

Time Let Me Play

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The late October night air was moist and sweet. Nestled at the end of a large forest stood a cosy-looking wooden cabin, an orange and amber glow illuminating it from the inside. On the front porch, a woman was leaning against the wooden bannister, looking out into the darkness of the night. Her eyes were impatiently searching the mostly obscured road leading to the cabin. Then they wandered to the liquid surface in the distance, occasionally glistening in the moonlight when the moon came from behind the clouds.

“One day we’ll see that lake, Catherine, I promise you...”

She never let go of those words, not since he’d said them back then. Whatever the obstacles, they would manage eventually. He never told a lie, and that strengthened her belief that it *would* happen for them one day. She had believed for so long...

Her fingers started tapping on the bannister upon which her hands were resting. The excitement bubbling within her mingled with growing worry.

What is taking them so long? she thought while desperately hoping to hear the sound of an approaching engine. They were supposed to arrive half an hour ago... it was past midnight...

“At last!” she couldn’t help but cry victoriously when two beams of bright light appeared from the forest.

As the silver van finally stopped in front of the cabin, Catherine ran down the few steps from the porch, overcome with relief. The driver’s door opened, and Joe Maxwell got out of, stretching his arms above his head. He looked tired but content, clad in his favourite jeans, sweater and leather jacket, which he always sported in his free time.

“I was worried something happened to you!” Catherine said before she gave him a friendly hug. Joe chuckled and patted her on the back before they pulled apart.

“Let’s just say, you might have expected any problem while transporting a top-secret package to a top-secret location: you might get stopped by the police for a routine check; you could get stuck in traffic, as highly unlikely as it may be in the middle of the night, or a confused deer might decide it would be a grand idea to cross your path on the road just as you’d settled into a decent speed.”

He grinned then rolled his eyes in pretended disappointment before continuing. “But no, all we got was a flat tyre, luckily in the middle of nowhere, about fifteen miles away from here. So, nothing exciting that would cause me to pull my DA rank, sadly.”

Catherine chuckled, shaking her head. “Well, I’m sorry your pride was hurt but I’m glad you made it here in one piece. Both of you...” Her eyes glanced towards the back of the van.

“Yeah, I know... Go on, let him out of the cage,” her friend said with a warm smile.

As she stood at the van’s back door and put her hands on the handle, she noticed they were trembling. *It’s happening... it’s finally happening...* She felt the heat of excitement rise in her, and her heart beat faster. Slowly, she pushed the handle and opened the door, subconsciously holding her breath.

Only a small camp torch placed inside the van modestly illuminated the familiar figure that carefully stepped forward. Veiled from head to toe in his trademark dark cloak, Vincent appeared in Catherine’s sight.

“You made it...,” she whispered, her voice shaky. Their eyes locked for a moment, sharing all the feelings they had kept inside having hoped for this moment for so long. Catherine looked around once more, assuring herself there was no one else nearby.

“Don’t worry, Cathy. There’s no one but us within at least twenty miles,” Joe said, with an encouraging smile. “That’s where the nearest campsite is.”

That erased the last worry from her mind, and she looked back into the van, nodding. She stretched her hand out in his direction, and Vincent accepted it with his heart beating in his throat. This was not Central Park. This was... freedom... at least for a long weekend.

As his feet silently hit the gravelly ground, he landed in his wife’s arms. His first moments in the world Above somewhere other than New York were something to

celebrate together. The moment they had been dreaming about for years had finally arrived.

Catherine pulled back from him with glistening eyes. She took hold of his hands and made him turn toward the lake, shrouded in darkness.

“Can you smell it, Vincent?” she asked quietly.

His sensitive nostrils took in a deep breath, enjoying the smog-free, crisp air of the wilderness. He could smell the water nearby and hear the gentle ripples on the liquid surface. The scent of the lake mingled with the sweet scent of the autumn grass. The sounds and smells were somehow familiar, but at the same time, it was unlike anything he had ever experienced. The total absence of the city traffic noise and the quiet, occasional breeze wrapped him in a cosy blanket of comfort. He couldn’t help but smile blissfully, closing his eyes.

Catherine and Joe were silently enjoying Vincent’s first encounter with true wilderness when suddenly, the moon appeared from behind a cloud that had been hiding it until then. The maned man’s smile faded as his deep-set eyes saw the glittering lunar reflection on the lake that appeared to stretch forever. Shimmering and floating took another meaning for him as a shiver of amazement went down his spine.

“Wait until you see it in daylight,” Catherine whispered and gently squeezed his hand, moved by his emotional reaction to the scene before him.

*“To me, every hour of the day and night is an unspeakably perfect miracle,”*¹ Vincent remarked, still captivated by the glittering scene before him.

Catherine smiled and turned back to Joe, who was trying to appear as casual as always (and failing). She approached him with a bear hug. “Thank you...,” she whispered into his ear, and he could feel her beaming smile.

“I want to hear all about it later,” he replied, then grinned. “Keep the dirty details for yourself, though.”

“Joe Maxwell,” his friend raised her eyebrows, laughing. “There’s a very comfy guest bed ready for you,” she added. “You can drive back in the morning.”

“Oh, no. I’ll be perfectly fine in the tiny but cosy (if I am to trust the motel manager) room I booked just past the campsite I mentioned. They are expecting me even at this late hour. There’s nothing a few bucks can’t fix.”

“But Joe, are you sure you can manage more driving tonight?” Catherine was worried.

“Radcliffe, have a little faith in your ex-boss!” he said theatrically. “Besides, where there are lovers on the scene, there’s no room for... spectators.” Joe winked, making his friend blush and Vincent chuckle.

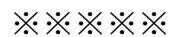
After the last couple of hugs, New York’s District Attorney hopped back into the rented van and with a wave and a smile, he drove off again, soon vanishing in the darkness.

¹Walt Whitman

As the van disappeared, Catherine grabbed Vincent's old worn leather duffel bag from the path, and her other hand reached for one of Vincent's.

"Come," she said quietly, her voice vibrating with joy. "Let me show you our home for the next three days."

Vincent smiled at her, excitement and a sense of adventure rising in him like a tide. He took a deep breath and looked around one last time. Only then did he follow her into the cabin.



The purplish sunrise penetrated the cabin's bedroom window on the first floor and fell onto Catherine's face, soon waking her. She turned around and reached for the body she expected to be lying there. But Vincent's side of the bed was empty. Only the still-warm and crumpled sheets he'd left behind reminded her that this wasn't a dream - they were truly at her father's cabin at the lake... together. A blissful smile appeared on her face.

She got up, ran some water over her face to freshen up, put a warm robe over her pyjamas and walked downstairs. She walked through the short corridor, reaching the sitting room, furnished in a simple but cosy style, and stopped, spotting him through the window. He was standing on the front porch, his eyes fixed on the lake before him and the morning sun, slowly climbing over the horizon. His cloak remained untouched in the bedroom upstairs.

If Vincent could have seen himself at that particular moment, he would have seen the early morning pink and purple glow of the sky and the just-rising sun over the lake reflecting in the sapphire blue of his eyes. It set them alight with a fire he had kept hidden deep inside his soul most of his life. Following his usual caution and apprehension, so significant and vital for a being who must never be seen by anyone Above, the vast open space of the water ahead and the forest paths around him should have made him nervous and overly alert. He should have been troubled about how easily he could have been exposed and potentially threatened by a lonesome wanderer or a group of tourists randomly roaming the area. He *should* have been afraid... but he wasn't.

For the first time in his life, Vincent put his complete trust in fate and left it to her to decide for and watch over him. The trust he put in Catherine's words, claiming that no one came anywhere near the cabin, especially at this time of year when the chill started creeping into the bones. That trust was enough for him. He owed it to her for all the sacrifices she had made for him. More importantly, whatever the possible complications, he owed it to himself.

He had envisioned this moment so many times in his mind that suddenly, it was almost impossible to believe this was not just another of his fantasies. All he was able to do was to take in the sound of the rustling colourful autumn leaves gently swaying in the trees, the smell of the lake and the vision of the soft ripples painted all over its surface, the calm, and the orange globe rising higher on the horizon, brightening the sky above more with each passing minute.

When he felt the gentle touch of an arm embracing his waist from behind, he smiled, without turning around.

“I hoped I could share this moment with you,” Catherine said quietly, and he could feel her smiling.

His arm snaked around her shoulder, pulling her closer. Only then he turned his head to look at her; the amber highlights in her long hair, conjured up by the first rays of the sun, enchanted him.

“So beautiful,” Vincent whispered, still smiling, and she knew he didn’t mean just the scenery before them.

“I was about to say the same,” Catherine replied with equal tenderness.

The moment when he looked at her, she was struck by the emotions in Vincent’s eyes. It wasn’t the first time he had seen the sunrise; their brownstone in New York witnessed many of those, always observed keenly by both from the safety of their bedroom French door. But this vast, wild spot of nature was visibly filling her husband with emotions he could only have imagined for so many years...

Her hand reached for his stubbly cheek, and her thumb softly wiped a small tear that had escaped his eye without even noticing it, catching him by surprise. He embraced her fully and rested his cheek on the top of her head.

“Thank you,” he whispered into her hair, unable to say more. His eyes were fixed on the sunny horizon again.

Catherine smiled and tightened her arms around his waist, knowing this moment would remain engraved in her memory and heart forever.

“My greatest pleasure.”



They were sitting at the kitchen table, enjoying their morning hot drinks: Vincent his favourite herb tea and Catherine a strong cup of coffee. They spent almost an hour on the porch, watching the sunrise, and the already chilly late October air made them long for something comforting along with their breakfast. They prepared and enjoyed some oatmeal, a few toasts and some fruit in companionable silence, filled with contentment. It was a rare occasion to have the morning entirely for themselves. In the past six years, they had always shared it with their sons, except for their anniversaries, when Grandpa Jacob and Mary more than gladly took the little ones into their care.

“I hope we can bring the boys next year,” Catherine said before taking another sip of her coffee. “It would be wonderful to spend the weekend here as a family.”

Vincent smiled and lowered his teacup.

“Jacob and Charlie will love it here,” he said then, not wanting to diminish her hopes, although not taking his luck for granted.

Her eyes lit up as she regarded him fondly. “I think it’s safe to say *you* do,” she stated.

There was no way he could deny the fact, hence his smile widened. It took him a moment to find his words as he took in the twinkle of her emerald eyes, a few strands of her sandy hair falling over her forehead, every line of the face he knew for years and yet never grew tired of seeing. It almost felt like he was brought back in time... to the time when he first fell in love with her.

”I love wherever you are, Catherine,” he spoke eventually. “But... yes, this place already holds a very special place in my heart.”

She smiled, hearing the tenderness in his voice. He didn’t have to say more; his eyes and the Bond spoke for him. Her eyes rested on his for a while, the magnetic pull between them as strong as ever.

When she finally managed to break eye contact and took the last sip of her coffee, she asked cheerfully, ”So, what would you like to do today? You know that if it was up to me, I would love to show you everything, but this weekend is for *you*, and I want to make sure you are happy and comfortable all the way.”

Vincent’s soft chuckle caressed her ears. *Don’t you know I’m happy and comfortable by your side, wherever you lead me?*

“I could not be any happier than I am now, being here with you, sharing this beautiful place, this moment in time,” he said. “There is one place, though...”

Catherine raised her eyebrows, her interest piqued.

“The glen... the one you told me about once... Is it far from here?”

The prospect of taking Vincent to her favourite childhood place in full daylight revived her childlike enthusiasm from her younger days.

“Not at all! If we set off now, we should be there in about fifteen minutes,” she replied with a beaming smile. “If we are lucky, we might even see some deer.” She covered his large hand with hers. “Oh, Vincent... It’s going to be wonderful!”

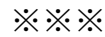
She got up from her chair, grabbing their empty plates to bring them over to the sink. He joined her, helping her to wash up, and couldn’t miss how her cheeks flushed from excitement. Catherine’s never-fading smile was contagious; Vincent found himself unable to stop smiling, as well. Is it possible it could really be so easy? Just walk out in the open without any danger lurking behind a tree?

After Catherine packed a few small food bits and a flask of fresh herb tea in a small backpack, warmly dressed, they were ready to go on their first adventure.

“Ready?” she asked as they stood on the front porch after she locked the cabin.

“Always,” he replied softly and put the hood of his cloak over his head. Then he took her by the hand.

They walked down the few steps and set out towards the forest.



Despite his usually calm and composed nature, Vincent felt slightly overwhelmed with emotion as they walked along the lake shore that morning. The sun was warming their backs and veiling the clear blue sky in a bright, golden haze. The air was far more light and crisp than he had ever smelled it before, filling his lungs with freshness and his nose with beguiling scents of various kinds.

“Are you all right?” Catherine asked midway to the glen, seeing the dazed expression on his face.

“As well as I have ever been,” Vincent replied with a warm smile, briefly squeezing her hand.

She didn’t need to say more; the look in his eyes gave her the satisfaction of a job well done... and promises to come.

They turned away from the lake and followed the path leading to the forest. Vincent’s free hand couldn’t get enough of gently touching everything within his grasp as they walked - the tall grass, still covered in dew in places, the rough tree trunks, the soft leaves on the branches. He touched a lot of trees in Central Park, but everything felt different here. *So this is what true freedom feels like...*

“Strange... this silence,” he started after a while. “There is no traffic noise, and still you can hear so many sounds... It fills me with wonder and peace as I have never known.”

Catherine smiled. “My Dad loved coming here every year,” she said. “He said this place couldn’t be more different from New York, but even with the stillness around, there is more life in a single tree branch here than on the whole of Broadway.”

Vincent chuckled. “Nature is the greatest energy reserve and artist. Nothing can stop her, neither disasters nor people’s carelessness.”

They walked for a few more minutes before they finally made it to their destination. The forest suddenly opened into a beautiful, sunny glen, surrounded mainly by spruces and firs. Vincent still remembered the vivid red colour of the leaves on maple trees they had passed by earlier. The image awakened a feeling of something magical in him, and seeing Catherine’s glen now was another miracle in his heart.

“Welcome to my paradise,” Catherine stated when they stopped at the beginning of the wide clearing. In her mind, she travelled back to the summers when she used to spend time in their cabin with her mother and father. She was only a child, but the memories tied to the place were engraved in her mind and heart. The memory of the

rich, vibrant colours of coral bells, catmint, and salvia added even more flavour to her nostalgia.

Vincent's blue eyes were taking in the smooth waves of grass and lush shades of green in the trees. The corners of his mouth turned upward as he imagined little Cathy playing here many seasons ago.

"What?" Catherine asked, seeing his amused smile.

"I can see you sitting there, under that wide tree on the other side, dreaming about a prince on a white horse coming to rescue you," he replied, the vision still vivid in his mind.

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "I couldn't have known back then that my prince wouldn't ride a horse but a subway car," she remarked with raised eyebrows, making Vincent chuckle.

"I apologise for shattering your dreams, Catherine," he said with amusement, then suddenly his face turned serious, and his eyes focused into the distance.

"What is it?" Catherine asked, lowering her voice.

"I'm sensing something..." Vincent replied, but there was no fear in his voice, only curiosity. He pulled his wife with him behind the thick trunk of the nearest tree, and they both watched in silence.

Only a moment later, another living being entered the glen. It was tall, had four long legs, beautiful dark-brown thickening fur, and a pair of majestic antlers.

"Well, I never..." Catherine started but didn't finish, completely in awe of the king of the forest himself, a gorgeous deer. The animal sniffed the air for a few moments, making sure that no danger was lurking hidden nearby. Then he buried his imposing head into the grass and started grazing.

For a few moments, the deer enjoyed his late breakfast but suddenly he turned his head in their direction.

"Don't move," Vincent whispered to Catherine, his eyes fixed on the animal. "He probably picked up our scent."

They expected the deer to run off to safety, but to their surprise, he chose a different path and started walking slowly towards them.

Utterly enchanted, Vincent felt an inexplicable urge to act as his heart desired. Very carefully, he stepped out from his retreat and pulled down the hood on his cloak.

"Vincent...!" Catherine called after him with a strained voice... yet her worry was immediately replaced by fascination. It was not the first time she had seen him interacting with animals, but it never ceased to amaze her. She *knew* he would be all right.

The deer didn't stray from his path, slowly but surely approaching the being ahead of him. Perhaps he wasn't sure what being it was; it walked like a human, but it had neither a human face nor scent. Either way, he obviously decided the being didn't intend to harm him and kept walking, his dark eyes focused on it.

It wasn't until they were within a step away from each other that they finally stopped. A sudden warm breeze picked up in the air around them as Vincent, with a slow movement, outstretched his arm, intuitively reaching for the deer's snout. Catherine held her breath when she saw the animal almost too obediently bowing his head a little, allowing contact with Vincent's hand.

Surely, this could only happen in fairy tales...

Yet she was proved wrong. This was truly happening, right before her amazed eyes, and Vincent was clearly enjoying the intimate moment with his unexpected friend. He couldn't suppress a tender smile as his hand gently moved around the deer's snout, savouring the soft feel of it.

As quickly as it had begun, the moment of magic ended. With a new, this time stronger breeze that made the trees rustle, the deer shyly pulled back, and after one last look at Vincent, he ran off, vanishing into the forest. The only proof of his presence in the glen just a few seconds ago was Vincent's still-outstretched arm, slowly descending back to his side.

Catherine was with him after a few quick strides.

"How... *how* did you...?" she wondered, yet sensing an answer was unnecessary.

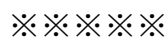
Vincent finally snapped from his reverie and looked into her widened eyes. "I told him I know how the need to hide all your life feels," he said and smiled. "I told him to enjoy his precious moment of freedom."

"*Time let me play and be golden in the mercy of his means,*"² Catherine quoted quietly, with a melancholic smile. She entwined the fingers of her hand with his.

"And I am grateful for it."

Seeing the genuine smile on his face and the sparkle in his blue eyes, she believed him.

²Dylan Thomas: *Fern Hill*



He gently prodded the ambers around the fireplace. The flames and a few table lamps around the spacious sitting room cast gentle and warm beams of light, making shadows dance on the wooden walls and ceiling. Vincent appreciated the fact that Catherine arranged the lighting around the cabin so that they could avoid using ceiling lights. Precaution was certainly one reason, but she also wanted to make Vincent more comfortable and not to feel so exposed through the curtain-less windows. Moreover, it felt more like home, more like the tunnels, and he settled into the environment quite comfortably.

They spent their second day with more walks in the forest and a brief picnic at the lake near the cabin, for as long as the autumn sun offered them its last warmth. Then they rested inside, at the comforting warmth of the fireplace, reading to each other in turns - Blake, Shakespeare, Wordsworth... Of course, they couldn't leave out *Fern Hill*, a reminder of when their dream about getting away began long ago...

When Vincent got up again, and his eyes searched for Catherine, they found her standing at one of the large windows, facing the lake, now shrouded in darkness. Her still and quiet figure was much in contrast to the feelings her husband felt vibrating within her. He slowly approached her, embracing her from behind.

"What's troubling you?" he asked softly, looking into the night outside.

Catherine's hands reached for his arms, tightening the hold, though her eyes still lingered on the lake.

"I was thinking of how Dad would have loved seeing you with the deer yesterday," she said with a sad smile. Even after years, the pain of her father's loss still lingered inside her. "And I was thinking of you as a child... all those years of having to accept your limitations and the boundaries that the world set for you that you couldn't cross. The knowing - at least back then - that you would never see the sun rise over the New York skyline, never see how the blue in your eyes mirrors the deep blue of a summer

day sky, never see all the true colours of the flowers and trees that you had within reach..." She sighed. "It's just so... unfair."

A melancholic smile appeared on Vincent's face before he put a gentle kiss on her temple, then leaned his face against it.

"I would be lying if I said I didn't feel injustice in my heart, that I was robbed of so much because of no wrongdoing on my part, merely by my existence," he replied. "I was born, I survived... and although it wasn't easy, I learned to appreciate the life that was given to me, with all the love that I received as a gift along the way."

He whispered into her ear. "And I am grateful to my fate, for otherwise, I might have never found you on that April night..."

Catherine couldn't fight a smile, closing her eyes for a moment. She turned around, unable to resist the urge to steal a lingering kiss. When she pulled back, he saw a tear glistening on her cheek.

"Do you ever think about how our lives would have been if our paths hadn't crossed?" she asked as he wiped away her tear with his thumb.

"Sometimes," Vincent answered truthfully. "We would have lived as we did until then, perhaps lived less dangerously... We might have met someone else who would help us grow, but..." He paused, sighing. "It is of no importance in the end. We *needed* each other, opened new worlds for each other and..." He paused again then poured all his emotions into the next thought. "We found love... so deep, strong and pure that no one and nothing could ever destroy it."

"We turned impossible into possible," Catherine added with a beaming smile, her hand resting on his heart.

Vincent covered her hand with his and agreed with a nod. She took his other hand.

"I think it's time for bed," she said enigmatically, little fires in her eyes shining bright. He followed her with great pleasure.

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"No way, Radcliffe! You're pulling not one but both of my legs!" Joe exclaimed, almost dropping his coffee cup. "Vincent, the deer whisperer?"

The man who was the main topic of discussion only chuckled, tilted his head and slightly raised his eyebrows, as if to say, *Well, why not?*

"Joe, how long have you known Vincent?" Catherine asked, amused.

Her friend frowned, counting in his head. "Um, six years, kinda."

"Exactly. And how many times has he surprised you with something you couldn't technically explain?" she challenged him.

Joe opened his mouth to answer, but then his face fell in defeat. “Countless times,” he admitted. “I still won’t forgive you the fact that you knew Diana was expecting before I or even she knew it,” he said, looking at Vincent now.

Catherine laughed. “All right, but back to the point. It really happened, and it was beautiful,” she added with a beaming smile.

Joe shook his head and chuckled. “I leave you alone for three days, and you turn the world on its head.”

“You’re just jealous you didn’t see it,” Catherine teased him, with a grin.

“Well, I wasn’t invited, was I?” he teased her back, but smiled. “Anyway, you should pack if you haven’t because it’s already eight, so we’ve only got about two hours until we can set out.”

Joe looked at Vincent, who was quietly enjoying the friendly banter. “Although, I don’t think you’ll need much time with *your* things, my friend. It’s Radcliffe who surely packed for a journey around the world.” He grinned.

“Vincent’s already packed. And as for me, a lady has to be prepared for all kinds of situations, doesn’t she?” Catherine joked, but then she put her coffee cup on the porch table, briefly kissed Vincent on the top of his head and walked into the cabin.

Both men leaned back in their wooden chairs, enjoying the last moments of peace before returning to the hustle and bustle of New York.

“Shame we can’t all drive back together,” Joe remarked then. “It would be a much more entertaining two hours, instead of me talking to myself in the driver’s seat while you’re stuck in the back.”

Vincent felt a brief pang of regret and worry - for Catherine’s safety when driving alone in her car. “Another flat tire might provide you with some amusement,” he said then, trying to cheer his friend up.

“Oh, please, not that again!” Joe exclaimed. “I hadn’t changed a tire in ten years before that, let alone on a van, and trust me, I can still feel every muscle in my body from changing that damned thing.”

Vincent chuckled and took a sip of his tea. They fell quiet again for a while.

“I’m surprised Father didn’t throw a tantrum or somethin’, Joe said eventually. “I was sure he would be against it.”

“He was, years ago, when Catherine planned this for the first time,” his maned friend replied with a smile, amused now at the memory. “But then he decided it was better to trust his son’s judgement more than his own temper and fear.”

“Yep, that sounds exactly like him,” Joe nodded. “However, I’m not sure about his trust in *me*; I clearly saw how white he turned when I said I would drive you in a van.”

Vincent chuckled, remembering the scene. “You can be sure that his trust in you is as unwavering as his love for chess,” he remarked, smiling.

“Thanks. I can live with that,” his friend replied with a grin.

“I bet you wished Jake and Charlie were here with you,” Joe changed the topic then. “By the way, to say they’ve missed you is an understatement.”

“We’ve missed them too,” Vincent replied, a fond smile appearing on his face at the memory of his two sons. “Catherine hopes we can do this with them next year.”

Joe nodded with a small smile. Both men understood without words that as lucky as they had been so far, anything could happen next time, and they had to be careful about promises for the future.

“Well, anyway, I’m really glad you made it and that you had a great time,” he added then, truly happy for his friend.

“So are we,” Vincent stated gratefully. “Thank you for making it happen.”

Joe wanted to say something to dismiss his merit in the whole matter, to say that anyone could have driven the van, but seeing his friend’s genuine happiness brightening his unusual features, he only smiled. The warm feeling in his chest, whenever he could do something for his best friends, was worth every trouble. Of course, he would never admit to it in words.

“Right,” he suddenly changed the mood and stood up, picking up the now empty cups from the table. “I better get these inside and help Cathy with the washing up or something, you know.”

Vincent smiled. *Yes, Joe, I know...* His eyes followed Joe until he disappeared inside the cabin. Then he looked back over the porch into the dark distance ahead.

He remembered the awe of the first morning as he and Catherine watched the sun rise over the lake. He remembered the scent of the grass, different during various parts of the day. He remembered the sound of the breeze, whispering in the trees, the colours of which reminded him of the most vibrant paintings from the past. He remembered the feel of the deer’s snout in his hand and the magic vibrating in the air at their encounter. He also remembered the mallards and black ducks roaming the lake every day, and the hawk he and Catherine spotted on the last day on their morning walk. And above all, he remembered Catherine in the sunlight, her shining eyes revealing their true emerald colour, the fiery highlights in her hair, the pinkish blush on her cheeks every time they...well...

The colours, scents and sounds of everything around him had been recreated for him in these three days, giving the word *life* a different dimension. *Time let me play and be golden in the mercy of his means, Vincent thought, but it was worthwhile, it meant everything...*



