was a newcomer," Sarah rambled. "Why do you ask about her, she's been dead for so many years?"

Catherine thought briefly about telling Sarah she'd found Anna's diary, but answered instead, "Vincent was so distressed about what Paracelsus told him, I'm just trying to give him some background on the woman who found him. She's been a secret all these years. Why was that, Sarah? Why is Anna such a mystery?"

"I don't know, dear, you will have to ask Father the reason. All I can remember is that Anna Pater was a sweet woman, who brought much happiness to all of us."

"A happiness she didn't get to share," Catherine said softly.

Just then, one of the younger children ran in crying, holding out a hurt finger.

"Well, it looks like I have a minor accident to tend to, and you have to be getting back to work." Sarah looked relieved by the interruption.

Catherine checked her watch and agreed. She thanked Sarah for the tea, kissed Jacob one last goodbye and left the nursery. Outside in the hall, Catherine held tight to her briefcase as she made her way Above.

"So many secrets, Anna. What does it all mean?" Catherine murmured to herself.

Vincent arrived at the nursery right after Catherine's departure. "Sarah, has Catherine been Below? I thought sensed her near."

"She just left, Vincent. She had to go back to work."

"That's odd, she never even called for me."

"She came to see Jacob, just to hold him. It's a trait mothers have."

Vincent could tell there was something else on Sarah's mind. He looked over at the two empty tea cups. "Did she say anything else, Sarah?"

"Well, yes." Sarah hesitated. "She asked me about Anna Pater."

"What?" Vincent looked at her, puzzled.

"She asked if I knew her. I told her, somewhat, but I was new to the community myself when Anna arrived."

"It seems odd that Catherine has spoken of Anna more than once. What could be on her mind? She is not stirring up good memories; I thought Father had made that clear to her."

"Don't worry, Vincent. I'm sure Catherine is just trying to find out all she can about the community. After all, it's in her nature to ask questions, that's what she does every day. I wouldn't make too much of her natural curiosity."

Vincent seemed satisfied with Sarah's answer. He turned his attention to his son. Walking over to the crib, he picked Jacob up and kissed his forehead.

"I'll take him with me now. If you need us, we'll be in my chamber."

Sarah smiled. She looked at Vincent and Jacob, thinking how unique they were, father and son.

"Bye-bye, Jacob." She threw him a kiss.

"Say bye-bye to Sarah." Vincent took the child's hand and made a waving gesture.

Jacob gave the older woman a big smile and a giggle.

"You know, son, your mother has been acting very strangely lately," Vincent muttered, as he left the room.

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Catherine arrived back at her basement. Sadly, she closed the passage between her two worlds. She looked at her watch, nine-fifteen am. If she could get a cab right away, she would almost be on time for work. Cautiously, she opened the door into the lobby, and walked towards the front door.

"Ms. Chandler, I was just calling your apartment. There's a package for you." As an afterthought he said, "I didn't see you come out of the elevator."

"I was down in the basement throwing away some trash." Cathy took the package from the young man's outstretched hand. "Where do I sign?"

"Right here," he indicated an empty line in his log book. "You shouldn't go down to the basement alone, it's too dangerous. Next time, call me and I'll get someone to help you."

"Thanks, Henry. I'll try to remember next time." She took another quick look at her watch and feigned surprises. "Could you call me a cab? I didn't realize I was running so late."

"Cathy, I'm glad you're here." Joe was walking out the door as Catherine was coming into the office. "I've been called to the mayor's office for a meeting. Could you keep working on the depositions in the Isaac's case? I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Sure, Joe. No problem. Any idea what the mayor wants?"

"Yeah, he said something about rounding up all assistant DA's who can't get to work on time. Especially those who promised their boss they'd be in the office by eight am."

"Joe, I'm sorry, something came up... and I forgot."

"Just get those depositions ready and maybe, just maybe, I'll forgive you. See you later, Radcliffe. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," Catherine said. But Joe was already gone.

Over the next few hours Cathy was true to her word; she finished all the paperwork needed for the case. It wasn't easy on Joe, being District Attorney, especially under the circumstances. The department had been under constant scrutiny since the Moreno scandal. Joe had to be careful not to be painted with the same brush as his former boss.

Catherine worked through lunch and by late afternoon needed to stretch her legs. She wrote Joe a quick note and left it on his desk.

The air felt good on her face as she walked over to the pedestrian park. She thought with sympathy of Anna, who'd longed to be in the fresh air again. Finding a quiet spot near the fountain, she opened the diary.

*Dear Diary,*

*I'm alone most of the time now, since John has moved us to a chamber far from the rest of the community. If that weren't enough, he goes Above every night now, returning late and in a terrible mood. Talking to him about his behavior does no good. He just tells me to have faith, to believe in him. That he is 'securing our future.' I don't know what he means. My nightmares continue.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary,*

*While I was cleaning our chamber, I found a paycheck from New York University made out to John for two hundred dollars. When I went to the school they told me that John works there nights as a porter, in exchange for a modest paycheck and the use of one of their laboratories. I ventured to ask what he was doing in the lab. No one knew for sure, he keeps his work secret.*

Catherine thought, *How ironic, both Anna and I happened upon a secret while we were cleaning.* The notion made her smile, as she turned the page....

*Dear Diary,*

*John has not been home for two days now.... ever since the night I asked about his job at the university. We had a terrible argument. The worst part was that I lost my temper, really lost my temper. As a girl, I used to go into such fits that grandma would swear the devil took my soul. This is the side of me that John saw for the first time since we've been together. My fury knew no bounds, and I struck out at him in a blind rage.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary,*

*He's been missing for a week. I search for him every day. Above, Below, but it is all in vain. My sense of him is growing dimmer.*

*Jacob assured me that I always have a home here Below the streets of New York.*

*Strange, how much I miss John. Life with him hasn't always been happy, but life without him is miserable. I guess I must live with my foolishness.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*The weather is getting warm as spring turns to summer. I enjoy going up to the park and feeling the sun on my face. I sit on the grass and watch the people, or read. Books have become treasured friends who help me fill the hours.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*It's been a month since I last saw my husband. Somehow I can't seem to remember the bad days now, only the good times and the laughter. How I miss the laughter.*

## **CHAPTER SIX**

Catherine could feel the sadness in those words and her eyes filled with tears. She cried for the woman, long dead, who had become so alive to her. Composing herself, she took out the next set of letters.

*Dear Yankee,*

*John has been missing for a month. It seems he and Anna had a rather explosive fight over his night time activities and he just walked out on her. I'd say good riddance at this point, but Anna is beside herself with guilt and worry.*

*Have you seen him? We've checked at New York University, but he no longer works there. If you can shed any light on his whereabouts, please let me know. The whole community is feeling the strain of this disruption.*

The next letter was not the usual reply from Yankee, but another letter from Jacob.

*Dear Yankee;*

*After nearly two months of driving everyone crazy, John has returned. He just arrived - showing no care for the anguish he has caused us all, especially his wife. I have tried speaking to him, but he told me to save my arguments, nothing I would say or do could dim his euphoria.*

"Radcliffe, you goofing off again?"

The sound of Joe's voice was the last thing Catherine wanted to hear.

"How did you find me?"

"It was a fine piece of detective work, if I must say so myself," he said with a smug smile.

"Oh, I see. So, tell me, Holmes, how did you come upon my 'exact' location?"

"You're slipping, Cath. Too preoccupied." He handed her the note she'd left for him.

*Joe....needed some fresh air. If you want me, I'll be in the park by the water fountain.... Cathy.*

Catherine sighed. She 'was' terribly preoccupied. She thought about asking for the rest of the afternoon off, knowing Joe would grant it. But there was a lot of work to do, maybe tomorrow she would ask for some time.

Joe looked over her shoulder. "What are you reading?"

"Just some old notes from my dad's desk," she lied. "I never really had the time to go through them."

"Don't start delving into too many painful memories, Cathy. You're still healing, yourself."

"It's pretty boring stuff, Joe. Nothing to worry about." She slipped the diary and letters back into her briefcase. Standing, she took Joe's arm and asked lightly, "Shall we go back to work?"

"'Fraid so. The work's piling up and the clock is ticking as we speak." He smiled and gave her a quick hug.

"What's that for?"

"Just because you're here, Radcliffe."

\*\*\*\*\*

The phone on Catherine's desk rang. It was her client cancelling their dinner appointment. She was relieved to have the evening to herself; she wanted to get back to the diary.

"You look like a woman with time on her hands." Joe was hovering above her desk.

"As a matter of fact, I am. That was Anderson, cancelling for the evening."

"Since you're now free for dinner, how about some lasagna?"

"I thought you only ate your 'mother's' lasagna?"

"It 'is' my mother's lasagna. I stayed with her over the weekend, and she sent me home with a doggie bag, the kind of doggie bag even the whole ASPCA couldn't eat." Joe took a breath. "You got a microwave?"

"Sure. Hey, are you inviting yourself over to my place?"

Joe ignored the question and continued, "We'll pick up a bottle of wine and enjoy Mother Maxwell's best dish."

"Sounds good to me, Joe. Heating up food other people make is my specialty. And I'm starving." Catherine thought Joe might have an ulterior motive for this impromptu meal. Ever since her return, he worried about her. He was a good friend, even if he acted like a mother hen.

"Radcliffe, I'm ready when you are."

Catherine grabbed her coat and briefcase. "Lead on."

They stopped at a liquor store down the block from the office and picked up a bottle of Chianti. Joe stepped off the curb to hail a cab.

"We can take the subway," Cathy ventured.

" 'Subway?' I bet Catherine Chandler has never even 'seen' the inside of a subway car. No, we'll take a taxi."

"I'm not that bad, honest. I've seen a lot more of this city than you think, only from a different angle." Joe just shook his head as a cab pulled up and he opened the door for her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Vincent was waiting on her balcony. He wanted to talk to Catherine about her strange behavior in the nursery. The sound of laughter made him step further back into the shadows. Catherine had company. He felt an emotion he hadn't known for a long time; Jealousy. Vincent watched his beloved walk through the door with Joe Maxwell.

"You can put your stuff on the bed and I'll go warm up the main dish." Catherine disappeared into the kitchen. "This smells delicious," she yelled back in to the living room.

Catherine set out the food while Joe poured the wine. "How about a toast, Cathy?"

"Sure, what should we toast to?"

"You, and whatever makes you happy. Some terrible things happened to you, but I'm convinced something very good finally came from it."

Catherine smiled at him. "And to friends, very good friends."

They discussed some cases, but mostly they laughed and enjoyed each other's company.

"God, I'm stuffed," Cathy rubbed her stomach and rolled her eyes. "You were right. Your mom 'does' make the best lasagna." She looked over to the half-eaten dish. "There's plenty left, we could have it for lunch."

"As good as it is, I've eaten it all weekend. I'll just put it in your fridge."

Before Catherine could stop him, he opened the refrigerator.

"Radcliffe, you on some kind of 'diet?' There is 'nothing' in here."

"I just haven't gotten to the store," she was behind him and closed the door. "Now I have mom's lasagna."

Joe just looked at her. "I've got to leave. Why don't you come in late tomorrow, get a good night's sleep."

"I was thinking of coming in early, and taking a few hours off in the afternoon." Catherine bit her lip and had that 'What do you think, Joe' look on her face.

"Take the whole day," he bent and kissed her cheek. "See ya."

\*\*\*\*\*

Vincent stepped into the room as soon as the door closed behind Joe.

"I didn't know you were having company this evening."

"Just an impromptu dinner with a friend." Catherine stood on tiptoe to kiss him. "I didn't expect you tonight."

"Are you sorry I came?" he asked sincerely.

" NO, never. I'm always glad for your company. Why do you ask?"

"Even the most ardent of lovers occasionally need space. We have a very confined life Below. Sometimes, there are cases of cabin fever."

*Cabin fever, an expression used by Father to this mysterious Yankee.* Catherine wanted to get back to the diary and Anna's story. Vincent sensed her distraction and was confused by her need to be alone.

"Will you be staying the night?" she asked, as she started to undress for bed.

"I thought you might come home tonight. Our son seems restless. Perhaps his mother should visit *'again'*... today."

"Again?"

"Sarah told me of your visit today. Why didn't you come and get me?"

"No reason, really. It's just that I came to see Jacob. Sometimes, I get these overwhelming feelings. When that happens, I just have to hold him."

"But that was not the only reason I was not sent for, was it?" His eyes were very blue and cold.

"What do you mean?" Catherine was truly at a loss.

"You insisted on bringing up painful memories."

"Are you referring to my inquiries about Anna Pater?"

"Yes! What is your obsession with this woman? She's dead." Vincent was speaking quite loudly.

"I just wanted to know more about her, the woman who married John Pater, the woman who saved your life, when she found you. Aren't you just the least bit curious about her, Vincent?"

"No," Vincent was now shouting. "The wounds Paracelsus inflicted are still too fresh. I have no need to open them again. I forbid you to talk about her again, to anyone. Do you understand, Catherine?" He looked at her with eyes narrowed to slits.

"Forbid me. *FORBID ME*!" It was Catherine's turn to shout.

Vincent had realized his poor choice of words the minute they left his mouth, but it was too late to take them back. And he didn't want any more talk of Anna Pater. He didn't reply.

"I have inquired about Anna in *'two'* conversations, that is *'not'* an obsession. But since you feel that you can *'censor'* me, just what *'are'* the safe subjects? The weather, Arnold Schwarzenegger's latest movie?" she pressed.

"Catherine, I think you're overreacting to what I said. I merely want to emphasize that perhaps you should not mention Anna again."

"*Get out, Vincent.* Just leave me alone before I say something I'll regret later."

"Catherine, I've come to be with you," he slipped his arms around her waist. "All night."

"I have a headache." Catherine looked at him defiantly, and slipped out of his embrace.

"What can I do to ease the pain?" Vincent was concerned.

"Leave." She opened the French doors and walked onto the balcony.

"Do you really want me to go?" Vincent had followed her outside.

"Yes." With that she walked back into her apartment and closed the doors, leaving Vincent standing alone, a dark figure, against the skyline.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine really did have a headache after her fight with Vincent. They usually didn't disagree, but this time he went too far. *Forbid me, indeed.* She resigned herself to an evening alone, and went to recover Anna's diary from her briefcase. Settling back on her bed, Catherine opened the book.

*Dear Diary;*

*John has finally come home, and I am thankful he is unharmed. When he walked into our chamber, I just ran into his arms and kissed him, asking him to forgive me. He said there was nothing to forgive, and it was he who should be apologizing.*

*I asked him where he'd been. He told me 'making our dreams come true.' That evening as we were getting ready for bed, John told me we could not make love, not for awhile anyway. He gave no reason, just stated a fact.*

*We held each other close during the night and I found comfort in the sound of his breathing. By rights, I should hate this man, but I can't. He seems to have some strange spell over me that will not let me leave him.*

There were no entries made during the next few weeks, and several pages had been left blank as if they were to be filled in at a later date. The next time Anna wrote, her handwriting looked a little shaky.

*Dear Diary;*

*John's been giving me the medication for three weeks and I still don't feel any better. He said the side effects would wear off soon. I hope so. The constant pain, and the nausea are leaving me weak.*

*I promised John I would keep this a secret, but nothing escapes the eyes of Jacob Wells. He called me into the Hospital chamber, on the pretext he was doing a health chart on all the community members. The concern he shows for me is heartwarming, he even suggested I leave John and live closer to the security of the inhabited tunnels. I can't leave John. I could never leave him, especially not now.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*At last I feel myself again, it has been a hard time for me. John returned to work at NYU. He needs to use the lab so we can do a few more treatments. I looked in the mirror today. I think I am glowing. Is it possible that my dearest wish has finally come true?*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*Jacob is never at a loss for words, but today he was practically speechless, after confirming the fact that I was pregnant. He had a million questions. It told him never mind the hows and whys, just be happy for me.*

*He wouldn't let it go. He wanted to know what John had done to me, and he pushed hard for an answer. I told him that I knew very little, just that it was a new fertility drug. We didn't actually have intercourse, it was a form of implantation. I'm not sure how it was done. I've slept a lot these last few weeks. I don't remember a great deal.*

\*\*\*\*\*



*Dear Diary;*

*So many questions for which I have no answers. Will it ever be clear to me? John has not left my side since we received the good news. He was angry when I told him that Jacob knew about my condition. I swore Jacob to secrecy. I trust him, sometimes more than my husband.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*No one besides John and Jacob know about my baby. Strange I never think of him as our baby, just 'my' baby. After all, John had nothing to do with his conception. It was just me and some unknown factor. Or maybe it was fate that intervened and brought me our greatest happiness.*

*I've had dreams about him, my little one. I never really see him clearly, but I know it's a boy. A very sweet little boy. One of my dreams was very disturbing. I could hear a crying far away, but could not get to the source. I just know it was my child, such cries of anguish, it broke my heart.*

*I woke suddenly with tears running down my face. John brushed the tears away, telling me everything would be fine. He has been so loving to me, yet to the rest of the community, he has become a problem.*

Catherine stopped reading and looked inside the envelope for more letters. But there were none that correspond to the diary dates. She continued to read;

*Dear Diary;*

*Turmoil has come to the tunnels, in the form of my husband. John has been recruiting residents to rebel against Jacob's authority. He promises them great wealth and a life of ease, if they follow him and give him absolute control. John says that this place has become a shelter for the underprivileged and the underachievers, those with no hope for the future. He says we must rid ourselves of the losers and become strong. I don't know him or his mind anymore. One minute he is kind and loving, the next he plots the demise of his best friend. The quest for power does strange things to a person.*

*I just stay away from the main living area now, and read or daydream. My little one has become quite active and takes most of my strength. I love him already, and can't wait to hold him in my arms.*

Catherine closed the book. Her head had begun to clear and she felt badly about her fight with Vincent. He's seemed so confused when she walked away from him - she had never denied him her love before. Looking at the clock, she realized it was too late to go Below. Vincent was still awake, she knew. She felt his restlessness.

Shutting the light, she said softly, "Good night, Vincent, take care of *OUR* little one."

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

Vincent was lying on his bed, their bed, staring at the ceiling. What had he done to make her so angry? Maybe he spoke a little too strongly, but that was no reason to force him to leave. He turned on his side and closed his eyes hoping sleep would overtake him, but he remained away, his body

aching with his need of her. Father walked into the chamber, both surprised and relieved to see Vincent there.

"I thought you were spending the night Above with Catherine?"

"She had a headache, and wanted to be alone this evening."

"A headache." Vincent thought he heard a chuckle in Father's voice. "Did she throw you out of the apartment?"

"No, she politely asked me to leave."

"Same thing, when a woman has a headache. Vincent, she is throwing you out, no matter how polite it sounds. Do you want to talk about it?"

"It was just a foolish argument that got out of hand, nothing serious."

"Vincent, my son, she is Above, alone in her bed, and you are in this chamber, alone in yours. It must have some serious connotations."

"She has been asking about Anna Pater again. I just pointed out that was not very prudent of her." Vincent didn't notice Father visibly pale at the mention of Anna's name.

"Who was she talking to?"

"Sarah. Catherine stopped by the nursery earlier today, to see Jacob and started asking questions about Anna and her life here."

"Well, you were correct in asking her not to discuss this further. Those of us who lived through the dark days have many bitter recollections."

"Except, I used the word forbid. I forbade Catherine to speak of Anna again."

"You used the word *forbid* to Catherine? Vincent, you *are* a brave man! I'm sure everything will be fine by tomorrow. Apologize to her."

"I've already said I'm sorry, but she won't listen to me."

"Say it again." Father bent over and kissed him on the brow. "Goodnight, son."

"Goodnight, Father."

Alone again, Vincent thought about getting Jacob from the nursery but his son would be sound asleep. No sense in both of them being awake all night.

Father returned to his chamber swiftly and began to climb the stairs to the upper bookshelves. Not knowing exactly where to look, he rummaged through the old volumes in the section Catherine had cleaned. He knew he'd hidden it up here somewhere. After an hour of searching, Jacob Wells' fear was intense. Catherine must have Anna's diary. Even in the cool night air, he felt the perspiration trickle down his back.

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Despite the promise of a gorgeous day, Catherine felt anything but sunny. In fact she felt awful, her argument with Vincent was still fresh in her mind. She kept remembering the look on his face when she had asked him to leave. He'd seem so confused and hurt. But she'd been angry with him last night and wanted to hurt him. Why are lovers always so stupid? The clock next to the bed showed eight am, she could get downtown by nine-thirty am, and be Below in time for lunch.

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"Washington Square, please," Catherine said as she entered a cab.

"Okay. Nice day, huh, lady? Good day to enjoy that old Greenwich Village atmosphere."

"Yes, it's wonderful. I love the sunshine." Thinking that if she got back early enough, she could take Jacob to the park. Catherine sat back in the seat and enjoyed the rest of the ride.

After paying the driver, she made for New York University's medical building.

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"May I help you?" a rather peppy nurse inquired.

"Yes, my name is Catherine Chandler. I'm with the District Attorney's office, and I would like to see someone in charge of the archives."

"Concerning any particular research?"

"The case I'm working on is rather sensitive and I'm not free to discuss it."

"I understand." The young woman dialed a number and after a brief phone conversation smiled up at Catherine. "Dr. Beyer will be right with you."

A robust woman in her early sixties walked toward Catherine and extended her hand in greeting.

"How can I help you, Ms. Chandler? I'm Paula Beyer."

"Nice to meet you, doctor. I was wondering if you kept files here from about thirty years ago. An old case has been reopened and there are accusations of drug misuse. It is alleged that lab equipment was being used by someone not officially authorized to do so by the hospital."

"Well, Ms. Chandler, if the research was not sanctioned by NYU, why would there be any record?"

"I know it sounds odd, but the man who allegedly did the experiments was too much of an egomaniac to let his work go unpublished. It has to be here somewhere, hidden among the paperwork."

"Do you have any clue as to what was being worked on?"

"I believe it was some sort of fertility drug."

"I'm more than glad to try to help the DA's office, but I'm afraid with such little information, it would be impossible to find anything."

"I know he worked as a janitor here at the lab facilities during the early fifties, his name was John Pater." Catherine watched as she said the name, but no sign of recognition showed in the doctor's eyes.

"I could check the employment records during that period and see what other research was being conducted while he worked here. But I'm afraid we won't turn up anything substantial."

"I would appreciate anything you could come up with, Dr. Beyer. These old cases are always the hardest to get evidence on." Catherine handed her card to the other woman. "Call me, day or night."

"I'll be in touch, Ms. Chandler." Dr. Beyer took the card and walked down the hall.

Catherine turned to the young nurse. "Thanks for all your help."

"No problem. Good luck with your case," she said, smiling.

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Catherine made it back home in record time. She checked her messages, changed clothes, and headed for the basement. As she reached the last step, she could sense him standing there. Jumping down the last few inches Catherine turned and was in his arms.

"Vincent, I'm so sorry about last night." She placed her arms around his waist and held him close.

"It is I who am sorry, Catherine. I should never have spoken to you in such a manner. Do you forgive me?"

"We were both wrong, let's just forget it." Catherine kissed him on the lips as if to silence any more apologies.

"Forgotten, Catherine," and he returned her kiss with equal fervor.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine loved to watch her son playing on the grass, the sun turning his hair the color of spun gold. How like his father he was in coloring, if not in looks, she thought. Sometimes, it seemed so unfair that only she could enjoy the daylight with Jacob. Then she would remember the family picnic by the waterfall Below. That was just as beautiful. They were fortunate, she and her son, to be able to enjoy such wonderful things in both worlds.

After returning from the park with Jacob, Catherine joined Vincent and everyone else for the evening meal.

"How did your case go, Cathy? Did you string him up?" Old Sam inquired.

"The case is still being worked on, Sam, and we don't string people up anymore. You remember too many old movies," Catherine chuckled.

"You know, long ago when I was an actor in the movies, the boys with the white hats always won. Then the movie business moved to that there Hollywood, and the good guys went with them. That was a sorry day for Hoboken."

"The white hats are still winning, except now it's done in a courtroom," Catherine gave Sam a warm smile.

"Dessert, anyone?" It was Ian, William's newest assistant. He was carrying a pineapple upside down cake covered with fresh fruit.

"None for me, Ian. I'm stuffed," Catherine said, holding her stomach.

"Same here," Father added. "You're becoming a fine cook, and an expert baker."

"Thank you, Father. But what should I do with this wonderful cake?" Ian looked over to the eager faces at the children's table. "Guess I'll just have to give it to them." Squeals of delight followed his announcement.

"Catherine and I would like to be excused," Vincent stood up as he spoke.

"Will you be Below tomorrow, Catherine? I would like to speak with you," Father inquired.

"I have to go back Above. If it is urgent, we could speak now."

"It's nothing, my dear. I just never got around to telling you what a good job you did in the library. We'll talk when you get back. Don't spend longer than you have to Above, we miss you."

"I'll be quick as I can. I miss you too. Goodbye, see you when I return." She picked Jacob up in her arms, and took Vincent's hand.

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Catherine started down the passageway toward their chamber, but Vincent stopped her. "This way, Catherine," he gently maneuvered her in the opposite direction. They continued on for a few feet, and then Catherine saw it - a brand new chamber had been carved into the rock.

"Is it ours, Vincent?"

"Yes. Welcome to your new home." Vincent led her inside.

Catherine stood at the entrance, speechless. Tears coming down her face. The interior of the chamber was lit with subtle candlelight and the scent of fresh flowers filled the air.

"It's beautiful, Vincent. I love it, and I love you too."

"I am glad you like it, Catherine. We truly have a home of our own now, somewhere for our family." Turning to her, he added, "Thank you for loving me, and thank you for our son."

"No thanks are necessary, Vincent, loving you is easy. And Jacob is one of my life's greatest joys." She laid her head on Vincent's arm and sighed.

As if by magic, Mary appeared in the doorway. "I've come to get Jacob."

"Oh no, Mary, don't take him, let him stay with us tonight."

"But I thought the two of you would like to be alone in your new home."

"The thought is lovely, but I'd rather be with both men in my life tonight. You don't mind, do you, Vincent?"

"Whatever you want." He looked lovingly at Catherine. "Thank you, Mary, but we will be keeping Jacob with us."

"Well, goodnight then." Mary took a quick look around. "This is a wonderful chamber, and so much room. You could have a dozen children."

After Mary's departure, the couple looked at each other and laughed. "A '*dozen*' children, perhaps we should start going to bed earlier," Vincent grinned.

"Why, Vincent, I '*do*' believe you're developing a sense of humor."

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The morning came much too early for Catherine. Reluctantly, she unwound herself from Vincent's arms and got out of bed. The candles had all burnt out long ago, the room had a definite chill. She heard soft footsteps and went to the entrance to see who was there, but all she found was a pot of tea, two cups and some breakfast rolls. Catherine never stopped being amazed how this small community was so in tune with each other, anticipating one's every wish. After getting dressed, she sat down at the new table to enjoy her tea and biscuits.

Looking around, Catherine could not help but notice how much love and care went into the construction of this chamber. The sleeping alcove was set far back from the main entrance, to give them complete privacy. A smaller alcove served as a bedroom for Jacob. There was a large common area, with a new table and chairs, and even a private bath chamber. Vincent had thought of everything, so she would not feel inconvenienced by living here Below.

"Catherine, is it time to leave so soon?" Vincent's voice was soft and caressing.

She wanted nothing more than to jump back into bed with him and enjoy the warmth of his body once again, but duty called.

"I'm afraid so. I was just about to wake you to say goodbye."

Vincent had put on his robe, and was now helping himself to a cup of tea. "When, Catherine? When won't you leave anymore? When will I have you all to myself?" he asked, not expecting a reply.

"I can't say just yet, Vincent. There is still so much to do, so many people without hope. But no matter where I am, I am always with you. You taught me that, do you remember?"

"Yes, Catherine. I remember. I remember every moment we are together." He bent and kissed her gently.

Catherine lingered in his embrace, reluctant to pull away. At last she said, "I'd better be going. Joe is waiting. I'll just say goodbye to Jacob."

And then she was gone, and Vincent sat contemplating all the miracles that had happened in his life, since the night he found his heart. Since the night he found Catherine.

## ***CHAPTER EIGHT***

The past few hours Catherine had not thought about Anna's diary, she was occupied with work.

"Miss Chandler." Catherine looked up to see Dr. Beyer standing at her desk. She was carrying a large brown manila envelope.

"Dr. Beyer, I didn't expect you to come in person. Did you find out anything?"

"Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

"There's a conference room across the hall. No one will bother us there." Catherine stepped from behind her desk. "Judith, I'll be in private consultation, please hold all my calls."

"Yes, Ms. Chandler."

After getting each of them a cup of coffee, Catherine sat across the table from Dr. Beyer. "So doctor, what have you found out? I assume since you came here, you've found something." Catherine sounded hopeful.

"You were right, Ms. Chandler. During the time frame you mentioned, there was indeed an employee that fits the description you gave. He gave his name as John Pater."

"Were there any lab notes by him?"

"No, he was employed as a janitor."

Catherine nodded her head. "We knew that, doctor, but we have reason to believe he also engaged in clandestine experiments."

"After you left, I went through the old files myself, and turned up this." She handed Catherine the envelope.

Opening it with caution, Catherine removed its contents. It was a rather crude flyer advertizing for lab assistants. The ad called for healthy males between the age of twenty and thirty-five who would be willing to donate sperm for new fertility research. The flyer went on to state that all donors would remain anonymous, and the results would not be made public. A phone number was given to call between eleven pm and five am.

"Where did you find this, doctor?" Catherine asked.

"It was stuck in with some old hospital reports."

"And the phone number?"

"An answering service of some sort, I presume. It's no longer connected."

"Do you know if anyone ever answered this ad?"

"There's really no way to tell; there are no notes. It's hard to believe that anyone could get someone to give them unauthorized access to our labs. This John Pater must have been some persuasive talker."

"That he was, doctor," Catherine took a sip of her coffee. "A real charmer."

"Well, I must get back to the hospital. I hope this information can be useful, sorry there isn't more." Doctor Beyer got up from her seat. "I'll keep looking, Ms. Chandler. Maybe something else will show up."

"Thank you. I appreciate your efforts."

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Catherine ran into Joe as she was coming back into the office.

"What was that all about, Radcliffe? Something I should know about?"

"Just a personal matter."

"Everything okay? You're not sick or anything?"

"No, nothing's wrong." Joe was still looking at her. "Honest."

"You can't be too careful, Cathy. You've gone missing before, and that Gabriel guy is still wandering around somewhere."

At the mention of Gabriel's name, Catherine's stomach tightened and the ring on her hand caused her finger to throb. "Don't worry, Joe. I'll be careful, very careful."

"All I ask is that if anyone bothers you, anyone, you let me know."

"It's a deal, Joe. Now go back to being the DA and stop harassing your employees."

"Okay, kid, but you stay alert. I couldn't stand to lose you again."

"I couldn't stand to lose myself again." Cathy rubbed his arm in an affectionate gesture. "I'm glad I have someone like you to watch out for me, Joe. You're a good friend."

Catherine returned to her desk and thought about her earlier conversation with Dr. Beyer. Fertility testing, that explained how Anna got pregnant. But what happened to the child? Was he the child that Father had said died when he was just a few months old? According to him, the death of that child is what set Paracelsus off on his madness. What did Anna have to say about all this? Catherine could not wait to get home and find the answer.

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The new chamber already felt familiar and Catherine was glad to be home. The last few days at work had been hectic, draining her of all her strength. And there was the news from Dr. Beyer. What did it all mean?

"You are quiet this evening, Catherine. Are you not feeling well?"

"Everything is fine, Vincent, just a pensive mood. What have you been doing today?"

"I've started Marsha in a college preparation course. She has expressed an interest in going Above to continue her studies."

"Is she that age so soon? Children grow up so fast." She looked over at their son sleeping peacefully. "What do you wish for him, Vincent, when he grows up?"

"I wish him happiness, and love, and choice. He will have a choice, Catherine. I wish him the insight to use it wisely."

"I think I'd like to see him get a formal education Above, but I hope he chooses to return to us here, Below," Catherine murmured.

"Do not confine him to one place, love. He, like you, belongs to both worlds."

"I guess we can discuss his future plans later. Now we can enjoy him for the miracle he is, proof that love still conquers all," she smiled. Then she walked behind Vincent's chair and put her arms around his neck. "I am so happy here with you. Thank you for everything."

Vincent was about to comment when he heard Father's voice at the door. "Catherine, it's Father. Are you home?"

"Yes, Father. Come in."

"I was wondering if you would walk with me a little this evening? Perhaps to the Mirror Pool and back."

"Vincent and I would be delighted to walk with you."

Father looked embarrassed. "I was thinking just you, my dear, a little father-daughter time."

"Well, I guess so. Vincent?"

"Go on. Jacob and I will be fine. There's some reading I can catch up on."

"I won't be long." She kissed Vincent and gave him a hug.

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Father and Catherine walked in silence for a few minutes. Catherine could feel the tension in the air. "What is it you wanted to talk to me about?" she ventured.

Father cleared his throat and began, awkwardly. "I know about your quarrel with Vincent the other night."

Catherine shook her head. "All couples fight, it's normal."

"He told me the cause of your disagreement."

"Since you know the reason, then tell me, Father. Why is Anna Pater such a secret?"

"We don't like to speak of her because of the unhappy memories thinking of her evokes."

"Anna was a victim of Paracelsus, not an accomplice."

"You don't understand, Catherine."

"I understand that all evidence of this woman's existence has been erased. And all because she had the misfortune to marry unwisely. She found Vincent, doesn't that count for something?"

The two of them now stood at the Mirror Pool, both looking into the water. Ignoring her question, Father asked one of his own.

"Why the sudden interest in Anna?"

"When I was cleaning your bookshelves, I found something of hers." Father's sharp intake of breath was not lost on Catherine, so she continued. "I found a book of poetry that was inscribed to her from you."

Father smiled at the memory. "A birthday gift, she was delighted with my choice. Poems of love and fantasy."

"She cared about you. You were her friend. Weren't you?"

"Yes, I was her friend."

"What did she do to all of you down here, that you have all but obliterated her memory? What dark secret did Anna Pater take to her grave?"

"I can't talk about it, not now. Sometime soon we'll talk about Anna. You, me and Vincent."



Catherine knew she would get no further in her conversation this evening. "Shall we go back, I'm getting a little tired and Vincent will be leaving soon for sentry duty."

"I'm a little tired myself. Let us walk back speaking of pleasant things."

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Returning to her chamber, Catherine found Vincent getting ready to start his shift as night security.

"Catherine, I was about to put word out on the pipes for you to return. Jeremy has taken ill, so I'll be starting my rounds a little early this evening."

"What's wrong? I didn't hear a call for Father."

"Oh, it's nothing serious, just a little stomach upset. How was your talk with Father?"

"Oh, nothing serious, just a little stomach upset," Catherine replied, laughing.

"Yes, I know those talks well. Was he upset over anything?"

"He wanted to be sure everything was all right between us. He was just being Father."

"I see, and what did you tell him, if I may ask?"

"You may ask. I told him we were blissfully happy in our new chamber and loved each other very much."

"Catherine, before Father walked in, you were thanking me for everything. You have nothing to thank me for. It is I who should thank you."

"Vincent, you've given me true joy and fulfillment. You've given me a happy life," Catherine smiled.

"And you have done the same for me." He kissed her lovingly.

"You'd better go before we start something we can't stop." She pushed him toward the chamber door.

## CHAPTER NINE

Alone at last, Catherine made herself a cup of tea and settled in the chair with Jake in her arms. She took the journal and letters from her briefcase.

"Now sweetheart," she said to her drowsy son. "Let's see what else we can find out about the mysterious Anna."

*Dear Diary;*

*The days grow colder, but my heart is warmed by the child I carry. No one has guessed my secret yet, I don't know why they can't tell. Sarah asked me the other day if I was finally happy, she said I was grinning like the Cheshire cat in 'Through the Looking Glass.' I gave her a big hug and told her, yes. I was truly happy. Even John is being less ominous. Last night he gave Jacob a gift, a chess set in a black lacquer case with a silver rose. When Jacob protested the cost, John just shook his head and said 'friendship had no price tag.' Maybe this son of mine will help mend the rift in our world and let us live in harmony again.*

Catherine took out the next set of letters and read;

*Dear Jacob;*

*I think I may have a lead on exactly what kind of experiments John has been doing. My friend at NYU got hold of some lab notes, and he thinks they may be John's. I'll let you know more in a few days.*

Yankee

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*Dear Jacob;*

*This must be a hurried note since I am on a double shift here at the hospital. My lead came through and I have a copy of John's lab journal. I'll come Below after work, and we can examine his notes together.*

Yankee

Jacob stirred in Catherine's arms, and she realized one hand had fallen asleep.

"Time for you to go to your bed, honey. You're getting too heavy for mommy to hold all night."

Catherine placed Jacob in his cradle and made a fresh pot of tea. She had the feeling she would be up all night. *How would Paracelsus's lab notes tie in to what Dr. Beyer found*, she wondered.

Once again she opened Anna's diary. She was not prepared for what she read next.

*Dear Diary;*

*How can I begin to explain about the last two days? It all started after supper on the twelfth. I began to feel very warm and wanted to go for a short walk in the evening air. John warned me that the weather had turned bitter cold and I should stay Below. But the call of the night breeze was too strong and I ventured Above.*

*John was right, the cold was biting, but I felt better than I had in weeks. Foolishly, I thought I might attempt to get to my favorite coffee house in the Village. I'd walked all the way downtown to Fourteenth Street before it hit me. Crippling pain. I knew immediately what it was, I was going into labor. My mind tried to make sense of this, but another pain hit me, obliterating all rational thought. After a few moments, sanity returned and I truly realized my situation. I was far from any safe entrance to the tunnels, and the snow was falling steadily. If I did not get help soon, this child that I had prayed so hard for would not survive his birth. Walking further into the night like a lost soul, my mind clouded with pain and fear, I searched for an answer. At Eleventh Street, I saw the sign, **'EMERGENCY ENTRANCE....ST VINCENT'S HOSPITAL.'***

*With only sheer willpower and determination, I made it into the hospital. Immediately, I was readied for delivery, there wasn't any time for preparation. My request not to be given any drugs was disregarded, and I drifted into a dreamless sleep. Next thing I remember was the sound of hushed voices filled with concern. My pleas to see my baby were ignored. After a short time, a gray-haired nurse came to tell me there had been a little problem with the birth, and I was to rest and stay off my feet, they would bring my baby soon.*

*I'm not sure how much time passed, but when I woke again the room was dark and I felt a distinct chill. I was alone. My strength had all but deserted me but somehow I pulled myself up from the bed and walked into the hall. A lone bassinet had been moved up against the wall, and emanating from it was the most forlorn cry. It was heartbreaking. I knew it was my child. Without hesitation, I looked into the cradle, a curious feline-like face looked back at me. His face is not unpleasant, just unusual, and he has a vast amount of golden hair, not unlike myself as a child.*

*I felt my heart melt for this very special newborn, for my son. Picking him up, I noticed that in their haste to remove him from everyone's sight, the hospital staff did not even bother to clean him properly. He felt clammy, still covered with blood and ooze, and hastily wrapped in a blanket. I wiped him off as best I could, and then held him to my breast. He ate greedily. 'You're safe, you're safe now,' I told him. A bond was formed between us then, a bond that connected us at the heart.*

*Fleeing the hospital in the middle of the night was no easy task. And it was not until I reached the safety of the tunnels that I took a deep breath. Holding my child close to me I entered my chamber. John was there, he stared silently at the bundle in my arms.*

*'What have you got there, Anna?' he asked me.*

*'My son,' I told him.*

*I held my breath as John walked over and pushed the blanket back from the baby's face. He smiled, a strange enigmatic look on his face. 'I had hoped to be able to deliver our child myself, Anna. Why did you have to go Above?'*

*Holding the child tighter, I replied, 'My child, John, not ours, mine. As for going Above, I didn't expect to give birth to him so soon.'*

*John continued in a steady voice. 'Did he give you much pain?'*

*'No, not really,' I said.*

*He asked what I would tell everyone. I said I would tell them I found him, abandoned because of his differences.*

*"That will appease the empty-minded, but what about Jacob?"*

*I said that since he knew about the pregnancy, he would know the truth.*

*John said nothing more, he just kissed my cheek and left. He never offered any explanations for the child's looks, and I never asked.*

*This morning the sound of a baby crying brought a few brave souls to our part of the tunnels. They all showed trepidation, but this wonderful son of mine won them all over with his bright blue eyes and good nature.*

*Word of the foundling spread and, by noon, it seemed like the entire community had gathered in my room. Then Jacob Wells arrived, and I could read the question in his eyes. Who and what was this strange creature that I had claimed to have found?*

*He asked me in an icy voice, 'What is this child you have found, what do you call it?'*

*John had returned, and stood defiantly in the doorway. He said I should call him Vincent, after all, that is where I 'found' him, near St. Vincent's Hospital.*

*'Very well, John,' Jacob said. 'He shall be called Vincent.'*

*Jacob walked out of our chamber but I knew he was not finished with me, or John.*

*As I write down these words, I feel more like the playwright, than the actor, I can't believe they are happening to me. Then I look over to the crib where my son is sleeping quietly. He gives me great joy. Goodnight, Vincent, I love you.*

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*Dear Diary;*

*Jacob came to visit today. He was very anxious. All the time he was speaking to me his eyes never left my face. It was as though he felt that if he looked around the room he might have to look at*

*Vincent, at my son. I remember the conversation so clearly. As I write it down, I can still hear it in my head.*

*'What are you going to do with him, Anna?' Jacob asked me suddenly, indicating with his head he meant the child.*

*'I'm going to raise him, watch him grow, love and care for him.'*

*'Don't be ridiculous, you don't even know what it is, for God's sake. You can't keep him.'*

*'What do you suggest I do, Jacob. Drown him like an unwanted kitten.'*

*'You could put him in an institution. One of the Helpers could leave him on the doorstep of a hospital.'*

*'I am not going to shut him away, imprison him because of his looks.'*

*'He will always be imprisoned by his appearance. He will never even be able to see the light of day.' He begged me to be reasonable.*

*I started to cry then and told Jacob to leave me.*

*'Where is John?' he asked tersely.*

*'I don't know. He's gone again.'*

*'Even he can't live with his handiwork....Think about what I said.' He left me, never looking back.*

Catherine stared at the page in disbelief, her hands shaking, the sound of her heartbeat filling the room. Anna Pater was Vincent's mother! Had she just read that, in Anna's own handwriting? Not being able to sit still a moment longer, she got up and paced the room.

"Anna is Vincent's mother," she said aloud. Another thought crossed her mind, and she gave it voice. "Father has known all along, no wonder he wanted no talk of Anna. He's been keeping this secret for over thirty years."

Jacob had started to cry, sensing his mother's confused feelings.

"Hush, sweetheart," Catherine lifted him from his cradle. "There's nothing to be upset about, we've just found you a Grandma."

The soothing sound of his mother's voice calmed him, and he started to let sleep take him over.

Catherine kept pacing the room, partly because Jacob liked it, and partly because she was too full of nervous energy to sit still. How could Father keep this information from Vincent, all these years? What was on his mind? Her feelings ran from seething anger, to cool calculated revenge for such a deliberate selfish act.

Who else knew, Catherine wondered. Yankee knew. Who was this person, that was a friend to both Father and Paracelsus? She needed answers before she could confront anyone with her knowledge. Catherine took the envelope from its hiding place and removed all the remaining letters. There were only three left. She placed them in chronological order and letting her lawyer's analytical mind take over, she opened them.

*Dear Yankee,*

*The unthinkable has happened, Anna has given birth to a monster child. Not a monster, really, but he has some terrible deformity. This child looks more like a lion cub, than a human baby. You said you have a copy of John's lab notes. You must bring them Below as soon as possible. We must talk some sense into Anna before she becomes too attached to this thing.*

Jacob

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Jacob;

*I'll come Below Saturday. It's my first day off. I have not looked at John's papers. I thought it would be best if all of us were present when Anna reads the report. Do you think you can get John to cooperate?*

Yankee

\*\*\*\*\*

It seemed like a lifetime before morning came and Vincent arrived home. Catherine had been awake all night, trying to make sense of what she had learned. She was hesitant to return to the diary, afraid of what else it might reveal. She'd had enough surprises for one night. Finally, that familiar voice filled the room.

"Catherine, are you all right? You look like you haven't slept a wink."

She ran into his arms, and held him tightly. "Vincent, it's so good to see you. I missed you."

"I missed you too, Catherine."

Before she had a chance to say another word, he covered her mouth with his. They were both swept away in a mounting passion. Clothing hastily discarded, she felt her tensions melt under his hands as they caressed her bare skin. Catherine let Vincent take her far away from all her apprehension, if even for just for a little while.

The clanging sound of the pipes signaled that the tunnel community was now fully awake. Catherine turned in Vincent's arms and looked at him as he slept.

Brushing a wayward strand of hair from his eyes, she whispered out loud. "You are right, Anna. He is very special."

"What did you say?" Vincent said, half-awake.

"I said, I need to talk to you. I have to go Above."

"Why? I thought you were off for a few days."

"I can't explain right now, please trust me."

He kissed her cheek gently. "I do trust you. How long will you be gone?"

"With any luck, just a few hours."

"Catherine," his arm tightened around her waist. "Be careful, Jacob and I need you."

"It's nothing dangerous, Vincent."

"You are very apprehensive, I can feel it."

"I'll be as quick as I can, I promise." she kissed him warmly and got out of bed.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

The familiar surroundings of Peter Alcott's office somehow soothed Catherine's anxieties. She had known Peter since she was a child; he was her mother's doctor and had become a family friend. How ironic, she thought, that he was also a friend of Jacob Wells. Small world.

"Catherine," Peter walked from his examining room into the reception area. "Are you okay? Your message sounded urgent."

"I didn't mean to frighten you, Peter," she placed a kiss on his cheek. "Everyone is fine. It's just that I found out some rather startling news, and I need someone to talk to."

"Of course, you can always talk to me. Let's go into my office." He took her hand and squeezed it reassuringly. "Whatever it is, I'm here to help you. You know I think of you as a daughter."

Catherine accepted Peter's offer of coffee, but she paced the room, looking at the well-known pictures and diplomas on the office wall.

"Peter, do you know anyone named Yankee?" she asked cautiously.

"Yankee, where did you hear that name? I haven't been called that in years. Has old Jacob been talking again?" Peter turned to face Catherine just in time to see the coffee cup slip from her hand.

"Cathy, what's wrong?" He walked to her, but she backed away, the tears welling up in her eyes.

"You knew! You've known all along, and you never said anything."

"Known what?"

"You knew that Anna was Vincent's mother." As she blurted out the words, the tears started down her face.

"Oh God, Cathy. How did you find out?"

"I found Anna's diary."

"Does Jacob know about your discovery?"

"No, not yet. Funny, I was coming here today to talk to you about this whole thing."

"Cathy," Peter reached out to put his arm around her, but she moved away.

"Don't touch me. I don't want you to touch me. I just want to know the truth."

"Okay. You tell me what you know and I'll fill in what I can." Peter sat down behind his desk.

For the next half-hour Catherine talked to Peter about the diary, as well as the letters, bringing back memories that had been hidden for so long.

"It was never meant to be a secret... things just happened. And the truth stayed concealed." Alcott's voice shook, but he continued.

"I brought John's lab notes Below, like I promised. Anna was in Jacob's chamber when I arrived. She looked pale and tired, but there was a certain beauty about her, a serenity. Vincent was in her arms. My first reaction to this curious infant was shock, but Anna smiled and reassured me that he was indeed real. Jacob seemed eager to get on with the evening and after a hurried cup of tea, suggested I tell Anna what brought me there that night. I asked if John would be joining us and was told he wouldn't.

"Anna listened as I revealed that I had gotten a copy of John's lab notes for his fertility research, and that Jacob and I thought she should look at them first. Perhaps they would explain her unusual pregnancy, and why her child was so alien. Anna took the report and read it to herself, as we waited with anticipation. Our scientific minds were just a little bit more than curious, as to what had caused this mutation."

"You thought Vincent was a mutation? How could you?" Catherine looked with disgust upon her old friend.

"You have to understand, Cathy, we were frightened men looking for answers."

"Go on, Peter. What did the lab notes reveal?"

"Jacob and I never found out. After reading the portfolio, Anna asked us what difference all those words made. Vincent was still her son, still flesh and blood, and she loved him unconditionally.

"What became of John's notes?" Catherine asked.

"Anna destroyed them. She placed the whole pack in the brazier and burst them. Jacob was furious with her. He ordered her out of his chamber. I can still see her as she left us, holding her child close, reminding us it was God's wish for us to love all his children, even the different ones.

"That was the last time I saw Anna Pater alive. A few weeks later I heard that John had poisoned her." Peter looked over to Catherine and shook his head. "After John's exile, Jacob thought it best to keep the whole affair quiet for awhile. *Awhile* just stretched into years."

"If Father hated Vincent so much, why was he chosen as his guardian?" Catherine was again pacing the room.

"Only Anna knows, and she's not talking."

"Yes, she is, Peter." Catherine grabbed her purse and headed for the door.

"Can you forgive me, Cathy?"

"I'll have to think about it, Peter. I don't know yet, but thank you for your honesty."

"What will you say to Jacob about your discovery?" he asked her as she was about to leave the room.

"I'll see what Anna has to say about him first. Goodbye, Peter."

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Peter Alcott was ready to go home and have a stiff drink. All his appointments had been cancelled. He had just one last obligation. Taking a piece of paper, he wrote;

*Jacob,*

*Catherine has discovered Anna's diary and our correspondence. She knows the truth.*

*Yankee*

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For the first time in months, Catherine's apartment felt like home. She had come here directly after leaving Peter's office. It was a familiar place, a place to think.

Catherine made herself a cup of coffee, built a fire and sat down on the sofa, ready to read the last chapters of the troubled life of Anna Peter. She opened the diary to the final few chapters.

*Dear Diary;*

*I went to visit Jacob this evening. He apologized for all his harsh words and accusations. I brought Vincent with me and he examined him and pronounced him in good health. Unfortunately, he couldn't say the same about me. Seems I've caught some sort of virus. An unknown virus. It turned up in my past natal exam. Jacob had Yankee run some tests in the hospital, but no answer to what it is. No cure, either.*

*Watching Jacob with Vincent, I can tell my son is beginning to win his heart. There are still misgivings, but I see an understanding growing.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*I can feel my strength ebbing away more and more each day. I'm afraid for him, he is so sensitive. We have an empathy, a link of some sort, my son and I. He can feel what I am feeling and I know that he must be suffering terribly. I've run out of options. It is time to give Vincent over to Jacob's safe keeping.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Diary;*

*Jacob protested vehemently at my suggestion that he raise Vincent. What did he know about raising a child like him? He couldn't possibly do it, maybe one of the women? I reminded him of the wonderful job he was doing with Devin. Vincent could be no different. He'll need love and guidance just like any other little boy. I know my child. I know his heart. With the proper nurturing, he will grow up to be a gentle, caring man.*

*Then Jacob asked me why I chose him. I told him he was the person I trusted most of all, and that had a big heart full of love. Jacob said he would consider my proposition.*

The handwriting became shaky at this point, as if holding the pen had become a chore. It was near the end for poor Anna, and Catherine felt a genuine sorrow at the impending loss. She turned the page and read the last entry.

*Dear Diary;*

*I've asked John to help me stop the suffering. He assured me that he would take care of me forever. I know John. I know what I have done. Is it the coward's way? Maybe. But as I reflect on my life, I have very few regrets. My only sorrow is leaving my child behind. I pray that he will always be among people that love him.*

The last entry was hardly legible, but Catherine pressed on.

*Dear Diary;*

*Earlier this evening John and I shared a bottle of wine. We haven't done that since our early days together. A little while ago when he kissed me goodbye. I looked into his eyes. They were the eyes of a madman. A madman who loves me.*

Catherine closed the book and let the tears fall. Her sorrow was genuine. The clock on the mantle piece said 3:30 pm. She had to go back Below, Vincent would be worried by now. It only took her a few minutes to gather her things and put out the fire.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

On the way back to her chamber, Catherine thought of the upcoming confrontation with Father. It wasn't a pleasant thought, but it occurred to her that the sooner she got it over with the better. Changing direction, she headed back towards Father's chamber.



Jacob Wells sat at his desk, head down. The pipes told him Catherine was coming his way. He had been expecting this showdown for some time now, ever since he had realized that she'd found the long forgotten journal of Anna Pater. Peter's note only confirmed his suspicions. Maybe it was all for the best. It would all be out in the open, no more a carefully hidden secret. He wondered how Vincent would react to the news; He wondered if he would hate him. He couldn't bear that. Catherine's voice broke into his thoughts.

"Father, we have to talk." Jacob looked up, and could see the anger on Catherine's face.

"Come in, I've been waiting for you."

She looked around the room, as if searching for someone.

"We are quite alone. I've sent Vincent off to help Cullen and Evan, he'll be gone for some time. He was very worried about you earlier today, but I told him Peter sent word you were spending time with him. Your son is with Brooke and Jamie. We can talk freely, you and I."

All of the frustration and outrage of the past few weeks came to the surface as Catherine began to speak.

"How could you? How could you not let Vincent know about his mother? He has lived more than thirty years thinking he was abandoned." She leaned across the desk and was now right in Father's face. He averted his eyes.

"It seemed the only solution at the time. He was so different, some of the community were afraid of him. To tell them that he was Anna's child, conceived by some unknown factor, was unnecessary. Unwise, even."

"But you don't know anything at all about his conception. Anna destroyed all the papers on John's work." Catherine looked at him accusingly. "Did you ever wonder what she thought of all of this?"

"I never had the courage to read Anna's journal. I found it in her chamber after," he seemed to choke on the words, "her death. I just hid it, along with all references to Vincent's birth."

"She trusted you, Jacob, enough to leave her son in your care. Even though you thought he might be better off dead. Drowned like an unwanted kitten. I believe that is how Anna phrased it."

"How do you know about that?"

"It was in Anna's journal, she wrote down everything that happened to her. A habit her son seems to have picked up. They are more alike than you think, mother and son."

Father was crying now. "It's true that at first I thought he might be better off where he could get special care. But I never wished him dead, you must believe that."

"But did you think it, Father? Did you think it would be best, if he just died." Catherine's voice was breaking.

"Yes, oh God forgive me, yes. And I have lived with the guilt of my thoughts all these years. Every time Vincent ran to me as a child, putting his trust in me, I thought of those first days, and wondered how I could have felt that way."

"There is something else I found out from Anna. Paracelsus didn't kill his wife because he hated her, he poisoned her because he loved her. She asked him to stop her pain. And he did."

"I... didn't know, no one could have. I remember I was on my way to Anna's chamber for her daily check-up, when I heard Vincent crying. It was terrible, you could hear him all the way down the tunnel. When I walked into the room, Anna was slumped over the table. I checked her pulse. She was dead. I picked up the baby from his cradle. He looked at me with trusting eyes and I knew I had just found another son."

As I was about to leave, John entered the chamber. I told him his wife was dead. He said he'd poisoned her, and that it was the hardest thing he had ever done. He never even mentioned the child, he just went over to Anna's lifeless body and held her in his arms. I sent some men back to the chamber, to place him in confinement. The rest you know."

"After a while, didn't you think to tell Vincent the truth? Doesn't he deserve that much?" Catherine asked.

"It all just got away from me. I began to believe the story of his being found myself. As more and more people joined the community, the truth became less important, they all just accepted Vincent."

Catherine looked at Jacob Wells, and saw a man who had not made all the wisest decisions, but had tried to make the most loving ones.

"Don't you think it is time Vincent knew the truth?" Catherine said gently.

Before Father could answer, a question came from the entrance way. "Know the truth about what?" Vincent entered the chamber, carrying Jacob.

Both Catherine and Father just looked at him, not answering.

"Please, tell me. The truth about what?"

"Sit down, Vincent, son. I have some news you may find upsetting."

Vincent listened intently as Father related the story of Anna. Vincent showed no emotion during the recital. Catherine handed him Anna's diary and watched his eyes as she revealed that she had found it on Father's bookshelf. She told him of Anna's premonitions, and her quick temper, things he had always attributed to his '*other side*.' Still, he showed no emotion. When they had finished, Vincent rose from his seat, and began to leave the room. Catherine lightly placed her hand on his shoulder.

"I need to be alone. Please understand that. I will be back shortly and we can talk."

Catherine nodded her head and kissed him gently.

"Vincent, before you go, there is one more thing." Father was holding something in his hand.

"When I found Anna, she had just finished writing this." He handed an envelope to Vincent. He accepted it and left.

The night went on endlessly. Catherine and Father made polite conversation but neither really wanted to talk. After several hours, Kipper came and informed them that Vincent was seen returning to his chamber. Catherine gathered up her son and prepared to go home.

"Father, I know you did your best. Anna would be proud of you, and Vincent." She bent over and kissed the drying tears on his cheek.

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Catherine entered her chamber cautiously, not knowing what to expect. All but one candle was out, giving the room an eerie glow. Vincent sat in his chair, arms over the side, a piece of paper in his hand.

"Catherine?"

"Yes, love. I'm here." She put Jacob in his bed, and walked over to Vincent. "Are you all right?" Putting her hands to his face, she felt his tears.

"She loved me, Catherine. After all these years, I finally know. My mother loved me."

Catherine took the paper from his hand. "May I?"

Vincent smiled at her. "Of course."

Catherine unfolded the note and immediately recognized Anna's degenerating handwriting. She began to read Anna's last thoughts.

*My dearest Vincent;*

*When you read this letter, I hope you will understand how much you mean to me and forgive me. It broke my heart to entrust your upbringing to another, to think of you as someone else's child.*

*Jacob Wells is a good and honest man, and he will love you with all his heart. He will give everything he has to make your life happy.*

*I don't understand fully, my dear Vincent, why you are the way you are, but never once did I ever regret bringing you into this world. It may be a harsh place for you sometimes, because of your differences. But you can make it, you have the strength. I can feel it in you, even at this age. Love will be yours, always, because you are so easy to love.*

*My time with you was short, my dearest boy. But know that I love you more than anything in the world, and will be watching over you always. Find yourself, Vincent, and learn to love yourself, just as I love you.*

*Love forever.*

*Your mother, Anna*

Catherine felt the tears in her eyes as she looked at her truest love.

"She was a wonderful woman, Vincent, this mother of yours. I'm so glad you found her."

"So am I, Catherine. So am I."

The END