



BIRTH CONTROL

LYNN WRIGHT

“Now listen to me. This is the way it’s going to be.”

Catherine stiffened. Not even Vincent could speak to her like that!

“I guess we’ll have to wait and see if that’s true, won’t we?”

“I will brook no refusal in this matter.”

Vincent’s face was hard. “I will not risk your life.” he stopped; this was difficult for him. “...Nor will I risk bringing another such as myself into this world.

We will use birth control. “I...” another pause. “...I will do it, if you aren’t willing.”

The most wonderful, the most exciting event in either of their lives, their coming together at last to make love, had created the first serious rift between them.

Only a few days before, the question of a child had never entered Vincent’s mind, since he was firmly resolute that any intimate relationship with Catherine was not in the cards for him.

He had reckoned without the strength of his passion for her, however. Or hers for him.

He came to her balcony as usual, eager to see her; it had been over a week since they had met. Her work and his often kept them apart for several days, but this separation had been longer than most.

Eleven days, he thought as he let himself down from the roof. Eleven days! I’m... hungry for the sight of her. To himself he admitted the desire he felt for her, desire that he was unwilling to acknowledge to Catherine. She knew, though. She felt it, just as he felt hers. And he did feel hers; her unremitting desire for him flooded the bond, contributing much to his sleepless nights that were becoming more frequent, and to the growing difficulty he felt in keeping his passion under control.

But here he was again; he couldn’t stay away, although he was becoming increasingly aware that he should. He should give her up. He should stop seeing her entirely, but his whole being shrank away from the thought. He thought, I can control this! I must do it, because I can’t live without seeing her.

His feet touched the floor of her balcony, and he was once again committed to hiding the desire that surged in him. He moved silently across the deck and raised his hand to knock lightly on her bedroom door. She was there; he felt her presence in the bedroom, although his view was partially obscured by the curtains.

As he waited for her to open the door, he heard a yelp and then “Damn!”

“Catherine? Are you all right? ...Catherine?” When she didn’t answer immediately he opened the door. She was sitting on the floor, rubbing her ankle.

He crossed the threshold without hesitation and knelt beside her. “Your ankle is injured...are you hurt anywhere else?” He ran exploratory hands down her arms.

“No, I just turned my ankle crossing the room! It’s not serious, I was surprised more than anything. For heaven’s sake you’d think I could walk across a room, wouldn’t you?” She smiled shakily and moved to get up. “Could you give me a hand here?”

Vincent rose, scooped her up easily, and set her on the bed. “Well, perhaps this may have contributed to your accident, hmm?” He bent and picked up a high heeled feather trimmed mule, looked down at it incredulously, and shook his head. “How can anyone keep his balance while standing atop this?”

“Oh, Vincent, I’ve been wearing high heels since I was 15 years old. You’d think I’d have had enough practice by now!”

Vincent still stared at the shoe. “It’s a pretty thing. But impractical.” He looked up at her. “Is your ankle still hurting? I could bring some ice.”

“No, it’s much better; I didn’t hurt it much. You could rub it a little bit, if you would. I think that’s all it needs.” She scooted up to the pillows and held up her foot. “Sit down, Vincent, please?”

He still held the shoe in his hand As he sat down on the end of the bed, he continued to stare at it. "... It is a pretty thing though...entirely feminine...as you are."

He continued to look down at the shoe, his hands turning it over. He was silent for so long that she wondered what he was thinking. His hands stilled, and he sat completely unmoving, still staring at the shoe. When he looked up at her at last, she was stunned to see the stark desire looking out of his eyes.

"Entirely beautiful...as you are. ... Entirely desirable...oh, Catherine..."

Something had happened. When he thought about it later he had no idea what it was that did it. Her shoe? It seemed that it was a small thing to have caused such a major transformation in his thinking. Looking back, he realized that there was no one cause. It had been inevitable. The magic between them was too strong not to have won the day at last. Whatever the reason, the balance had tipped. Vincent, suddenly and completely, had lost his battle.

His hand came out to take the bare foot that she had extended toward him. His head dropped and his mane shielded his face as he brought his other hand to curl softly around her ankle. "... Catherine..." his hands trembled as he caressed her foot tenderly. His head dropped further and she gasped soundlessly as his mouth touched her foot.

Yes...oh yes...don't stop, please just ... love me, oh love me... She couldn't believe this. He was making love... making real love to her. She found herself holding her breath, and let it out with a soft puff of air. Hesitantly she reached down to put her hand on his hair, where he was still moving his mouth softly over her foot and ankle.

Don't let him stop...oh, please... He did stop when he felt her hand on him. He stopped what he was doing and his head lifted slowly, until he was looking at her, his eyes dark with his love and his desire for her.

"Catherine...Catherine..."

"Oh, yes, yes, come here to me..." She leaned forward to touch his face, and he turned his head far enough to kiss her palm, his eyes never leaving her face. He still held her gaze as he lifted himself up and forward to sit beside her. His arms came around her and he lowered his face into the warm hollow between her neck and her shoulder. She felt his lips there, and then his tongue swept softly over the sensitive skin under her ear.

With his mouth still moving over her skin, he spoke softly. "I love you, oh Catherine, I love you...I want to make love with you...let me love you... Catherine..."

He kissed her then, his mouth coming down over hers in a hot open-mouthed kiss of passion, and she responded with equal heat. In a moment they were lost in speechless, fervent lovemaking.

Catherine was astounded and overjoyed, but under the joy that she felt in his lovemaking darker questions stirred. Is he going to regret this ? Then, as he continued to kiss and fondle her body, those questions sank below the surface of her excitement; she stopped thinking and just felt.

Vincent had stopped thinking also. His rational being was completely subsumed in his hunger for her body. In a few moments he no longer had words, only the raging desire that had been so long denied. There was no going back

That was how it had started; now it was two days later, their first meeting since the momentous night. Now they faced each other, again in her bedroom, with a deep difference of opinion which had turned into a confrontation, with anger on both sides.

"You will not dictate to me!"

"Call it what you will, Catherine. This is the way it's going to be."

Both had strong character; for a moment they teetered on the edge of a real battle. Then, almost as one, their faces softened and each smiled ruefully.

“Catherine, I’m sorry. I had no right to speak to you like that.”

“I shouldn’t have spoken as I did, and I’m sorry too.”

Both relaxed from a combative stance, looking apologetic and somewhat ill at ease. The anger was over, but the problem remained.

Vincent’s eyes were down, looking at his hands. He said nothing for a moment, then he shook his head slightly. “This is something about which I cannot negotiate.” He raised his head to face her directly and spoke quietly but with solid earnestness. “I cannot allow it, Catherine.”

“Oh my dear, women have babies every day, and live to love them...and to love their fathers. ...And if the child should look like you...we will love it just for that reason, and protect it, and make its life a happy one!”

His face was strained. “I can’t do it. If you will not agree to this, I don’t...I will not ...Catherine, please understand.”

There was a small silence while she looked at him sadly. “I see that you’re not able to face this now.” She thought for a minute, then her training in negotiation came to her rescue. “Well, suppose we do this. Suppose I agree to use birth control for the time being. Then in a couple of months, we’ll talk again. Will that be agreeable to you?”

He exhaled explosively; he’d been holding his breath. “Yes! Oh yes. Thank you for being so reasonable. I’m aware that I am...not reasonable in this matter. I am sorry, Catherine. I’m just not able to face the possibility...”

“I understand.” She smiled gently and raised her hand to caress his cheek. “You love me, and you’re afraid. I know.”

He took her into his embrace then. “Love you? I adore you. You are...within my soul.” His kiss was gentle, loving, but soon it began to hold his passion also. Then he raised his head quickly. “My love...I cannot...what can we do to ...?”

She smiled. “I happen to have something in the bathroom that will make everything OK, if you’ll be patient for just a moment.”

He looked down at her with open relief, then smiled his small smile. “Yes. I’ll wait...but patience may be beyond me.”

When she returned he was standing at the open terrace door looking out over the city. She crossed the room silently on bare feet and slid her arms around him, pressing against his back with her whole body.

He sighed, “Catherine. Oh, Catherine...” He turned and pulled her against him. “I was afraid we’d never... have this again. I knew you’d not accept what I said easily. I know your love for children...I am so sorry my love, that I cannot agree.”

“Vincent, I must warn you that I haven’t given up hope. And there is a possibility...we were not protected when...last time. It was at a very chancy time in my cycle, also.”

“I have wondered...worried.” He paused with a small rueful smile. “Now I’ll worry again. But I must hope that it will be all right. I didn’t think...I didn’t think at all...then. There was no room in me for any thought of the future. There was only you...your beautiful body, your mouth.... I...Catherine, I must apologize. It was not how I had hoped to make love to you. There was no holding back though, I think, for either of us.”

“You’re right about that. There is no need for an apology; it was the same for me. The need was too great. It was just...an explosion.”

“This time will be different. This time I will love you as you deserve.” He lifted her up into his arms and stood looking down at her for a moment. “It has been...hell, being so close...and not....”

She put her hand up to the side of his face. “For me too. I have dreamed...”

He gave a small snort of laughter. "I know. Believe me, I know."

"You knew...when I dreamed?"

"Every lovely, incredible moment of those dreams. Only those. Your other dreams were not given to me, only those of me. They tore my heart...dreams do not satisfy. I laid awake afterward, reliving...and craving. But no longer..."

He moved across the room slowly, holding her close in his arms, his face pressed to her neck, breathing deeply of her scent. He laid her on her bed, sat down to remove his boots, and joined her there, lying close and leaning over her.

"This time will be different. Now I will explore...oh, Catherine..." He kissed her gently, with love, and then not so gently, as his passion rose. When he raised his head at last, he was smiling.

"What?" She smiled back at him. "Why the smile?"

"I was wondering...Catherine, I want you so much...I hope that this time will be different!"

She laughed. "However it is, I want it as much as you do, so it will be OK with me!"

He chuckled, and kissed her again. When he raised his head from that kiss, he was no longer smiling.

"You're so wonderful..." He kissed her nose, her eyes, then his mouth moved to her ear, making her shiver. He stopped and looked at her. "Is something...?"

"You breathed in my ear."

"I'm sorry, should I not do that?"

She laughed softly, "Bend your head down here, Vincent." He did, and she breathed in his ear. Predictably, he shivered.

He smiled. "Oh." Then he began to kiss her again. As his mouth moved down the side of her neck, his tongue came out to taste of her. She felt the slide of his teeth over her skin as his mouth opened to take her essence in. While he kissed and tongued her skin, his hand came up and pushed her robe down her arm, baring more skin to his mouth. It moved across her shoulder and down her upper arm, then he stopped .

"Here...I need to touch you here..." His hand lifted to cup her breast. "I want to undress you...I want to see you..." He slid the straps of her nightgown down, and she helped him by lifting her body as he stripped off her robe and gown.

He sat back to look for a long moment. Their previous coming together had not allowed for time to look. Words were not there for him, he just looked and looked. Then with a groan he began to tear at his own garments. Catherine tried to help, but the intricacy of his clothing defeated her, and finally she laid back just to watch his disrobing. It was worth watching. But the time his last garment was removed, she was holding out her arms.

He came to her slowly, letting himself down on the bed and then sliding over until his body touched hers. As they felt the touch of each other's naked skin at last, a sigh was drawn from both of them.

"There." Catherine said softly.

Vincent put both arms around her and pulled her tightly against him. "I've wanted..." He could say no more. His hands began to slide over her back, and down over her hips, while he still held her against him tightly.

"May I..?" His hand moved down to the top of her thigh, and slid toward her center. "I want to..."

"Oh, yes, please!"

His hand moved lower and curved into her center. He touched just lightly on the lips, sliding his fingers softly over them. Inside Catherine desire exploded, making her instantly ready for him.

Vincent too felt his excitement erupt. She felt his heart accelerate, and his breathing became ragged.

“Oh, Catherine...” He released her from his arms then and leaned over her as she turned on her back. “...So beautiful...”

His hand came up to touch her breast just lightly, to slide over the under surface of it. “...So soft...” He touched the nipple with one claw, just touched it lightly and watched it rise up to meet him.

“Ohhh...” His head came down.

“Vincent...” She squirmed under his mouth. “Oh, do that...”

He took her nipple deep into his mouth, pulling on it and laving it with his tongue. Her hands came up to hold his head against her and she moaned wordlessly.

While he tongued her breast insistently, his hand moved down her body, the tips of his claws making light contact with her skin. As his hand neared her mound, she began to moan. He raised his head.

“You do want me, don’t you. This is real...”

Her head rolled back and forth. “Ohhh... touch me...touch me there...”

He smiled, loving his ability to make her lose herself, and he touched her...there. His fingers slid into the secret part of her, feeling the moisture that was the signal of her desire for him. When he felt it he bent his head to kiss her. After a moment she tore herself away from his mouth and spoke urgently.

“Vincent...I want you. I don’t want to wait! I want to feel you inside me... please?”

He groaned. He had wanted this time to be leisurely and romantic, but how could he refuse her, when it was what he wanted also, so much?

“Oh, love, I want that too.”

He laid his body down on top of her, feeling the length of her and her movement under him with a spurt of excitement. His knee moved her legs apart, and he felt with burning satisfaction his erection pressed to her center. He paused then, looking at her with a question in his eyes, wordlessly.

Catherine was in no better shape. “Ah, God, yes!!”

She managed that many words, because she was afraid he’d stop. Her hands were on his shoulders, pulling him down, her legs raised to curl around his hips, pushing down to bring him into her. Anything, everything to bring him into her.

He didn’t hesitate any longer. She felt the pressure on her center grow. The slick wetness that her body produced made the entry easy, and in a moment he was solidly seated in her to the full extent of his considerable length.

As he felt her hot interior around him, he made a long groaning growl, and she also moaned aloud. He began to move almost at once, the low growl continuing deep in his throat as he moved away from her, then sunk himself deeply inside again. Catherine’s hips came up to meet him, and her ankles crossed behind his body. She was lost in sensation, unable to speak or think, just feeling the length and thickness of his body inside hers.

His motion increased quickly and climax came for both of them almost at once.

Vincent gasped as his body convulsed in ecstasy, and Catherine moaned and her hips raised spontaneously as the hot spurt of his climax brought hers. Gradually Vincent’s body relaxed from its tightly flexed position, and his weight descended on Catherine as his body loosened.

In a moment he realized that he was lying on her, and moved to lift himself away. But Catherine’s hands came up to grasp him. “No, don’t move. I want you there...inside me.”

“...Inside you ...I’m inside you...” He couldn’t believe it.

They lay silent for a minute, recovering. Then his habitual care for her surfaced. “Are you all right?”

“Mm...consult the bond.”

After a moment he smiled his small smile. “I see that you are ...well...sated, and feeling happy.”

“Happy’ doesn’t cover it, trust me!” she said, smiling back at him.

“I’m glad you feel that way, for once again romance has bowed to urgency. I seem not able to stop myself from rushing to the end. I’m sorry, Catherine. I’m a tyro here, and it shows.”

“If you remember, I’m the one who couldn’t wait. You’re just too wonderful; I can’t resist you. Anyway, we have years and years to perfect our technique. This time next year it ought to be really amazing.”

He slid off her, worried still about his weight, bringing a small sound of regret from her. He reached over to kiss her softly, then his mouth moved down to kiss her body, stopping at her breast where he covered the nipple with his mouth, in a soft open-mouthed kiss.

When he raised his head, she was looking down at him with a loving smile. He returned it, and with another soft kiss to her nipple, he moved away.

Still lying on his stomach, he raised himself on his elbows, staring ahead of him deep in thought, one hand absently caressing her hair. Finally, after several minutes, he turned his head to look at her while he spoke.

“Catherine, I am sorry that I waited so long to...surrender to the way I felt...the way we both felt. Many months were wasted while we both... starved, when we could have been as happy as we are now. I was so frightened of what the consequences would be for you.” He paused, and his head went down, his hair hiding his face from her. “I wasn’t even sure we’d ...fit together...I was afraid I’d hurt you. You’re so little, and I am...what I am.”

As always any talk of his physical differences discomfited him.

Catherine reached to lift his hair away from his face. “I never thought for a minute that we wouldn’t fit together perfectly. Vincent, we were made for each other; how could we not fit? And you have to admit, the fit is pretty perfect.” She grinned at him.

“It is...more than I ever dreamed...” He rolled over onto his back, pulling her with him to lie on top of him. “You are more than I ever dreamed...” He pulled her head down to meet his mouth. “I am afraid now that I’ll be...a pest. I want you again...”

Her grin got wider. “And this position that you have put us in ...does that mean that you want me to... take the lead?”

“Do you...can it...” He was embarrassed. “...Would that be ...all right?”

“Honey, just you watch me!” She could feel that his erection had been growing, and at her words it throbbed mightily, turning her grin into a giggle.

She was still laughing as she slid off him and moved down to kiss his throat. He raised his chin to give her access to as much of him as he could.

“Catherine? This is acceptable? ...I have dreamed... that you made love to me...”

“Oh, love, so have I! Now you just lie there and I’ll show you how I’ve dreamed!”

He didn’t answer. She could feel his body relax, and then she felt his legs part slightly. M-hm! she thought, He has been dreaming. She began to kiss her way down his body. She pushed her fingers through his chest hair down to the skin, and rubbed in slow circles around his nipples. His body began to tense again; she took that as a sign, and lowered her head to press a kiss on the nearest nipple. He jumped. When she opened her mouth and began to suck, a low sound broke from him, and his hand came up to cradle the back of her head. As she continued to tongue and suck the nipple, she saw from the corner of her eye his head begin to move slowly back and forth on the pillow.

Looking out of the opposite corner, she saw his penis standing up straight and stiff. When she left the nipple she felt his chest rise in a deep sigh. A dream fulfilled, she thought, and not the last one.

She moved slowly down his body, kissing and tonguing as she went, He started to shake as she passed his navel. Her hands preceded her mouth then and as she neared his penis he began a slow growling

moan. Just before she touched his penis, she stopped and raised herself up.

“No! Oh, don’t stop...” He moaned.

“It’s all right, my love, I won’t stop.”

She moved down and positioned herself between his legs. “I’m here, I won’t stop.”

She brought both hands to the base of his penis, and slowly began to slide them around it. As her hands moved up, his growling moan became less moan and more growl. She looked up at his face, and found him watching her avidly. Her hands closed around his penis, and she began to move up to bring her mouth into contact with it.

He jerked, and his hand came down to stop her. “No, Catherine!”

She looked up. “No? You don’t want this?”

“It’s you...you can’t want to do this! I can’t ask such a thing of you.”

“Oh, Vincent! Of course I want to do it!”

“I...I can’t believe you’d...”

“My dear, trust me, I want to do it. My mouth waters to cover you, to hear you cry out in orgasm, to feel you spurt into my mouth.”

He was nearly speechless with astonishment. “You...you want me to... I’m...I can’t....not in your... mouth. I can’t!”

She grinned. “Wanna bet? I bet I can make you.”

She was still holding his penis in both hands. His erection had faded during this discussion, but at her last words, it returned instantly to its former state.

Her grin widened. “You can say no, but your body knows what it wants.”

“You want to do this.”

“Oh, yes, very much.”

He closed his eyes. “I want it. I do want it. If you’re all right with it. Oh God, I want it.”

She dropped her head and kissed the end of his penis softly. His body stiffened, and he groaned loudly. His hands came down to her head, and laid lightly on it, exerting no pressure, just to know she was there, where he longed for her to be.

She opened her mouth then and took him inside. His penis swelled again, becoming even harder. As she moved her head up and down, laving him with her tongue, he growled softly, “Ah, God...”

He was too big for her mouth to take him all, she used her hands also. As her mouth moved over him, he began to writhe, and his whole body flexed tightly; he wasn’t going to last long unless she was very careful. She stopped the motion of her mouth, and instead moved her hands down to that softly furred sac below. He stiffened even more as she caressed his testicles, and groaned as she moved down farther yet, to caress the skin below them.

He began to move involuntarily in and out of her mouth just a bit. She took pity; he wanted this so much. Her hands went back to help her cover his penis, and she began to use her mouth again. Her tongue and her hands quickly drove him to bursting, and with a long growling cry he came at last.

After a long minute spent coming back to earth, he reached down and drew her up beside him, his arms around her tenderly.

“You are so wonderful...” He kissed her mouth and her eyes. “I never thought that would happen to me.” He stopped to kiss every part of her face, as if he couldn’t get enough of kissing her.

When he was temporarily satisfied, he spoke again. “I thought...that it wasn’t something that you’d want to...”

She raised her head. "Why not? When did I ever give you the idea that I was ... I don't know...prudish?"

"No, not you; that is, not only you...I thought..." He stopped suddenly, looking away from her.

She waited, and when he didn't finish, she suddenly understood. "You thought it was something that only prostitutes do."

"Yes." The answer came very low.

"Well, it isn't. It's something that most people do." She turned in his arms to kiss him. "I understand. You would have no way to know."

"It may be only one of many shortcomings I have in this area." He was still not looking at her.

She put her hand on his chin and turned his face until he was looking at her.

"You have no shortcomings. You are a marvelous lover." He looked away without answering. "Vincent, check the bond to see if I'm saying less than the entire truth."

In a moment he looked back at her. "You meant it."

"Of course I did. I tell you the truth."

"Of course you do. I'm sorry, Catherine. I have no experience in this area, and I've been somewhat apprehensive." He smiled then, pulling her closer. "I'm very glad to have it explained to me. It was an unforgettable experience, to say the least." He smiled down at her. "It's possible that I am going to want to experience it again."

"And it's just possible that you might." She grinned and snuggled further into his arms with a long sigh.

He was silent for a while. She wondered what was going on in his head; his silences almost always brought forth some new thought.

"Catherine..."

"M-hm."

"Is the...reverse of our recent activity possible?"

She looked puzzled. "The reverse?"

"If...our positions were reversed?"

She smiled, understanding.

"Would you like to do that?"

"Oh, yes...I've dreamed..."

"Oh, Vincent, so have I! I'd love that."

He rolled to lean over her. "Are you going to fulfill my every dream? Is there nothing I could ask that you wouldn't want?"

"I can't think of anything, but Heaven only knows what you'll think up when you get a little bit more accustomed to this whole thing!" She smiled. "Now that I think about it, I'm looking forward to the productions of your fertile brain."

"Right now my fertile brain wants to make love to you."

Smiling, she put her hand up to stroke his face. "That's OK with me. Any time, any place, and now would be good."

He bent over her, and ran his tongue lightly across her mouth.

"M-m-m, do that again." He chuckled, and began to lave her face with his tongue. She turned it back and forth, loving the feel of his tongue and the light touch of his teeth. He moved down her neck, his tongue still active, and across her shoulder. But she suspected that he was only making pleasant the journey to her breast. And indeed he sighed as his mouth closed over her nipple.

Through her haze of erotic excitement she found a space to wonder at his expertise. He seemed to

know what would please her almost before she did.

Of course, it's the bond. He does know. And she relaxed into enjoyment of his skill.

He soon continued his journey down her body. She could feel his excitement building as he reached her pubic mound. She spread her legs to give him room; then he suddenly stopped moving. She opened her eyes to see him staring down at the exposed center of her body.

He glanced up. "I need...to look. Is that all right?"

She nodded, smiling at him. He stared for a long moment, then he said, "So beautiful...like a flower..." and his head went down.

When his mouth touched her, it was as if a jolt of electricity blazed through her. In a moment she was moaning and writhing under his mouth.

"Oh, yes...yes. Oh, there!" as he touched her clitoris.

He was growling softly as he made her moan and shudder. His tongue slowed its movement as he felt her close to climax, and he lifted his head to breathe his hot breath on her.

"More,..more...please," she whispered, her body tight with her desire for orgasm. Please...please. "

Her relented and began to stroke her clitoris, moving his tongue back and forth over the tiny nubbin. Her body arched and shuddered and she came with a small cry of ecstasy.

He watched her body tense and quake as her climax came to her; he felt through their connection her body's shuddering release, and he thought that this was as exciting as anything he could have imagined. But as she came slowly down from the height of her climax, he thought What will I do now? She's satisfied, and I'm wild again with desire for her.

He needn't have worried. Her first words were, "Oh, love, I want you inside me...come into me, oh come into me!"

He complied with alacrity, and to his stunned amazement, when he reached a rapid climax, she was right with him. She came again with shuddering force.

After a moment's total inability to move he lifted his weight from her. She made a soft sound of regret as he parted his body from hers and rolled off her to lie on his back panting heavily.

When he had recovered enough to talk, he said, "It was...twice for you. How can you do that?"

She chuckled. "Ah, one of womankind's secrets. It just happens. We don't really have any control over it, and you are so...so exciting that I ...can't help myself. And anyway, you seem to have no trouble in producing multiple orgasms yourself."

"Not that close together! And not for a while now. I'm...totally exhausted."

"And so am I." She snuggled closer to him and sighed deeply. Her hand strayed over his chest, feeling through the soft pelt there for his skin.

"But I'm not too exhausted to appreciate you. Your body is so wonderful, Vincent. It's just perfect."

"That's nice to hear, even if exaggerated. Are you ready to go to sleep?"

"Are you spending the night?"

"I am if that's acceptable to you."

"Oh, believe, me, it's acceptable. I love sleeping in your arms." She made new snuggling motions, although she was already as close as she could get. "Good night, my love."

He reached over her to snap off the light.

"Good night. I love you."

As it fell out, she was pregnant. The one night without protection had done it, and as she sat staring at

the tab from the pregnancy kit, she was torn between two violent emotions.

The first one was apprehension. Oh my God, what will he do now? How will I tell him? Then it came home to her with overwhelming joy. But oh...oh! I'm going to have a baby, Vincent's child! It's a dream come true! She hugged the knowledge to herself. Something she'd longed for with such passion was going to happen to them.

But...maybe he'd not want it to continue. No! she thought. He couldn't! Not this child, not our child together! But when she thought of his adamant stance in the matter, she was afraid.

He swung down to the balcony, landing with his usual feline grace. Instead of moving toward her, he stood looking at her.

Her heart swelled, as it always did at the sight of him, but tonight it was apprehension that made her tremble. He stood still a moment longer, his eyes narrowing.

"What is it? Something is wrong." He moved then, took her into his arms, stroking her hair gently while he searched her face. "Tell me."

She turned away from his gaze, burying her face in his soft woolen sweater. Her voice was muffled by the sweater and by her reluctance as she answered.

"I... don't know how to tell you."

As she waited for his answer, his hand smoothing her hair stopped, and she felt a slow tightening of his muscles, until his entire body was hard as iron against her.

The silence drew out. At last he spoke, and what she had hoped would happen came true. He had guessed. "You are pregnant."

She nodded wordlessly, her head still against his chest. She felt frightened, something which she had never believed could happen to her with Vincent. And of course he felt it.

His fingers came up under her chin and he turned her face up to his. He looked into her eyes, verifying by what he saw there that she was fearful, terrified of his anger and what he might decide was the right thing to do.

"Oh, my beloved, don't be frightened. Not of me!" He bent his head to kiss her softly, tenderly. "I'm not angry. How could I be angry at you? And there is no fault here. It's...fate. Something over which we have no control. We'll deal with it as best we may."

She searched his eyes. "Then you won't...I thought..."

Again he guessed, saving her the agony of saying it. "You thought I might want you to...end this pregnancy." "No. I can't ask that of you...and in truth...I wouldn't want it...myself."

He shook his head. "I couldn't. Oh, Catherine, the thought of your child...your child and mine...it's a dream, a dream come true. I never thought...that I would be a father. I never thought that such a joy could come to me...to us."

Tears began to slide down her cheeks. "I was so scared...I thought it might... divide us..."

He brought his mouth down to kiss away her tears.

"Nothing...nothing! can divide us now. We are one."

END