

SNOW - DIANA

by Melinda Madison

Vincent climbed onto Diana's roof top. January had been a cold month, but February was growing even colder. With the wind-chill factored in, the temperature was a ravaging – 20 F. Although the tunnels were cozy and warm, Vincent rather enjoyed taking brief walks in the crisp, icy snow. At this moment, however, he hoped to get Diana's attention and seek an invitation into the warmth of her loft.

Vincent tapped lightly at the window, and waited for Diana to lift the shade and welcome him. However, there was no response. Diana didn't appear at the window as she usually did. She did not come to the roof top, inviting him into her world.

Vincent lowered the hood of his cloak. He listened carefully to the sounds of the night. Reaching deep into the bond he held now with Diana, he sensed her safety and sensed that she was, in fact, inside. What else was that he heard? That noise? Music? It was not like any music he had ever heard, but it seemed nevertheless to be music.

'Blackout, heatwave, .44 caliber homicide.' What kind of music was this? *'the bums drop dead and dogs go mad in packs on the West Side.'* The man's voice in the song was rough around the edges, nothing special, Vincent thought. *'Young girl standing on the ledge looks like another suicide. She wants to hit those bricks cause the news at six gotta stick to a deadline.'* Those lyrics troubled him! Exactly where was Diana?

Curiously, Vincent peered through a slit in the blinds to see Diana at her sink doing dishes. The water was running, the music was blaring, and Diana was singing and dancing around the kitchen as she dried the dishes and returned them to their proper place in the cupboard. At this vision, Vincent laughed. Diana's energy, her whimsy, amused him.

The song continued, *'While the millionaires hide in Beekman Place, the bag ladies throw their bones in my face. I got attacked by a kid with stereo sound. I don't wanna hear it but he won't turn it down.'*

How true! Apparently Diana was one of those kids. Vincent waved his hands, and tapped a little louder at the window again, trying to get Diana's attention. Finally, the thought crossed his mind to see if this window was locked. To his surprise, it wasn't.

Diana felt a burst of cold air enter her kitchen. Startled, she looked up to discover that her window was ajar. She sighed in relief when a familiar clawed hand was seen at the ledge. Diana ran to her stereo and turned the volume down.

"Vincent!" she hollered, then ran up the stairs to the roof, taking them two at a time. Opening the door and motioning him in, she beckoned. "Come in here. You must be freezing. How long have you been out here?"

"Long enough," came his reply, as Vincent followed Diana down into her living room. "What exactly is that.... noise?" he added.

"I happen to like Billy Joel," Diana fired back in defense of her choice in music for the evening.

"Billy who?" Vincent assumed she was referring to the singer of that *'song'* but hoped she was not referring to a male companion lurking perhaps in another room.

"Billy Joel. And that *'noise'* is rock and roll, Vincent." Diana's eyes and the smile on her face demonstrated to Vincent that he was about to meet a new side of Diana. The Diana he had met

only five short months ago was tough and intelligent, having a love of poetry, literature, and classical music. 'Or,' he wondered, 'is she only indulging me, because I enjoy these things so?' Seeing the confused expression on Vincent's face, Diana handed him the record cover.

"Welcome to the music of the eighties!" she exclaimed with a light laugh.

Vincent examined the cardboard square. On it was a photo of a rather odd-looking man in blue jeans and black leather jacket. He was holding a large rock and appeared as if he were about to throw it through a window of a house made of glass. The cover read, 'Billy Joel,' and 'Glass Houses.' Vincent bent down before the turntable and observed the vinyl circle going round and round. He had heard about records, but had never actually seen them, since electricity was not in abundance in his world.

Diana stepped up behind him, having finished both her dishes and her dancing. She handed him a cup of hot tea. "I'm glad to see you, Vincent. I'm sorry that you had to wait in the cold."

Diana knew she had been observed dancing. Although she had taken years of lessons, she remained uncomfortable in front of an audience, especially this audience! She removed the Billy Joel album from the stereo and pressed the start button on the cassette player to begin playing Tchaikovsky's 'Romeo and Juliet.'

"There," she retorted, "That's more appropriate for this occasion."

"Diana, you do not need to adjust your likes and dislikes in accord with my own. I will listen to your rock and roll." Vincent grimaced at the thought, but was genuinely willing to try something new.

"And, I was rather enjoying your dance."

"I like the music, too, Vincent. And not just because you do." Diana was embarrassed and knew she was blushing. She was right about that. Her face matched her hair and she looked away from Vincent's gaze. "As for my dancing," she added, "you just pretend you never saw that side of me!"

"But I like that side of you, Diana." Vincent was enjoying having placed her in such a compromising and awkward position. He realized it was not entirely fair of him, but knew Diana would find a way to get her punches in eventually. She had opened a new world for him, and he joked with her freely. As he and Diana grew to know each other better, Vincent could feel an increasing pull toward her. It all began during his stay in her loft, as he recovered from his injuries following the explosion on the Compass Rose. He did not have the strength to acknowledge what he was feeling then, but could not deny those feelings now.

Diana had helped him to face his demons. She had helped him to mourn Catherine and to find his son. Diana was his saviour. Until she had come into his life, Vincent did not truly know the value of laughter. Diana's ever-present-in-your-face attitude, taught him both to laugh and to cry. Tonight he laughed with her, not at her. She was actually a very good dancer, obviously having had some training, and Vincent longed to take her in his arms and whirl her around the room. But he didn't.

Returning to the kitchen, Diana poured herself a cup of tea. "Is it too warm in here for you, Vincent?" she asked. The warmth Diana referred to was due to her dance and not the half-working radiator. A once cold Vincent had noticeably grown flush and sweat glistened on his brow.

"I am quite comfortable, Diana."

"Are you now?" she asked with an impish grin. Then deciding to let him off the hook, she asked, "So, what brings you out on a night like this?"

Vincent had told her the truth. As odd as it seemed to him as well as to Diana, he was comfortable with her in her loft, drinking tea. Even her teasing, and their flirting did not upset him. It was fun, and Vincent felt a sense of what it was like to be just a 'normal man,' enjoying the company and humor of a 'normal woman.'

"Jacob has been crabby," Vincent began. "I needed a break for patience sake, so Mary is watching

him. I have not been Above in a while and I like the snow. It is cold, but it is so beautiful."

"Yes, it is," Diana conceded. "But there is a lot to be said for curling up under a warm blanket, too, with a good book or a little rock and roll!"

"I'll agree with the book and warm blanket, Diana," Vincent kidded. "But as for the rock and roll.... well, I can only assume it is an acquired taste."

"I'm a child of the Seventies, Vincent. Here, I'll show you." Diana got up and opened the door of her entertainment center. She removed more of the cardboard squares and handed them to Vincent.

"You mean you have never heard '*Aquarius*' or '*Hotel California*'?"

Vincent looked at her, puzzled, and shook his head.

"How about the fifties?" Diana asked. "The Chiffons?" He shook his head again. "One Fine Day?" Another shake of his head caused Diana to announce, "That's it!" She was on a mission now. She would start with the Fifties and give Vincent a lesson in rock music. At first she wondered if doing so would corrupt him. He was such a romantically refined creature, and Diana did not want to spoil his sophistication. She recognized in herself, however, both a sophisticated, classical side and a less traditional, yet more adventurous side.

Making her decision, Diana located an old forty-five of '*One Fine Day*.' Setting the needle to the vinyl, she advised her pupil. "If you hate it, tell me and I'll turn it off."

Vincent resigned himself to listen, and surprisingly he did not hate what he heard. '*One fine day, you'll look at me. And then you'll know our love was meant to be. One fine day, you're gonna want me for your girl.*' No, Vincent liked this song.

The song ended and Diana returned the aged record to its cover. Vincent sat motionless and quiet on her couch. His blue eyes found Diana's green from across the room. "I like it," he said softly. Rising, he informed her. "I liked it very much, Diana, and I should go."

It took Diana a few seconds for his words to sink in. She really hadn't thought about the words of that song until she had begun to play it. By then it was too late to turn it off. She, too, liked this song. And, it did accurately, though prematurely, express her feelings for this man.

"Please, don't go, Vincent, not yet."

Vincent pulled his cloak around his shoulders, and smiled shyly. "It is better that I do." He was not yet ready to face his feelings for Diana, and Diana knew it would be a long time before anything would happen to signify that they were more than just friends. "Find your blanket, Diana, and stay warm!" Vincent entered the stairs to the roof.

Quietly Diana followed. She slipped into her boots and grabbed her coat off the back of the kitchen chair. she did not want him to leave because of a song.

"Vincent, wait. I didn't mean to embarrass you," she hollered up to him, as she took her gloves from her pocket and put them on. "I played that song without thinking. I know it hit home, but I didn't plan it." She followed him onto the roof. "Really, I didn't."

Vincent stopped, turning to face her. "I know that, Diana. My leaving has little to do with your song, and much more to do with me."

"I don't understand, Vincent. Is something wrong?"

"No," he answered. Seeing the concerned look on her face, he added. "Everything is too right."

"Explain?" Diana's one word query was as brisk as the cold winter air. She crossed her arms for warmth and leaned against the brick outer wall of her loft.

"I enjoy your company, Diana." Vincent moved to stand in front of her to shelter her from the cold, winter wind. "It's too soon for me to allow myself such pleasures."

"Says who?" Diana's question was non-confrontational and honest.

"My mind and my heart tell me it is too soon. My heart cannot forget what I have lost, but now it gives me glimpses of what is yet to come." He lightly brushed her hair from her face, and took her gloved hands in his, *'for warmth,'* he told himself. "It's cold," he said, squeezing her hands. "You should go in."

Diana nodded. "When can I see you again?" With a smile, she added. "I promise, no more rock and roll." But rock and roll was a perfect description for the events yet to come. Diana stepped away from the wall and was heading back toward the warmth waiting for her inside. She stepped on a patch of ice and slipped, sliding to sit on the roof.

A startled Vincent rushed to her side. "Are you all right, Diana?" he asked, extending his hand to help her to her feet. A slight smile lit his face, as he struggled not to laugh at her predicament.

Diana took his hand and tried to stand. Clumsily, she slipped again, causing Vincent to lose his balance and slip as well. He joined her in sitting upon the icy rooftop floor.

"Sure," Diana laughed. "I'm fine, Vincent. And you?" Diana lay back on the ice, laughing uncontrollably, feeling both cold and wet from the fall. Looking up at the stars, she noticed how clear they were this night. *'Too bad the telescope is in for the winter,'* she thought, as she tried to stop giggling.

Vincent sat in awe of Diana's spirit. Her openness with him, and her childlike playfulness caused him to soon join in her laughter. "You're going to catch cold lying on the ice," he cautioned.

"Nah," Diana informed him. "I used to lie in the snow and make snow angels. I didn't get sick then."

"Yes, but you were a child then," Vincent reminded.

"Are you implying I'm *'old,'* Vincent?" Diana detected a bit of delightful sarcasm in his voice. "It was only last year!" she quipped, and then watched the expression of surprise light his face. Her devious side overcame her and she suddenly sat up, and scooped up a mound of snow from the crevice by the wall. "Mark and I were goofing off in the snow in the park one day, and we had a good old-fashioned snowball fight." And with that, Vincent received a snowball blast to the shoulder.

A still laughing Diana let out a high-pitched shriek as Vincent returned her fire, hitting her on the top of the head with a soft mound of snow. He joined in her laughter again.

"You're bad! I like that!" Diana struggled to get to her feet without falling and proceeded to let him have it again, aiming for his head but missing him completely as he ducked.

"And *'you'* are too slow!" Vincent nailed her again, this time in the back as she tried to escape.

"Yeah, well, take that," she screamed, succeeding in landing one on his arm. "And that!" She finally got him on the top of the head.

Vincent quickly grew quiet. His laughing ceased, and he turned away from her, leaning on the ledge and looking down at the city beneath. His sudden change in demeanor told Diana that something was wrong. Slowly she approached him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Vincent, what is it?" Genuine concern filled her voice. She knew that their game was over and he would soon leave, sending her back into the warmth of her loft. "Did I do or say something wrong?"

Slowly Vincent turned to face her. "No," he said quietly, both hands behind him. "Take that!" he exclaimed as he dumped a huge ball of snow over her head.

"Ahhhh!" she squealed as she felt the cold run down her face and back. "You're dead meat, mister!" She fired one, two, three handfuls of snow at him, and then slipping again on the ice, she fell to the ground. "Ouch!" Diana let out a painful cry. "My ankle!"

"You're bluffing," Vincent replied.

"No, Vincent, really. It hurts. I think it's broken. Please help me inside."

Her voice was shaky and she grabbed at her foot. Cautiously, Vincent walked over to her and leaned down beside her. He could see drops of water running down her cheeks and knew she was telling him the truth. He squatted down and placed his arms beneath her, preparing to lift her into his arms.

"Gotcha!" she hollered as she dumped snow down the back of his shirt. "Two can play at that game!" Diana had not been hurt and the water running down her face was left-over from the snow melting through her hair.

"I thought you were really hurt. Diana, don't scare me like that." Vincent sounded angry. Was he? Or was this another trick? He proceeded to lift her into his arms and set her onto her feet again.

"I'm sorry, Vincent." Diana felt truly bad. "I guess I got carried away with the game."

Vincent, however, was bluffing again. A handful of soft snow was dropped down the front of her shirt. "Now we are even!" he averred. "I, too, have had practice at these games!" He and Devin used to stage snow wars in the park late at night, as children.

Diana was the one shivering now. "That's it! I'm going in. I surrender! Why don't you join me for another cup of tea. You should warm up before you try to walk all the way home."

Warily, expecting another trick, Vincent approached her door. There were no more tricks, however. Diana's cheeks and ears were red and she was cursing at not having put on her hat and scarf. Such moments with Vincent were so rare, she had not wanted him to get away from her too soon. Noticing her discomfort, both visibly and through their connection, Vincent the Doctor spoke up. "You're going to have frostbite if you stay out here any longer. Let's get you inside with your blanket."

Vincent escorted Diana inside, shaking the water from his hair and cloak. He removed his boots and cloak, leaving them on the stairs to dry. "I will make the tea this time. You go and change into some dry clothes." Diana followed his instructions and soon returned in a long flannel gown and socks. She plugged in an electric blanket and curled beneath it on the couch. Vincent served her tea, after having struggled with her electric stove. He had learned a lot about electricity this evening. He sat down beside her on the couch.

"Aren't you cold?" Diana asked. Handing him a towel she had brought back with her from her bedroom.

Vincent took the towel and dried some of the water from his hair, face and clothes. "Yes, thanks to you," he retorted.

"Here," Diana said, handing him a pair of large sweat pants and a thermal shirt, which had been Mark's. "You can probably wear these."

Vincent felt odd about borrowing these things from her, and did not ask her where they had come from. He did, however, long to get out of the wet clothes he wore. Reluctantly, he took the dry articles from her and entered her bedroom to change. The room was familiar to him as the one he had spent three nights in not too long ago. Minutes later a drier, warmer Vincent emerged.

In these clothes, he looked different than Diana had ever recalled seeing him look. The clothes fit him well, and she smiled up at him.

"Here," she said, lifting the edge of the electric blanket, inviting him to share in her warmth. "I promise I won't bite, and I don't have any more snow!"

"No tricks?" Vincent asked. Moving in to join her beneath the blanket.

"No tricks." Diana curled up next to him and leaned her head on his shoulder. Just keep me warm."

Vincent wrapped his arm around Diana. He had never been this close to her physically, and while he was somewhat alarmed by their sudden closeness, he felt at ease beside her. She had opened

her home and her heart to him, and was willing to take only what he was willing to offer. Vincent smiled, closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep. Moments later, sleep overcame Diana, and the pair settled into the warmth of each others' arms.

A few hours later, Vincent opened his eyes. It took him a few minutes to orient himself to his surroundings and to realize that the sun had risen and he could not go home.

Diana felt the form beside her stir and stretch, and then felt the tension rising within him. She, too, opened her eyes and was stunned at the fact that Vincent was beside her at 6:45am. "Good morning," she muttered, trying to make light of the situation.

"Morning it is, Diana." Vincent's tone was unsure. He could not spend the entire day alone in her loft while she went to work. "I cannot stay here. How did this happen?" He was obviously very uptight. "Father must be frantic. And you must be getting to work."

"Vincent.... relax." Diana tossed the electric blanket off of them and slowly got up and began to move around. "It's Saturday. I'm not going anywhere.... besides, I work at home, remember?" A day with Vincent! This could be fun!

Vincent sat back, calming down slightly. "Still, Diana....," he began, before she ended his thought for him.

"You're over-reacting! I'll go and tell Father what happened.... and what didn't happen.... while you have breakfast, take a shower, listen to some music.... whatever.... okay?" Diana smiled reassuringly, understanding Vincent's nervousness. "You've stayed here before, right? No big deal!" Diana touched his shoulder softly, and felt him relax a little. She left to use the bathroom, brush her hair and teeth, then threw on some jeans and a sweater and bundled up in her winter garb. "I'll be back in an hour or so. You want anything?"

"No." Vincent was amazed at how together she was. She was not the least bit upset by this turn of events. Settling back on the couch, he stared at the ceiling and smiled. "Hurry back!" he said with uncertainty as Diana closed the elevator door.

Diana was gone only ten minutes when her phone rang. "Diana, it's Joe." The voice on the answering machine startled Vincent, and he knew it to be that of Joe Maxwell, Catherine's friend and former boss. "Listen, Bennett.... call me back. I know you don't want to work this weekend, but I have a lead on this new case. If I don't hear from you, I'll call you later. Bye."

The call unnerved Vincent, and he got up and went to the kitchen, deciding some tea might soothe his rising inhibitions. He was not as afraid of spending an entire day Above as he was of getting so close to Diana. Waking up beside her this morning reminded him of all that he had not been able to share with Catherine. Despite the pain in that recognition, he had enjoyed the feel of Diana's sleeping form beside him.

Vincent drank his tea, and decided to try out the shower. He had bathed there before, the morning after Diana had nursed him back to health, only a few months ago. Vincent took special care to lock the door behind him, before shedding his borrowed clothing and stepping beneath the steamy water. The warm water massaged his lightly furred skin and all tension was drained from his body. At first, he felt insecure about using Diana's towels, shampoo and soap. However, this insecurity soon vanished as he caught the scent of her there. Turning off the water, he dried himself as best he could and put on his own shirt and pants. He was still barefoot and his hair was damp as he heard the elevator return. Vincent caught a glimpse of himself in the bathroom mirror and he froze. He could not let her see him like this!

"Vincent?" Diana's voice echoed through the loft. She threw her coat on the couch and sat the box of bagels she carried on the counter. Looking around for Vincent, she noticed the bathroom door was closed.

Diana heard the lock on the door click open and a damp Vincent stepped barefoot into her view.

He tried to hide his feet from her as he informed her. "Joe called." He couldn't bring himself to say anything else, and was embarrassed by his appearance. He simply pointed to the answering machine, drawing this woman's attention away from him.

Diana nodded and then asked. "Do you like bagels?" She did not even approach the machine.

A perplexed Vincent affirmed that he did, and found himself directed to the kitchen for breakfast. Sharing this food with Diana eased his apprehension a little, as Diana treated him as she would any house guest.

After breakfast, Vincent headed for the rooftop, intent that the winter breeze would dry him faster. "Would you prefer a blow dryer, Vincent?" Diana asked. "It's warmer. You'll freeze solid out there. Then how will I explain that to Father?" The old man had taken Vincent's absence this day with amazing ease, as Diana assured him his son would be safe and would return when it got dark enough for him to slip safely back into the tunnel world.

Vincent had never seen a blow dryer, but assumed it was another intriguing electrical appliance. He nodded and quietly followed her into the bathroom. Diana retrieved the hand-held hair dryer from the cabinet and plugged it in. Demonstrating its operation, she informed him. "Push the switch up for on and down for off and that's it... easy, huh?"

Vincent made a face and took the appliance from her. It sounded simple enough. '*Up for on,*' he thought as he flipped the switch while staring directly into the end of the dryer. Hot air blew in his face, and Diana howled in laughter. A somewhat discouraged Vincent placed the dryer on the sink and headed for the door. "I'll be outside," he told her.

Diana grabbed him as he tried to leave the bathroom. "No, wait," she said smiling sweetly at him. "Don't give up so easily. Let me help." Diana pulled Vincent back into the room and turned the dryer on, pointing it in the proper direction. She placed it firmly in his hand and directed, "Now, '*dry!*'"

Vincent complied, but not before turning the device toward her blowing the hot air in her face. He caught on all too well, and Diana provided him with a brush and a comb. Once the drying was completed, he replaced the appliance in the cabinet from which Diana had gotten it earlier. He stood silent again, staring into the mirror. Mirrors amazed him, and he had always shied away from placing one in his chamber. Seeing his reflection there now was startling.

Diana, who had returned to the kitchen, leaving Vincent to his solitary grooming, was conscious of the fact that the hair dryer was no longer running. The loft was quiet, but Vincent did not join her. Searching him out, she walked curiously back towards the bathroom. She stopped just outside his line of vision, leaning on the door so that her reflection could not be seen in the mirror.

He did not notice her and he did not move. He just stood there staring in the mirror, staring at himself, wondering how she could be so at ease, so welcoming to such a creature. For the first time ever in Diana's company, Vincent felt oddly out of place.

Carefully, slowly, Diana moved in behind him. Not wanting to frighten him, but needing to comfort him, she wrapped her arms around his waist from behind and rested her chin on his shoulder, staring with him into the mirror. Such close physical contact had been taboo until they slept curled together on her couch.

"What is it, Vincent?" Diana's voice was soft, barely a whisper.

Vincent did not move, and he made no attempt to leave the security of her embrace. He simply answered. "Look."

"I'm looking," came her response. "And I love what I see." She smiled ear-to-ear at his reflection, staring deeply into her eyes.

"What do you see, Diana?" Came his reply. Still he did not move. His breathing quickened, and

Diana was unsure if it was due to her touch or because of the vision before him.

"I see a man and a woman...." she began, "... who have become great friends.... who have shared a lot of pain, a lot of sorrow, but a lot of joy as well.... in a very short time."

Diana wanted to tell Vincent how much she loved him. She wanted to shout it at the top of her lungs, but she knew she mustn't. She couldn't, not yet. He was far too fragile, and was only beginning to open himself to her. Her arms still around him, she clasped her hands together at his stomach and pressed herself tightly to him, hugging him from behind. He allowed this contact, and little did she know, how much he craved it.

She returned his question. "What do you see, Vincent?"

A slight uncertain smile adorned Vincent's face, and he exhaled a breath he had been holding for quite some time. It struck him finally that Diana was not appalled or disgusted by what she saw.

"We are good friends, Diana.... but what I see scares me. For I see the woman, but cannot see the man. I see two friends, the same as you. The woman is strong, and daring, and even a bit devilish at times. She throws a mighty snowball, and a mighty punch. She is honest, and also frightened, although she would never admit it. The other, Diana, is not a man. I don't know what it is."

Vincent broke free from her embrace and left the tiny room, needing the open space that her loft provided. Diana followed.

"I know what it is.... want me to tell you?" Diana perched on the back of the couch, watching him intently as he stared out the kitchen window.

"Not really. I may not like what I hear."

"Tough," Diana snapped back, with all the graciousness of the determined red-head that she was. "You're like a snowman, Vincent." He turned his head to look at her. "You're safe in the cold, but when things heat up, you begin to melt. Your certainties disappear the minute anything goes contrary to your plan. As long as you're alone, you stay frozen and solid and safe. And you're wrong, Vincent, this woman admits to being frightened."

Vincent cut her off. "I'm not made of snow, Diana. Sometimes I wish I were."

"I'm glad you're not, Vincent. When the sun comes out, you'd be gone. Then who would torment me? Huh? Who would listen to rock and roll music and smash snowballs over my head?" Diana touched Vincent's hair, soft and dry now. He leaned into her touch, and did not pull away.

"I don't know who that was, Diana.... Don't you see? I have never.... never.... behaved in such a manner with...." Vincent did not finish this phrase. He didn't need to. Diana knew exactly what he was saying. He had never behaved in this manner with Catherine, or with anyone for that matter, other than the children.

Diana looked down and saw that his feet were still bare. With one stockinged foot, she brushed the top of his foot. This time, he did pull away. He moved his foot away from her and turned to face her. Their eyes met, blue on green, and a mixture of emotions surrounded them. Vincent wanted to run, wanted to hide, wanted to go home. He was not supposed to be feeling this way! It was too early to be getting this close to anyone. He thought back on how in just ten short days, he had known that his destiny was linked to Catherine. In just ten short days, he knew that he loved her. And now, he loved Diana. He knew it. He had known it after the first month. They were linked. He was learning to live, to enjoy life again. He recalled the image he had seen just moments ago in the bathroom mirror. Diana, the woman, standing beside Vincent, the man? *'Perhaps,'* he thought. *'Perhaps.'*

Diana moved away from Vincent, deciding it best to allow him some space. He was, after all, faced with spending the entire day with her. "I'm gonna work for a little while, okay." She pointed to her computer. "Just across the room, so you're not rid of me completely." Diana picked up her phone and dialed Joe's number. Perhaps a distraction was needed here. Joe did not answer, so Diana left

a message on his machine. These little games of phone tag were an annoying part of life in the world Above.

Vincent read for a little while. Then, after much urging, and while she worked, Diana coaxed him into reading from a never-opened edition of Rilke that had decorated her coffee table for years. With some distance between them, Vincent became more at ease. Diana wanted to be near him, to hold him in her arms again, but did not want to encourage a retreat.

She continued her work, typing busily at the computer, but she gave up on Joe after two more attempts to contact him. Vincent continued reading, until he could read no more. With each word that rolled off his tongue came memories of Catherine. However, now, something had changed. Each word also brought him thoughts of Diana. He closed the book in mid-sentence and returned it to his place.

"Diana," Vincent left the couch and entered her work space. She looked up at him from her chair, but continued typing on the computer. He stopped behind her to see that what she had typed was not work, but rather a letter to him.

It was too late for Diana to clear the screen. Half of her words had been read. Vincent leaned over her to read what she had typed there.

'Dear Vincent,

This is a letter you will never receive. I type it to keep from saying these things to you out loud. I love you. I love your face, your eyes and your smile. I love the way you make me feel. I love being Below and being Above, as long as you are there. I love how you laugh both at me and with me. I love concerts and classical music, shared with you beneath the park. I love how you hate Billy Joel. I love losing to you in chess. I love holding your son in my arms. I love your voice as you sit there reading to me now. I love the warmth of you sharing my blanket on a cold night, last night. I love you here in my home, struggling with my hair dryer. I love snowball fights, even when you win.

I know this is wrong, that it is so very wrong for me to have these feelings. I should not have them at all, especially now. I am supposed to be your friend, and I have let you down. I'm sorry.

You are right. I am afraid. I am afraid that if you find out about this you will....'

She was caught by Vincent before she could finish the last line. And now she sat frozen at her keyboard. "I will what, Diana?" came his question.

Diana took a deep breath, and typed the words, *'never forgive me.'* Then she cleared the screen and turned the computer off. "I'm sorry," she said. "I had to get it out. You just weren't supposed to know. You were supposed to stay over there on your side of the room, and leave me alone with my shame over here!"

"You were supposed to be working." Vincent's tone was soft, gentle, even a little cajoling. Shame? If only she knew what shame really was. He had the same feelings for her, but feared that acting on them would be to betray his Catherine. He could not, however, leave Diana alone with her fears.

"Diana.... there is no reason to be sorry.... and I have nothing to forgive. You have given me back my life, my son, the strength to face the future. Everything you have written there comes from your heart. And now, I must tell you out loud, what I wish I could type. Unfortunately, I am finished battling your electronic equipment, except for one."

Vincent moved over to the stereo and was relieved to see the classical cassette still in the tape deck. He pressed the power button, and pressed the play button starting the cassette player. Diana smiled shyly as he took her hand, leading her from her desk into the living area. His right hand encompassed her left hand, and his left hand lightly clasped her waist. He, too, could dance. Looking down at her, he made his admission.

"Diana, I love your face, your eyes and your smile. I love being here with you. I love to hear you

laugh. I love snowball fights, and sharing your blanket. I love dancing with you now. I hate your hair dryer. I don't hate your Billy Joel."

Diana laughed softly. This man, sensitive as he was, had humor. And as long as he could laugh, she knew he'd come through all right. They both would. Diana wrapped both arms around his neck and rested her head on his shoulder, as a lone tear rolled down her cheek.

Vincent moved both hands to her waist as the two continued their slow dance on the living room floor. Pressing his lips to her ear, Vincent made the greatest admission of all. "I love you, too, Diana. I love you, too."

She held him tighter, her grip telling him all that he needed to know. He was loved. He was cared for, in a way he had never expected to be cared for again. With Diana's acceptance and her friendship came a new lease on life. And now, for the first time in months, Vincent looked forward to each new day without despair. Outside, a new blanket of crystal snow fell on the city. Inside, the once frozen Vincent melted in the warmth of Diana's love.

END