

WHEN LOVE IS ITS OWN TRUTH

by Pauline Marshall

(from Masquerades 1993)

Catherine stretched her bronzed body to its limits before slowly uncoiling and sitting herself up on the moulded plastic sun-bed. Searching the padding pool, she finally fixed her gaze on her baby son, Jacob.

Smiling, she watched him playing with his half-drowned Nanny, before catching her eye and indicating to her watch. Waving in reply, Heather lifted the boy and carried him towards his mother.

Reaching for him, Catherine hugged him close before smothering him in endless kisses. This caused him to giggle and squirm, before he put his arms around her neck and lay his tired head on her bare shoulder.

The man lying beside her, stretched over and gently ruffled his blond hair; he lifted his head and his mother gave him one last kiss before being taken for his much needed afternoon nap.

"Sleep well, my little one," Catherine's words were barely a whisper, as Heather took her small charge towards the hotel complex.

Sighing and replacing her dark glasses, Catherine sunk back on the sun-bed, soaking up some more of the beautiful French sun.

"Cathy, you okay?" His voice was soothingly gentle and full of concern.

Turning to face this dark, handsome man, she smiled a reply and quietly lied, "I'm fine, really, don't worry." Then closed her eyes and once more turned to face the warmth of the sun.

It did feel good, and soon it had warmed her body enough to be relaxed, almost to a contented sleepy state, but with a distance. Always the distance, enough for her mind to travel an endless, disturbed route. It unsettled her.

Sighing once more, she wondered when it would end; when would the dreams mix into reality so things would become whole again? She was restless today! Lifting herself up on one elbow, she brushed the long bleached hair away from her face, throwing a glance sideways as she did.

The tanned figure stretched out on the other sun-bed was long, lean and oozing with good looks and charm. She had to smile. His hair was pulled back in a pony tail, his beard was as she remembered it, beautifully groomed and hiding that dimple!

Catherine had to admit being with him had helped, but her feeling of loss, of not knowing exactly what was happening, marred any of the enjoyment.

It had been a group effort to get her away, but it was Elliot who had suggested the French Riviera. '*A chance to recover from the hell of the last year*', was their reasoning. God! Had it been a whole year of her life.

The whole thing had been a nightmare and she still had sleepless nights, worrying why she still couldn't remember certain things. Her friends, work and places fitted into place without a problem, but

there were huge empty gaps yet to be filled.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and thought of Jacob. He was so special! Being reunited with him had been the best day of her life. Holding him in her arms for the first time caused the biggest breakthrough and jolt to her memory. She remembered practically everything; why she was held hostage, who and all the everyday things one takes for granted.

Except there was a void; a hole in her life that had anything to do with Vincent.

Shutting her eyes, she felt him. *'Vincent. Vincent! My mysterious shadow that never leaves me.'* Unable to settle, she saw Elliot had drifted into a sound sleep, his ever present briefcase at his side. Quietly, she grabbed her tee-shirt, a towel and wandered towards the beach.

Catherine was happy here, her little spot on the beach where she could be alone with her dreams. It was funny how it reminded her of another place she must know; she could see it in her mind, but just where it was, remained a mystery for now. Coming here was important somehow, most of her flashbacks took place here.

Settling down on the warm sand, she cradled her head in her arms, resting them on her shapely tanned knees, hugging them to her.

Each day was a struggle for her mind; willing things to come back, but frustration caused anger, anger caused tears, which in turn clouded any visions. Sometimes flashes would come without warning, catching her off guard and only adding to the disappointment.

Taking off her tee-shirt, she thought of Elliot. They had shared so much over the years, only this time he was the one who couldn't explain. He loved her; had done for years, but now, as much as she cared for him, love never seemed to come into their relationship. He was her friend, not her lover, and right now he was doing the best a friend could do.

Giving herself a shake, Catherine spread her towel out and sat back down, her mind once more focusing on one person; Vincent. Even his name excited her, sending her emotions haywire, but this was hindered every time because she could not see him. Vincent, the man whose vision never developed past a voice, a beautiful voice, that faded whenever she felt near to remembering something.

His voice haunted her, day and night, but was the one thing that she truly didn't mind. He held the key to it all. It was not her head that told her this, it was her heart; the one thing she trusted more than anything.

Rubbing her toes deep into the fine sand, she lifted her face to the sun, feeling its warmth. The sea shimmered in the heat; happy people enjoying themselves up and down the beach made her smile. Hidden behind her smile there was still a fear of the emptiness she felt; of knowing and not knowing.

Leaning back on outstretched arms, she pushed her long, tanned legs out in front of her, wondering what Vincent thought of them and why he wasn't here. Well, she knew the answer to that one, didn't she? Peter!

Allowing herself a broad smile she remembered his reaction when she told him she knew who Jacob's father was; only a name, but she had been right! There had never been any doubt in her mind, she just knew it had to be Vincent.

Jacob had indeed been her salvation, her own little miracle and one she had badly needed. She would never forget that time, that day was imprinted in her mind forever.

She did wonder if he was like his father, in features. Was he blond, tall? Whatever, deep inside her, feelings told her Vincent was special. Not just to her and Jacob, but to anyone that knew him; even Elliot had been affected.

Sitting here she wished, by closing her eyes and counting to ten, and then opening them, everything

would be as it should be. Some wish!

Thrusting her hand into the silky soft sand, Catherine caught on an old white shell, quite large in size and for some reason, causing a disturbance to her concentration. What connection had she with a shell?

Lifting it to her ear, she heard his voice, "I miss you," so clear she looked around to see if he was standing beside her. It shook her.

Throwing her head back, she found herself on another shore, writing a letter, lifting a shell from the sand. Of course! She had sent it home to Vincent. Why send it? That was strange; didn't make sense at all.

"Oh, damn!" And with great force, she pushed her feet deeper into the sand. After a few moments she rose and strolled down to the water's edge, slowly padding in the warm salty sea. It felt nice but the strength of the sun made her shelter her eyes from the sea's reflection as it lapped against her legs.

Back at her spot, she flopped down on the beach towel to let the sun dry her off. Stretching, her mind wandered to Peter; dear Peter. It had been his decision that no pressure should be put on her to remember. No one was to put memories before her that didn't come to her naturally.

Lying back on her elbows she let her head fall right back, her long, sun-bleached hair flying out on the sand.

"Cathy." Peter's gentle voice swirled around her and she could still see his look of worried concern. "We could tell you everything you need to know, fill in all the gaps, but in my opinion there would be nothing achieved by doing so."

She had asked him why. And after due deliberation he tried to explain it in the simplest way he could.

"It's just that I really think giving you your memories, without them having any sense of meaning... Well, they wouldn't be worth having," and he held her hands in his, reassuring her, letting her know that he cared and loved her.

"Cathy, I have my reasons for doing this, and if it may seem a little unusual, believe me, when your mind is ready to tell you its secrets, you will understand. Trust me."

Her uncertainties were washed away by the love and emotion she got from him, and seeing how he was caring for her. She had thrown herself at him then, into his protective arms and cried.

"Hey, Cathy, you there?" Elliot's voice brought her back to the present as she watched him run towards her. "There you are, I've been looking for you." He grinned at her, knowing she had been away on another trip through her Pandora's box.

He picked up his pace and realized that only a week in the sun had renewed her tan and enhanced her beauty beyond belief. 'God!' No wonder he had loved her! He still did in his own way, but with what he knew of Vincent and their relationship, he hadn't got a chance in hell!

He grinned. "Hi, stranger." He fell to his knees in front of her. "Fancy a cool swim before dinner?" His eyes watched her closely.

Her smile melted his heart, causing beads of sweat to cover his forehead.

Cathy brushed the sand from her hands. "Sure, why not," and she took the offer of his outstretched hand to pull her up.

"You okay?" He held onto her hands for a moment longer than was required.

"Yeah! Hey, I'm sorry I keep drifting off, but it's not personal!"

He nodded. "I know that and I wish I could help you more, but Peter ..."

"Elliot!" She raised her hand to stop him. "We have been over this before and I'm sure Peter is right."

He shook his head. "Cath, I feel so helpless, I want to help."

"No!" Then more quietly, "No, Elliot! I have to do this as much on my own as I can." Breathing out a heart-felt sigh, she tried to soften the hurt he was feeling. "It's not just the remembering, you know, it's more, much more and Peter is aware of that." She frowned. "Perhaps you are too, I'm not sure, but whatever comes, I can't blame you for anything, except being here for me. Elliot, I feel safe and happy with you, as good friends do, so don't let it spoil what we've got."

And smiling again, she pulled him towards the sea. "Come on, last one in pays for dinner!" And with that she almost left him standing, until he realized what she was doing and tried to catch up, knowing she had won before they started.

"Well? What do you want?" Father leaned forward across his huge desk, removing his glasses from his nose tip as he did.

"Jacob!" Peter felt awkward. "What can I tell you that you don't already know?" He shifted in his seat, trying to get comfortable. "We can all see what this is doing to him, but we can only give our love and support, replacing Jacob and Catherine would be impossible for him."

"Yes, you're right, of course." Father leaned back against his chair, one hand rubbing his forehead, the other swinging his glasses. "Why couldn't she have left the child?"

"Now, Jacob, you know full well that she has no memory of Vincent, let alone you or Below!" He raised his hands at his friend in a gesture of despair and frustration.

"I know, I know," Father sucked the ends of his glasses.

"We are helpless," Peter sighed. "And until Catherine starts to put her mind around this problem," his voice dropped, "We can only pray and hope her recovery is sooner, rather than later."

"It's a sad time for all of us. Catherine is one of our family too, now." Father rubbed his face, trying to disguise the red eyes. "We miss her so very much."

Peter rose and stood beside his old friend, patting his shoulder, as a means of comfort. "We must be patient."

"Yes, but why did you let her go away with Elliot Burch, of all people!" He tapped the desk top with irritated fingers.

"My friend," Peter stood in front of him. "We all know how he has helped over these difficult times and deep down, you know as I, that he, above anyone, will look after her."

"Because he loves her!"

They both jumped, the strength of Vincent's voice taking them by surprise. He stood watching from the top of the small stairs.

"Yes, he did," Peter emphasized the word *'DID'*, before turning to face Vincent's forlorn figure. "But he also knows of your love, its strength, and that Catherine - with or without her memory - could never love anyone other than you."

"How can you be so sure?" He slowly came down to their level, almost dragging himself along.

"Calm yourself, Vincent." Father tried to sound reassuring. "Elliot has been keeping in touch as we requested before he left, so as soon as there is any change in her condition, we will know almost as soon as she does."

"I am well aware of what Elliot is doing, but it has no relief for the pain and so far, has not

taken Catherine back!"

Feeling completely empty, Vincent lowered himself into the chair that Peter had recently vacated, his head hanging heavily and his eyes listless and sad. He missed his son, his love with Catherine and life itself. Not so long ago, he had nearly died, when he thought Catherine dead, then he became obsessed with finding his son. He was rewarded on that occasion and Jacob's presence helped to heal the hurt over Catherine. Then, as if to punish him again, he was presented with the knowledge that Catherine was alive, but unable to remember any of their life together.

Vincent threw his head back and roared with the pain and fear that was with him constantly.

Seeing his pain, Father and Peter decided to leave him alone and quietly left the chamber. Vincent was oblivious to them and didn't know they had gone.

"Jacob," Peter whispered, "You can fill him in on the news when you feel he might be up to it." He sighed. "But I don't think anything but telling him she was coming home will do any good."

Nodding, Father acknowledged his friend.

"If I hear anything new, I'll get back to you right away."

"Yes, thank you, Peter," and they shook hands before he disappeared through the lengthy tunnels.

Turning back to the chamber, Father could see his son's drooping body and he feared for him so.

'This whole damn thing is driving him to the edge. Dear God! Cathy, for all our sakes, get well soon.'

Shaking his head slowly, he glanced once more at his son, before leaving him alone to savour his memories and dream his dreams.

It was some time later that Vincent moved, and only then because the small chair he sat in was not designed for his frame. Wearily, with aching bones, he pulled himself up and headed to the solitude of his chamber. Entering, he stood still a few moments, sensing her in all the crooks and crannies around him.

"Oh, Catherine, Catherine." The whispered words echoed around the chamber walls, the candles flickering as if they knew. He threw himself on the massive bed, and wondered what had they done to deserve all they had faced? The answer was, so simple in comparison. They loved! Or dared to love, as no others have.

Lying there, his mind was traveling its troubled journey once more, and he clenched his fists at the thought of Elliot on another shore with his Catherine! Elliot, the man who had proved himself more than once since her capture, but yet Vincent couldn't help but doubt him or his feelings in the situation he was in now. His love for Catherine had been powerful and true, therefore he felt it was not to be ignored, on the chance that he had changed.

Vincent lifted his hands to his head, his thoughts hurting him; he slowly shook, from side to side in the hope it might give some relief. He could feel a grumbling inside his soul, emotions waiting to be released.

'What was going to happen to them?' The thought that Catherine may never remember caused him to catch his breath and shudder from head to toe. Then clenched fists thundered down on the bed - again and again, before the awaiting roar was let loose, and with such force, it could be heard vibrating through the labyrinth of tunnels.

"Oh! Catherine, CATHERINE!"

His heart hurt as it pounded inside him, his head hurt and his eyes stung. He started to shake, his body was out of control as his sobs once more racked his weakened form. Turning his face and body into the comfort of his bed, Vincent tried to hide the flood of tears from the loving walls around him.

To survive he needed Catherine and his son.

Without them, he was nothing!

Elliot shrugged himself into the light-weight summer jacket and checked his image in the bedroom mirror. He would do, but in truth he would rather have got out of this dinner party.

Stopping at the small table, he sighed as he lifted the lid of his briefcase and examined its contents. He paused for a second, as pulling a specific file out, his thoughts were of Cathy. Lifting his head to look at where she was staying, he had to admit his time with her was taking more than first calculated. Thumping the file against his thigh, he realized how cold that sounded, but right now, business had to come a close first with Cathy.

'What the hell!' he smiled. 'If this project goes to the wall, so do I - and if Vincent thinks I'm not looking after Cathy, I've had it anyway! Yeah! The odds are far from good, looking at it that way.'

Flipping through the file and plans it held, he frowned as he lifted his hand to straighten, then run down the length of his designer tie.

Shutting the manila file on his Harbour Project back in New York, Elliot felt very uneasy about it being put on hold, due to certain technicalities. The name Jean-Claude Monair had been cropping up time and time again, but his information told him he was only the go-between.

'Who is this playboy working for? And why has he turned up here at the same resort as him?'

Tossing the file back into the darkness of the briefcase, he slammed the lid and threw the combination lock. There was no doubt he would be on his guard until the information he had asked for came from New York. Shoving his hands deep into his trouser pockets, Elliot sauntered over to the patio door overlooking the perfect blue sea and marina complex.

'What the hell is going on?' He talked to himself a lot these days. He sighed again and wondered what has possessed him to take on that female white kid. *'God!'* She was back in his office doing his job, or was she? Well, her references and qualifications spoke for themselves, as did her looks.

Elliot cleared his throat as his face coloured slightly under the tanned and bearded contours. Removing one hand from his pocket, he played with his time again before checking his watch and looking to see if he was still alone.

He remembered the day she had walked into his office, full of confidence and good looks to go with a near perfect body.

Scratching his beard, he dragged his thoughts back to the harbour project. For once, he felt he was doing the right thing. Going back to his roots and the docklands he was brought up in. Oh, the Marina would bring in the money, but the revamping of the housing along the docklands themselves was to be his pride and joy.

Funny, but he felt more about this than he had about his precious Burch Tower! *'Had he changed that much?'* He smiled, he knew he had and, for the better. Cathy noticed it too, which seemed a bit odd, as that had come about after his time with Vincent and the family he now felt a small part of.

It seemed strange that he had always accused her of being the one with secrets, yet here he was keeping the most important ones of her life from her. He now knew what she must have gone through so many times before. Yes, he knew how that felt, and it made him a little sad.

The knock on the door made him spin around from the view he had been watching as he let his thoughts run free. Turning, he was just in time to catch Jacob as he tried to scale his left trouser leg. Lifting the young boy, he kissed his head and thought of his father, knowing how it hurt him to be so far away.

"Well, young man, you look all ready for bed."

Jacob answered him by tugging his beard.

"Hey! You may get away with doing that to your fath..." He looked up to see Catherine watching him, arms crossed as she leaned against the door jam.

He looked like a little boy himself as he blushed. "Sorry, Cath, I didn't think," and he placed Jacob back on level ground.

"Elliot, you knew Vincent pretty well, didn't you?" She had whispered so low he only just caught what she said.

"Still do, in a way, but Cathy, I don't see..."

"Tell me, Elliot, please, it's important." Her eyes pleaded with him in a way she always did when she wanted something bad enough.

Pushing herself away from the door, she picked up her son before turning to face Elliot at eye level.

"Peter did say it was okay to answer certain questions, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did, but..."

"But nothing, Elliot! I need to know... please?" Although her voice was low it carried enough force for him to realize she was hurting again. *'Had something happened today, a memory?'* This was not a choice for him to make and it might help.

"Okay, but it's not a simple yes or no," and going back to the patio door, he lifted one hand against it to lean on, the other was safe in his trouser pocket.

"Go on," she sounded anxious.

"For a long time, none of us, your friends, or anyone you knew, were aware of Vincent. He was your secret and you went to great lengths to keep it that way.

"Why?"

"No, Cathy. I'll only answer your first question." His head bent slightly.

"Okay, okay."

"Well, when certain things happened to you, I'm talking about last year, there became a need for Vincent to meet and trust someone close to you. Someone you had talked to him about and he felt could help him." He turned to face her. "He found me and..." He lowered his head again.

"And... and?"

"At first, I was reluctant." *'That was putting it mildly,'* he thought.

"Why, for God's sake?" Catherine lowered Jacob to the floor and went to stand in front of Elliot.

"Why? Because he loved you and you loved him! He was the reason I didn't stand a chance with you!" He was thumping his chest as he spoke from his heart. **"Oh, don't look at me like that! I knew where I stood long before we met, don't you remember telling me there was no possibility?"**

Catherine nodded that she did, but it was far from clear.

"It didn't stop me from loving you, Cathy."

"I'm sorry, Elliot." She gently touched his arm. "I remember a great deal about us, how you felt and I understand most of it to a point, but then there are things..."

He took her hand. "Yes, I know, but Cathy, Vincent taught me more than anyone I have ever known. The time we spent looking for Jacob together was an experience I'll never forget." He squeezed the

hand he was holding. "When we thought you were dead, Vincent also died... inside. You and he had such a special bond with each other it was like he had gone with you." He sighed before going on. "Then he came to me and eventually we got it to work out between us, and together we concentrated on Jacob. It gave him hope!"

She pulled away from him and lifted her son to hold tight, feeling Vincent with her as she did.

"You got hurt, didn't you?" Quietly she searched his face. "Both of you?"

"You could say that, but we felt it was worth it!" He grinned at her, trying to break down the thick atmosphere that had built up as they talked.

Jacob squirmed in her arms and brought her back to the moment as she heard Heather's voice.

"Miss Chandler?"

Turning to the doorway, the girl smiled at them.

"Should I take Jacob through now?"

"Yes. Yes, please," and kissing him goodnight, she handed him over to her, as a chubby hand waved back.

"Mommy." Jacob's efforts nearly tore her apart.

Elliot came beside her and put a protective arm around her shoulders. So far, through all this. she had held up, but now he was beginning to doubt that being away from her surroundings was such a good idea. She needed the rest, okay, but that wouldn't heal the hurting inside. He would ask her later about going home earlier than planned, besides he wanted to get behind his desk again. He was like a fish out of water here, apart from Catherine, it had been hard to relax.

He pulled her close. "I think you should get ready for dinner."

"Damn, I had forgotten." She wasn't in the mood either. "Do we have to go?"

"You don't have to, but it would be better than being on your own. Don't worry, I have no intention of letting it drag on," he smiled down at her.

"Hah! What you mean is, when you have found out what you want to know, you will leave!"

"You read me like one of Vincent's books!"

"No, his are more interest..., she faded away.

"You okay?"

"Hmmmmm, just another little part of my crazy jigsaw."

"I could make an excuse for you."

"No, it's okay, just give me ten minutes to get ready." And with that, she jogged from his room.

He watched her go and wondered where she got her strength. Vincent probably, he had that effect on people! Then turning, he went back to the bathroom mirror to check his appearance.

The elevator clicked at the tenth floor and Julie clutched her bulging briefcase as she alighted for the crowded compartment. Her eyes hurt and were extra tired after the extensive work she had crammed into the weekend, but it had been well worth it.

The dark navy suit and white silk blouse showed off her shapely figure, as she pushed open the large glass doors of the Burch Corporation.

"Morning, Miss Clarke," Wendy smiled, as she rose to walk beside her new boss. "Mr. Burch has rung twice this morning and wants a reply as soon as possible."

They reached the office together, but Julie entered first, taking the paper from Wendy's hand as she did.

"Anything else?" She put her briefcase on the desk before removing her jacket.

"Yeah! One, a Mr. Logan called and left a message on the machine, must have been over the weekend." She handed the message over to Julie.

Examining the paper, she nodded as she looked up at her secretary. "Good." Then she flopped down into her huge chair.

Wendy waited as her boss concentrated.

"Call Mr. Logan back and, if he's not in, keep trying till you get him, understand?"

"Sure, Miss Clarke." She paused at the door. "How about a coffee?"

"I'm parched, thanks," and she leaned back in her chair as Wendy closed the door behind her.

Staring at the piece of paper, a slow but definite smile crept across her flawless features; her thoughts of Elliot Burch. Hunk that he may be, he still had reservations about her ability, she felt it, and now Mr. Logan was about to help prove him wrong.

Julie pulled herself and her chair against the desk, and started pulling some of the files out of her loaded briefcase.

'What a weekend!'

She had only just caught her breath from moving into her new apartment; part of her contract and supplied courtesy of the Burch Corporation, and here she was, working overtime already. Still, it was a great improvement to her old homely digs, and now she was just a stone's throw from her high-rise office.

Even with the apartment and company car, she felt this overpowering need to prove Elliot wrong in his judgement of her. She must try and control this need, though, before it clouded her work and her judgement.

Wendy knocked before leaving the coffee on Julie's desk. "Mr. Logan will be out of his office for at least an hour, Miss Clarke, but his assistant will get him to ring back as soon as he gets in."

"That's fine, Wendy, thanks," and as an afterthought added, "Oh! If Mr. Burch phones, tell him anything, but keep him off my back till I have had a chance to speak to Mr. Logan!"

She raised her eyebrows. "You're the boss," and grinning, Wendy closed the door behind her, leaving Julie alone with her thoughts.

'So I am, so I am!' and Julie allowed herself a little giggle at her boss's expense, then turned her attention back to the files.

Going through them one by one, they were all headed with the person's name, Logan, Avery, Nicholas and Reed, being the main four that were of interest to her and Elliot. Lifting the first one, Max Avery. She remembered how he had been a thorn in - not only Elliot's side, but all the big builders and contractors at the time. Then the DA's office stepped in and closed him down, about two years ago now, and with a great deal of help from files handed over by Elliot.

Julie let out a deep breath before flicking through more of the paperwork. It had been his evidence that helped them lock the door and throw away the key!

Leaning forward, she closed the file and lifted her soothing cup of coffee. He may not have been the brightest of con-men, but then Avery was not the brains behind the scams, not on paper.

Putting her now empty cup back on her desk, Julie picked up the Nicholas and Reed bundle. They were the brains behind most of the pressure put to bear on people. She had gone over and over these two with a fine tooth comb, but still the connection between them and Jean-Claude evaded her. It was there, she would find it and prayed the call from Logan would give her the link she needed.

Jack Logan was her find and he had turned out to be a gold mine. Going over some old documentation of Avery's, his name had come up and, being in his line of work, wasn't too difficult to trace. He was not your rough and ready type, but the modern well-dressed and concerned type. So far, he had been true to his word, and now, if he came through with the goodies, her plan was to see Elliot about taking him on as a permanent fixture.

Stretching in her chair, Julie remembered being told about Cleon Manning and how close he and Elliot had worked together, but so far he had not been replaced, and in their line of work they needed someone they could trust in that direction. She would work on it, all going well.

Jack had worked for one of Avery's companies a few years previous, but with good judgement, had got out before things got too bad. His timing was pretty good, because six months after he left, Avery was arrested and things started getting nasty. The only problem now was Nicholas, Reed and the suave not-so-sophisticated Jean-Claude!

Thumping the files back on the desk, Julie lifted her head to remove her glasses and rub her eyes.

'Give them their due, they had been good at what they did!' Replacing her glasses, she interlocked her hands and slowly rubbed them under her chin.

'They had managed to get suspended sentences, because of the evidence against Avery they had given in court. But to do that, they had gone to great lengths to cover their tracks and survive everything that was collected against them and their activities.'

'Jack hadn't gone into elaborate detail but she was not that naive she couldn't imagine how they achieved it!'

Leaning forward, Julie gathered up the files and, putting a rubber band around them, popped them back in her briefcase. Then pushing herself and her chair backwards, she rose and went towards the large landscape window, which gave her a wonderful view of more high-rise buildings and just a glimpse off to the left, was the park.

"Oh well, you can't have everything, girl!" she muttered and turned her attention to the large drawing board where the plans for the harbour project were pinned on display.

Scanning the large sheets, *'she had to admit it was a major contract that would benefit all concerned, and for once wouldn't make Elliot Burch loads of money.'* At first she wondered what the hidden agenda was, *'what he was up to that might be lurking between the lines of the contracts, but not this time!'*

Julie's thoughts went back to the day she had come to see him about this job. *'She had studied everything she could lay her hands on regarding him. The good, the bad, anything, but for all that it hadn't prepared her for what she met that day. Business-like though he had been, she was surprised to find - not that he wore it on his shirt sleeves - a man with feelings. The only dent she could find in his armour it seemed, was his hidden doubt about her abilities.'*

'Still, give him his due, he had taken her on and given her the kind of workload not normally handed out to women, yet she felt he would expect her to prove herself.'

Running her hand slowly over the plans, she imagined *'what he looked like stretched out on the beach, half naked body tanned and gleaming with oil!'*

'Damn!' She stopped herself and turned back to her desk. However, she was still a little curious as to why he had taken Catherine Chandler along with him on this trip. *'Business or pleasure?'* Knowing it was wrong still hadn't stopped her from quizzing as many of their friends as she could. *'It was a little*

tickle that annoyed her, every time she thought of them together.'

She shouldn't have been worried, it seemed to be a one-sided affair from all accounts. Elliot had asked her to marry once but she had turned him down (*She must be crazy*) and now they were just good friends! *'They say!'*

Catherine Chandler herself was some mystery, but everyone knew what had happened to her over the last year and she wouldn't have wished that on anyone. Her joining Elliot, by all accounts, was a means to recovery, which Julie could see to be feasible, but it still annoyed her. *'God knew why.'*

Sighing from her heart, she settled herself back in her chair, wondering *'if she did manage to get this affair cleared up before he got back, would he realize there was more to her than brain power?'*

Julie leaned back, slightly out of sorts with herself, when the intercom buzzed.

"Mr. Logan on line 2, Miss Clarke," Wendy's pleasant voice broke her wandering thoughts.

"Thanks." As she reached forward for the black receiver, her heart rate increased and she felt hope that here was the answers she needed.

Catherine rubbed her hair as dry as she could, still going over in her mind the conversation she had had with Elliot. She felt now, as she had standing in his room, that what she really wanted was to go back home.

Removing the towel from her head, she stared at herself in the bathroom mirror. Again she wasn't exactly sure why, but every time her mind flashed a memory it almost felt like it was telling her she needed to be there.

Elbows on the vanity bar, Catherine balanced her head between her hands. *'Oh God, Vincent! Help me, please!'* And true to form the thought of him increased her heart beat until she had to catch her breath. *'They loved each other, which she never doubted, but why couldn't she remember how he looked or where he lived?'*

Peter had explained there were reasons why they couldn't tell her, and she accepted that he knew what was best for her, but it didn't bring any consolation to her at this moment.

Sitting up, she brushed her damp hair before going through to the bedroom to get dressed. Reaching for the white lace dress, that would show off her beautiful tan, she thought about the shell earlier today and then later, when she saw shelves of books in a dark room, *'she didn't know where. They were Vincent's, but more than that her mind felt she was not ready to know.'*

Sighing, she zipped up the dress and ran her hand through her damp, long hair. No make-up was required and, glancing at her reflection, she was satisfied that she would pass.

Elliot knocked before coming in. "Ready?"

"Sure," she smiled. "Just let me check on Jacob before we go." Poking her head around the door, she saw Heather writing a letter by the window. "Is he asleep?"

Heather looked up at her employer, nodding. "He's out for the count." She stood up to come over. "Do you want me to....?"

"No." Catherine stopped her by lifting her hand. "No, don't disturb him. I'll come and see him later, but if you need me, I'm only downstairs."

"Okay, Miss Chandler."

"Night." And Catherine turned to the waiting Elliot.

"This time?" he smiled.

"This time!" She returned his smile, as he took hold of her elbow and led her to the elevator.

They were alone in the elevator, so Catherine decided to ask Elliot something that had nagged her. "This Jean-Claude we are having dinner with tonight? You don't like him much, do you?"

"Not much."

"Then why go through with this masquerade?"

He turned and looked down at her. "He's causing a few problems for me back home, so I'm keeping an eye on him."

"What kind of problems?"

"Well, let's say he's a puppet and somebody out there has got very long strings attached to him. He, or they, have so far managed to convince the authorities to put a hold on my harbour project." Elliot shoved his hands deep into his pockets, as a sigh escaped through pursed lips.

"How and why?"

"That, Catherine, I am trying to find out!"

"Hm... it's funny but I get this feeling he's familiar, but I can't put my finger on it." A frown creased her brow as she concentrated.

"Yeah! I'm not sure our Jean-Claude is quite who he says he is!" He leaned against the side of the elevator, watching the numbers flash by. "Guess I'll have to wait till I get back to find out."

"Talking about going back..." Catherine cleared her throat. "When is that going to be, exactly?"

"Why?" His eyes twinkled at her. "You bored with me already?"

"No! No, it's just being here, in a way." She turned her gaze from him, a little embarrassed by her request, then added quietly. "I want to go home. I need to be in familiar surroundings, Elliot. I think it would be best for me."

"You're sure about this?"

"Would you mind? I know it's not what you have ..."

He interrupted her. "It's okay, Cathy, really."

The elevator *'pinged'* as they reached the lobby floor.

Elliot went on. "To be honest, I could do with going back myself. Things don't seem to be going well right now." He grinned at her.

Her soul lifted inside her and she thought of Vincent. "Oh! You have no idea how much of a relief it is to hear you say that, Elliot."

They left the elevator side by side and made their way to the dining room entrance to wait for their guests. People's heads turned as they passed this well matched couple, tanned and beautiful.

"When?"

"When what?" he asked in all innocence.

She thumped his arm and they smiled again, both relieved at the decision.

"As soon as I can make the arrangements, probably after the weekend. Here we go!" Elliot took hold of Catherine's elbow and nodded to their left.

Jean-Claude, with a beautiful blonde hanging off his arm, approached, smiling as he joined them.

'God, I hope this isn't going to be drawn out.' Catherine thought to herself, as she shook hands with

the blonde; all teeth and legs that reached up to her armpits. The fact that not much covered them probably accounted for why she was here! *'Yeah! Tall girl.'* Then the sweaty palm of Jean-Claude grabbed her hand for the inevitable kiss.

"Good evening, Miss Chandler." His smooth grin made her stomach turn.

"Shall we go in and order?" Elliot suggested, as he steered Cathy to her seat, throwing a cheeky glance at her, knowing how uncomfortable she was.

"Elliot, I hear on the grape vine that you are having a few problems with... shall we call it... your latest venture!" He smugly lifted his eyes from the menu.

"Really?" Elliot gave nothing away with his cool easy manner. "I hadn't realized."

"No?" He wasn't taken in altogether. "Well, perhaps you should check with your office. They do know where you are?" and he glanced at Catherine.

"Oh, I don't think so, Jean. I'm sure if it was all that important, they would have reached me by now," and his smile oozed out of him, causing the blonde's mouth to drop open.

"I see." He was a little flustered. "It appears I have been given the wrong grape vine."

"It seems so," Elliot was now in charge.

Jean-Claude appeared to accept things but Catherine felt his unease.

Returning to the dinner, everyone ordered and drinks arrived first. As if by cue, attention was focused on Catherine now.

"Tell me, Miss Chandler, or can I call you Cathy?" Another smile found his lips. "How are things in the DA's office?"

Alarm bells went off inside Catherine's mind and she quickly glared at Elliot before facing Jean.

"Excuse me?"

"You don't work there anymore?"

"Oh no! I used to, but not for some time now." She made an effort to smile. "But tell me, how did you know I worked there?"

"I am in New York a great deal, on business, and I often go to your courts. I remember one case in particular, some time ago it was ... Max Avery... very interesting, but I'm sure you know all about it!" And he turned to face Elliot.

"Oh yes! I remember Max Avery!" and he nudged Cathy under the table.

Catherine turned to watch him, realizing there was not a feeling bone in this man's body.

Curiosity made her ask. "Do you enjoy watching people suffer?"

"Yes, I suppose I do!" He smiled as he sat back in his chair, swirling his drink in its glass. "You should have looked more closely. Cathy, you might just have spotted me sitting there, watching, listening!" Sipping his drink he looked over the rim and winked at her, grinning.

Catherine's stomach turned upside down and she could feel her anger growing, but before anything more could happen, the waiter saved her by bringing the first course. This interruption caused the conversation to change its direction and flow, much to everyone's relief.

The meal or its company didn't last too long, as after a mysterious phone call, Jean and his companion left very hastily, retreating without explanation.

"Well? What do you make of all that?" Catherine turned her gaze on Elliot as the couple disappeared from sight.

He frowned. "Like I said, our Mr. Monair is not who, or what he seems!"

"What do we do now?" She sipped her coffee.

Elliot signed for the meal and lifted his wine glass before answering. "We wait."

"How do you mean?"

"We wait till my intrepid assistant gets in touch with more up-to-date information, which I hope will give me enough answers to know what to do next!" He lifted his eyebrows in a gesture of expectation.

Catherine finished her coffee. "You know, Elliot, it looks more and more like we should be somewhere, anywhere, but here!"

He laughed quietly, her sense of humour was beginning to creep through the unhappiness. "And where is anywhere?"

"Oh!" She sighed and thought for a minute. "Listening to a concert, with Vincent." Her voice trailed away at his name.

"You miss him, even with your loss?" His question was also quiet.

"I know in my heart who he is, what we are together, it's just the recognition and the unanswered questions that disturb me."

"I know you will feel this may sound cold, but believe me, Cath, everything you're going through now, will be worth it."

She lifted her head and smiled warmly. "Oh, I already know that!"

He smiled back, knowing her strength and still amazed at these two people. "Come on, I think we have had enough for one night, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

Once upstairs they went their separate ways. Elliot to his briefcase and Catherine to check on Jacob and dream of Vincent.

Father turned as Vincent came down the steps, for the third time in less than an hour. Something was bothering him, but the way he had been recently he hesitated to ask what it was.

"Vincent," Father looked over the top of his glasses. "Mouse was looking for you a short time ago."

He was pacing the chamber, looking... well, Father wasn't quite sure how he looked today.

"Yes, I know." Vincent stopped pacing long enough to face the elderly man.

"Was it important?"

"No! No, not important." He turned again for the steps.

"Vincent! Please!" Father's worry told in his voice.

He looked back over his shoulder.

"What is it that upsets you in this way?"

Vincent dropped his head, slightly to one side and his look was full of compassion. They both knew what was the cause of his unrest.

Father sighed. "Yes, Vincent, I know how Catherine and Jacob's absence is affecting you." He rose and removed his glasses. "But I feel this unease in you is somehow different."

He hesitated before retracing his steps back into the chamber, then turned and took his father in his

arms.

"Vincent?" Father pulled apart slowly, more worried.

"Father, I'm not sure how to explain my feelings, but they are strong," he sighed and looked at the chamber roof for inspiration. "It feels as it used to be, with Catherine, our bond, but its strength seems to be from Jacob... I..." He couldn't explain.

Father gently held his shoulder. "It's all right, Vincent. I do understand your feelings." He turned his face up to his son. "They are not something that can be easily put into plain words."

Frowning, Vincent sat on the edge of the large desk, as he had done so many times before, resting his arms on one knee. "It started through the night, like a surge inside me, its force woke me. Now it continues to increase in its strength, almost by the hour."

Father nodded, knowing what he said to be the truth. "Peter is coming soon, perhaps he will have some news for us," and Father returned to his seat and replaced his glasses.

Vincent slid off the desk to stand, when he suddenly lifted his head, then his body, to full height.

"Vincent?" Father sensed a change.

He turned to look down at him, his now bright eyes sparkled and a glimmer of a smile stretched across his tired features.

"She's coming home! They are coming home, Father! His excitement was overwhelming and he glowed with the love he felt.

"Are you sure, Vincent?" Father rose, removing his glasses once more. "Is your connection that strong? I mean, she is on the other side of the world, after all!"

"I don't know, Father, connection or not, this feeling comes from my heart." He leant over the desk. "And I never doubt that where my family is concerned."

"Yes, of course, Vincent, I'm not doubting your ability. I just think you should weigh up all the possibilities; be prepared." He floundered as Vincent's blue eyes questioned him.

"Father..." He was interrupted by Peter's entrance, his smile telling them things they wanted to know.

"You have news?" Father didn't wait for him to reach the bottom step.

"I have!"

Vincent came forward and shook Peter's outstretched hand. "We have been anxious for your arrival."

Peter looked closely at his friend. *'He seemed more relaxed, more his old self.'*

"You know, don't you, Vincent?"

He sheepishly nodded.

"Well, I'll be." Peter looked at Father, who just shrugged his shoulders. "When did you know?"

"I had this feeling throughout the night, but its strength was only a short time ago." Vincent was anxious to hear his news. "But tell me when is it to be? When will they be home?"

"I received a telephone call early this morning from Elliot, they hope to leave in the next two days," he squeezed Vincent's arm. "They should be in New York by Monday evening."

Vincent threw back his head and closed his eyes before the tears of relief could give away his overwhelming joy.

"Are they well, Peter?" Father was as pleased as his son, but there were still things to be done.

"According to Elliot, Catherine is desperate to come back. It seems she wants to be around familiar things, hopeful it might help her remember."

"Has there been any improvement?"

Vincent watched and listened as the two friends talked of his family, his own deliverance from pain making him content to do so.

"Yes, in a way. She remembers Vincent in her heart but not in any visual form." He frowned. "I know it sounds strange, but she hears his voice, knows what they are to each other, yet still she cannot see him in her mind."

"Is there anything we can do, Peter?" Father glanced at Vincent who seemed to be taking everything very calmly.

"Well, I have an idea, but it's only if Vincent will agree."

"Tell me." His voice was tender. Vincent would do anything.

Peter nodded, then retrieved the bag he had brought with him. Reaching inside, he pulled out a portable tape recorder.

Father and Vincent looked at each other, then at Peter, both rather amused at what he might be up to.

Peter smiled as he lifted the machine onto the desk.

"This," he seemed triumphant. "This is going to help you and your Catherine, I hope, Vincent."

"How?"

"I want you to send her a message."

The penny dropped with Father but Vincent was unsure.

"Listen to me, Vincent," Peter persevered. "If she heard your voice, talking about things and places you two only know about, it might be enough to push the right memory button."

"It could work," Father looked encouraged.

"Don't worry, you can do it in the privacy of your chamber," Peter smiled. "I'll show you how to use it, it runs on batteries."

Vincent listened as Peter explained the workings of the recorder and with it his spirits lifted with the hope that he could speak to his love.

"All right, Peter. I will try."

"Good for you, Vincent. I feel this will help," and they all agreed they were going in the right direction.

"Take your time over what you want to say, the tape is an hour and a half long." He rose to leave. "I'll come back for it on Sunday night and give it to Cathy on Monday."

"Thank you." Then shaking hands once more, Vincent lifted the machine and left for the chamber that Catherine loved so much.

"He seems much better, Jacob."

"God help us, yes!" Father sighed. "I pray your idea works. If not..."

"Jacob, it will do no harm, only good. Believe me!"

"I'm sure you're right, Peter, and thank you."

"I must go, but I will see you on Sunday."

"Yes, and you will stay for dinner with us?" Father asked.

"Of course, I couldn't miss William's Sunday special!"

With that, he left, the chamber becoming quiet once more.

Julie replaced the phone, rose from her chair and reached for her jacket and handbag. Lifting her briefcase, she left her office and went to stand beside Wendy's desk.

"Wendy?"

"Yes, Miss Clarke?"

"I'm going out for about an hour. If Mr. Burch phones, tell him I'll get back to him before the end of the day."

"Sure. Anything else?" She flipped over the page of her pad.

"Yeah! Cancel my appointments for today and reschedule for next week, but if the Planning Commission call, squeeze them in sometime tomorrow morning."

"It's Saturday!"

"I know, but I'll be here, working on the Harbour Project." She smiled at her secretary. "Don't worry, I won't need you."

"Thanks, I've got a ate for the baseball game." Her smile spoke volumes.

"Lucky you, is it serious?"

"Not at the moment, but..."

Nodding, Julie understood. "See you in about an hour," and left for her meeting with Jack Logan.

The coffee bar was only around the corner from her office, but Jack felt more comfortable in the busy atmosphere.

"Hi, Miss Clarke."

His welcome was warm and friendly, his voice gentle and he dressed more like Elliot than a private detective.

"Mr. Logan." They shook hands.

"Jack, please."

"Okay, and I'm Julie." They smiled as they sat at the corner table where he had been waiting.

"You hungry?"

"No, thank you. Just a coffee."

He lifted his hand to the waitress and ordered two drinks.

"Have you got anything for me, Jack?" Her voice was strained but held no pressure against him.

"Yes, I have and I think it's what you were looking for!"

Their coffee came in hot steaming mugs, delivered by a motherly woman who tried to get them to eat, but went away shaking her head and muttering, "Young folk these days....."

"Let's have what you've got." Julie held her breath for a second.

Jack bent down to his case beside him and pulled out a manila folder with nothing on its outside and handed it to her.

"This has a list of all Avery's previous employees. Most of them have gone their separate ways, and some are still in jail, but what he had boiled it down to is your two men, Nicholas and Reed." He sipped some coffee before going on. "What we didn't know before, was Nicholas had a younger brother who used to do some of his dirty work."

"A brother? There was never any mention of him before!" Julie searched the file as Jack continued.

"No, that's because Terry Nicholas was sent abroad before the storm broke. Jed and Charlie..."

Julie interrupted. "Jed Nicholas and Charlie Reed?"

"Sorry, yes. Well, they knew things were hotting up so they sent young Terry over to Spain where they were building a complex that was nothing to do with Avery."

"You mean they had branched out on their own?"

"Oh yes, they're smart cookies, these two. Over a period of five years, they have funnelled funds from Avery through the Cayman Islands and he never knew."

"So, Terry was their connection on the continent." Julie finished her coffee and called the waitress over to refill their mugs.

"He seemed to flitter from Spain, France and the UK." He nodded his thanks for the refill. "From all accounts the business over there is doing very well, but they want to get re-established over here."

"You're kidding?"

"No! They honestly think they can pull it off," he smiled. "They plan to use the sale of their overseas companies to get financially sound here."

"Let's say, hypothetically, that they have established enough sound finance to move in as competition, what about their reputation? Won't that go against them?" She looked confused as she questioned him.

"We both know if the price is right, just about anything can be bought." He raised his eyebrows and smiled. "And anyone!"

"You're not wrong, but if they are involved in the Harbour Project, why have we not had any word from the Planning Commission about them?" She lifted the file again. "Why are they holding back?" she looked up at him.

"Now there, I'm stumped!" he smiled. "Well, not stumped, but disturbed."

"Why?"

"From my source inside the Commission, there are no dealings or applications filed by Nicolas or Reed."

"They haven't used their own names?" Julie was deep in concentration.

"No, they know better than that, so what we have to do is find out what company name they intend to use." He finished his second cup. "I should have a list of all applicants within the hour."

She smiled up at him, then returned to look at the picture of the man staring back at her. Young, dark and fairly good-looking.

"Who's this?" She turned the file for Jack to see.

"That's Terry."

"But the name underneath says Jean-Claude Monair!"

"Do you know it?" He leaned forward with interest.

"Well, yes. Elliot thinks he is behind the interference on his project - and he is over in France at the moment."

"Terry is in France?"

"According to Elliot, he has been like a shadow to him and he's just waiting for me to give him something to go on." She closed the file. "Look, why don't you come back to my office, we could work

from there."

"Normally I would say no, come to mine, but in this case, I will concede." They rose from the table. "Besides, it looks like it could develop into an interesting afternoon."

They gathered their things and headed back to Julie's office.

Julie led the way as they came from the elevator.

"Any messages, Wendy?"

"Yes, Mr. Burch," and she handed over the hand-written message.

"Thanks." Nodding to Jack, they disappeared into her office. "Look at this." She handed Jack the note.

"Hmmm, interesting!" He sat in the chair across from her desk. "Our Mr. Monair seems to have taken a quick exit again."

"He's good at that." Julie sat down and leaned forward over her desk. "Do you think they know you were looking into their affairs?"

He shrugged. "I doubt it, and if they did, they wouldn't know I was working for you and Elliot. No, someone has got nervous about something."

Julie rose from her chair and lifted the photo from the file. "I'm going to fax this to Elliot and then phone him with what we have." She sighed. "I wish I had more."

"Can I use your phone?" Jack asked as he came towards her desk.

"Help yourself."

"Thanks. I'll make that call to my friend about the offers on the Harbour job." He lifted the receiver.

"You know the only way these crooks could get inside this is with help. Any ideas?"

"Sorry, I've not been around long enough to know that, but Elliot might. Yeah! I'll mention it to him when I phone."

"Listen, wait till I've made my call, it might help."

She nodded and took the photo through to Wendy whilst he made his call. By the time she had faxed the sheets, Jack had finished.

"I owe you one for a change, Bill!" he laughed. "Okay, see you at the Panther later. Cheers."

"The Panther?" Julie was amazed.

"You have to make sacrifices in this job," he grinned at her, wondering how she knew the club he mentioned.

"Any luck?"

"You bet!" He lifted the paper he had used to write on. "How about this? There is a company called InterContinental, putting in an offer for the work, and one of the directors is..."

"Jean-Claude Monair!" Julie couldn't hide her smile of pleasure.

"Got it in one." He gave her the sheet of paper. "You will also find listed as its secretary, Jed Nicholas and, as senior advisor, none other than our missing Charlie Reed."

"Oh, Jack! It's all here!" She beamed at him.

"You will also see the amount they have tendered. I thought Mr. Burch would be interested in that," he pointed to the figure on the bottom of the page.

"You've done well, very well, Jack."

He shrugged into his coat before lifting his case and stretching out his hand to her. "It's been a pleasure."

"Look, you knew Cleon Manning, didn't you?"

"Yes. A fine man."

"Then you knew he worked for Elliot?"

"Yes."

"His job had never been contracted out properly. Would you and your firm be interested?" She watched him for his reaction.

"I would be mad to say I wasn't."

"Great. Leave it with me and...thanks."

He smiled once more before he shut the door behind him. Julie stood looking at it for a while, then pressed the intercom. "Get me Mr. Burch, please, Wendy - urgent."

She smiled to herself. *'Elliot one, Julie ten!'*

"Cathy!" Elliot knocked on her door, knowing it was early, but she would be up, playing with Jacob by now.

"What is it, Elliot? What's wrong?" Catherine was worried.

"No, Cathy, you don't understand. I have had word from the office, look." He showed her the faxed picture as he came into her rooms.

"So, he is behind the plot on your projects." She handed it back to him.

"Yes, and some of Avery's old associates." He smiled and the relief showed. "I know what I have to work with, now."

"Your intrepid assistant did a good job then?" She smiled up at him as she lifted Jacob from the floor.

"Yes. All right I concede, she's done a brilliant job!" His hands went to their usual place inside his pockets.

"Any idea when we can head home then?" Catherine pulled a tee-shirt over Jacob's brown back.

"Yes! How about Sunday and home by Monday evening!" He took Jacob from her as she looked for his shorts.

Stopping mid-stream, she turned and hugged him. No words were needed.

"Look, can you manage without me today? I have some...."

"Elliot, go play the hectic businessman, it's more you than the man that tries to enjoy lying in the sun!" And they laughed together.

"Okay, see you later."

"I doubt it!" She knew he had the bit between his teeth now and he wouldn't give in till he won.

Catherine, Jacob and Heather spent the rest of their stay soaking up the sun and swimming. Sunday couldn't come quick enough for them.

But here it was, Saturday night and everything was packed. Jacob was sound asleep and Heather was out with some friends, it being her last night.

Catherine settled down on the couch and hugged her book to her. '*GREAT EXPECTATIONS!*' She wasn't sure if it had been the prospect of going home, but today had been a busy one where her mind was concerned. She had put together all sorts of snippets, listening to the concerts in the park, but not from the stands; a waterfall and, Father. A strange image he had conjured up, such a strange image, yet it didn't surprise her. She felt safe with it and he loved her like a daughter. This image had given her strength and the memories seemed to tumble all around her, creating an inner glow that lifted her more than anything.

At one stage that afternoon, a young man with long blonde hair turned in front of them and, for a moment she had a recognition to the hair. Vincent had long beautiful hair. She had seen blue intense eyes when watching the sea; Vincent's, and his voice was never far away. She sighed and made herself more comfortable, still hugging the book.

Retracing what she had remembered so far was like a trip to the pictures. In truth, she felt she had remembered everything she would, until the picture of Vincent's face would come to her and, for some reason her heart told her that would come once she was back in her own apartment.

Jacob, sound asleep in his bed, was another memory that had come in fits and starts. Most she knew right away, but now there were things and places she could see him at, yet she couldn't place them. She smiled, remembering that Father was often in these visions, holding Jacob and speaking to Vincent, standing in the darkness.

She shivered and realized she had fallen asleep on the couch. Slowly lifting herself, she looked at the clock. Four am! Stretching, she went to bed with the knowledge that in a few hours they would be well on their way home.

Pulling up the duvet cover over her tanned body, Catherine turned on her side, thinking there was somebody by the window.

"Who's there?" It was just shadows!

Lying back down, she couldn't shut her eyes, then again something disturbed her.

'Catherine, we will be together again soon.'

She cried into the duvet. "Oh, Vincent, I love you so," and the tears she had held back for so long came flowing freely, and something that she had to let go before returning to her past.

Vincent was restless. Peter should have been here by now. Glancing down, he looked at the small tape lying in his palm. He sighed, thinking of the time it took, deciding just the right thing to say, and now he was anxious that Catherine should get it. *'Where was Peter?'*

"Vincent." Father stood at the chamber entrance. "May I come in?"

"Of course, Father, please."

"Have you prepared the tape? Peter will be here very soon."

"Yes, I have, Father. It says all I need it to." He bent his head slightly to one side as he thought of her.

"Catherine will understand."

"Will she?"

He dropped his eyes to the old man.

"What if she doesn't?" He leaned heavily on his stick.

Vincent pulled himself up to his full height. "Have no fear, Father, she will!" His conviction held no place for doubt.

"Yes, well, you should know best, Vincent," and they smiled at each other, even if Father still had misgivings.

"Vincent, Father!" Mary came quickly forward. "There you are, Father. Peter is waiting in your chamber."

"He's here?"

"Yes, he's waiting for you." Mary tried to hurry them along.

"Thank you, Mary." Father turned to leave. "Vincent?"

"I'm coming, give me a moment."

Nodding, Mary and Father left him alone.

Vincent squeezed the tape before handing it over to Peter.

"You were able to work it all right?" His smile giving away the fear he had had about his claws.

"Yes, with only slight difficulty." He smiled back. "It's a wonderful machine."

"You may keep it, Vincent, it's of no use to me."

"Thank you, Peter, it is most kind of you."

He nodded. "Look Jacob, I'm afraid I can't stay for dinner as we planned. I really only came for the tape."

"Is there something wrong?" Father was concerned. Peter never avoided one of William's feasts.

"Not really; a baby has decided to come into this world early."

"Ahhhh," Father smiled, understanding, and Vincent's eyes sparkled.

"A baby!"

"Well, I should go, but Vincent, I will let you know when your family arrives." He chuckled. "Maybe you should let me know, your system's pretty hard to beat!"

Vincent allowed himself to laugh at Peter's remark and noticed Father had turned a lowered head away.

Kipper arrived to show Peter out and, with a wave of his hand, he had disappeared into the tunnels.

Father watched Vincent for a moment, seeing he was in deep conversation, thinking no doubt of Catherine and Jacob.

"Vincent." Father's voice was gentle and caring. "It won't be long now. Your patience will be well and truly rewarded."

He patted his son's shoulder, no longer sagging as they had been these last long months.

"I never want to feel so empty again, Father." He turned to face him. "I lost not only my family, but I

lost myself. I felt dead!" Dropping his head to one side, his intense blue eyes were so full of love, it hurt.

"It will be all right now, Vincent, you'll see," he smiled up at his son. "Soon you will be a real family again." Then they hugged each other, their love needed no words.

The airport was hectic. They were cold and tired, but once through immigration, they retrieved their luggage and headed for the exit lobby.

Peter's arrival was perfect. He explained he had come straight from the hospital and was worried he would have been late, but here he was, and with his share of hugs and kisses out of the way, he set about gathering up their belongings onto a trolley.

"Well, Miss Chandler, I'm off, but I wanted to thank you for your kindness and generosity." Heather's smile was warm and friendly.

"It wasn't your fault we came home early. Perhaps another time." And they shook hands before she turned and left through the automatic doors.

"Cathy!"

Searching for the familiar voice, she saw Joe Maxwell grinning as he came towards them.

"Joe!" They hugged. "What are you doing here?"

Jacob, by now, was getting restless, so Catherine had to dive into a carrier for a drink of juice.

"You look good, Radcliffe!" He looked her over. "The sun obviously agrees with you." He turned his head to Peter. "Hi, need a hand?"

"It's under control, thanks."

"Joe, come on, why are you here?" She smiled at him.

Bending, he lifted Jacob from his push chair. "Boy! You've grown!"

Jacob squirmed till he was released back into his mother's arms. Catherine juggled him on her hip then brushed the hair from her face, at the same time giving Joe one of her looks.

"Okay! Okay!" He held his arms up in mock defense. "Truth is, I have to go out of town for a few days, and when Peter phoned to say you were coming home early, well, I didn't want to go without saying hi." He bent and kissed his cheek. "Glad to see you back Radcliffe."

"Thanks, Joe. I'm glad too."

"I can see Jacob is a handful, but any chance you might consider coming back to the salt mines?" He grinned at them.

"Oh, Joe! I just don't know how I feel about that yet." Putting Jacob back in his push chair, she noticed Peter and Elliot saying their goodbyes.

"Hey! It's okay, but remember your job's open." He gave her a quick peck on her cheek. "So phone me, don't forget."

"I won't, and thanks for coming, Joe."

"Bye," and turning to leave, he nodded to the two men. "Thanks Peter, Elliot." And with a short lifting of his hand, he was gone.

Smiling after Joe, Catherine was aware of the tall, well-groomed figure waiting patiently for Elliot.

Even with Joe's chattering, she had noticed her arrive, and how Elliot nearly fell over himself to speak to her. She was like a model from Vogue magazine, and Catherine surmised she was his new, efficient assistant. Assistant she may be, but by the way she looked at Elliot, she had more than work on her mind!

"Cathy!" Elliot broke into her thoughts. "My ride is here, so I'll leave you in Peter's capable hands." He rubbed his hands up and down her arms, as if reluctant to leave her.

Slowly, Catherine reached up and kissed her cheek. "Thank you, Elliot, for everything." She felt closer to him than ever. "You have been a true friend."

He looked down into her eyes. "Do you remember me saying to you once, that I had no friends?"

Jacob stirred, he had fallen asleep and Peter was trying to get him more comfortable.

"Yes, on my balcony, the night you asked me to marry you." She lifted her eyes sheepishly.

"Well, since I've been rubbing shoulders with Vincent and you, of course, I am pleased to say that statement is no longer true." He lifted his hand to brush her hair from her eyes. "I owe you and Vincent's family so much. You have made me the man I thought I could, or would, never be."

"Oh, Elliot! It was always there, inside you... you just needed to find it yourself."

They hugged, then he bent for his briefcase, shook Peter's hand and rubbed Jacob's hot cheek. "I have to go, be in touch, soon." He winked, smiled and turned to the lovely lady, held her by the elbow and steered her through the automatic doors to the waiting limousine.

"Very nice!" Peter had also noticed Elliot's companion.

"And so are you!" Catherine put her hand through his arm and lifted her face to his, to peck his cheek.

"Enough!" he teased. "Come on, it's time I got you both home."

"Yes, please." And with push chair and luggage, they finally left the hustle and bustle of the airport behind them.

At last they were settled and safe in their own home. Jacob was asleep in his cot by Catherine's bed, the fire glowed with a friendly flicker dancing around the walls, and the hot cocoa had warmed them to their toes.

Peter rose from the small couch. "You look tired, Cathy. I'll leave you now and recommend you get plenty of sleep." Shrugging into his coat, he reached inside one of the pockets. "Before I go, though, I must give you something."

From the time she had opened the apartment door, Cathy had been mentally distracted as she busied herself with Jacob and all the other things that automatically have to be done when you return from a trip. She had a deep feeling of anticipation, and concentrating on Peter and everything else was making her feel very unsettled. But now, Peter had all her attention.

"What is it?"

He held a cassette tape in his hand. "It's from Vincent," he sighed. "He has been finding this all very difficult, Cathy, but he has put some of his feelings into words, in the hope it will help you."

Taking the tape, her eyes filled with unshed tears. "How is he, really?"

"He... He's much better, now you are back." He squeezed her hand.

A glimmer of a smile crossed her face. "He knew I was coming home before you, didn't he?"

Returning her smile, he added, "He probably knew before you did!"

She nodded.

"You will have noticed, I have avoided asking you too many questions."

She nodded again, clutching the tape.

"I felt it best for you to get adjusted first, back here, with Jacob. And you should hear what Vincent has to say."

She lifted the tape and was about to ask a question, when Peter cut her off. "No, nobody but Vincent knows what's on that." He patted her hand. "Now, I really must go and leave you and Vincent alone. Good night, dear, and do try and get some rest."

"I will, I promise. Thank you, Peter, for everything."

Peter checked his watch and decided he would go to the hospital to see his patients before going to see Father and Vincent. He sighed and prayed with all his might that whatever Vincent had put into words, were indeed, the right ones.

Father grew anxious. He hadn't seen Vincent for hours. *'Where had he got to? Catherine's return had given him such mixed emotions, he had wanted to be left alone. This was understandable, but now he was not to be found, anywhere.'* Yes, Father was worried. *'What was Catherine's reaction to the tape going to be? Dear God! Have these two not been through enough? It must stop!'*

Catherine had not moved since had Peter left, some five minutes before. She just stood there, clutching the tape to her heart, feeling him with her.

The fire crackled and caught her attention. Moving to stoke it up, she turned out the lights, letting the flow and warmth surround her and the room. Going then into the kitchen, she re-boiled the kettle while she went to put on her nightwear and dressing gown.

She stopped and stood by Jacob's cot, before going back into the living room. He lay, more happy and contented than he had been for weeks. She sighed, as she gently rubbed a finger over his cheek, wondering if he knew more than she at this moment. *'He is his father's son, after all!'* She smiled and placed a tender kiss on his head then turning, pulled the louvered doors slightly closed so as not to wake him whilst listening to his father's voice.

Coffee mug in one hand, portable radio cassette player in the other, Catherine turned out the kitchen lights and settled herself down on one of the dinky little couches. *'HMMMMM, Joe's expression,'* and she smiled at her fleeting thought.

Putting the tape in its slot, she made sure she was comfortable, tucking her feet underneath her, pounding the cushions into place, before pressing the play button.

Holding her breath, Catherine started the tape.

"Catherine." She gulped for air as his voice filled the room, not with force, but with its magic. He was here, sitting beside her, by the fire, in the bedroom with Jacob. He was everywhere and she felt her face flush, and her heart beat started to run riot. She turned her concentration to the tape.

"This has been a time for us, Catherine, a time we will, in the future, come to cherish, but for now has only pain and heartache. I have spent a great deal of time thinking about what I should say to you, and I truly wanted to tell you everything, but Peter tells me that your memory has only misplaced certain things, such as me!"

He paused here and she felt a hint of a smile.

"He feels it is because of what we are to each other that its effect is so strong and that is why I am doing this for you now. I feel your love every day, and know you have no doubts about us, and what we have. And Jacob, he grows stronger every day, giving me comfort and joy while I am parted from you."

"Catherine, the connection we had, was once broken, but now it has returned to us, its power and strength shared with our son. You once told me that what we were, and what we have, was meant to be, and for a long time I have been afraid that your love would not withstand everything we have been through. Yet you have endured more in our time together than most people do in a lifetime."

"Your love has amazed me, given me life and feelings I thought would never be mine to have. I love you more than life itself, and whatever comes, I will be yours forever."

Catherine stopped the tape to wipe away the tears streaming down both sides of her face. Holding back a sob, she forced herself to throw something on the fire and go for a drink of cold water. Returning to her seat she placed a box of tissues beside her, drank some of her water then pressed the play button again.

"These things you know, so I shall try and restore what has so far evaded your thoughts. This has been a hard choice, but I feel the best way for us is to go back to the beginning. To the time we first met, which will cause you extra pain, but may just be the doorway in."

She could hear him sigh as another pause came.

She could sense his pain and some fear, but above all this was the love. So intense and powerful, she could almost touch it. She shut her eyes, hoping for a vision, as he went on. He described everything in detail, and it all started to fall into place; the hospital, the new job and her apartment. Then he went onto the more detailed description of his home and family. The tape ended and she turned it to the other side.

Father, the tunnels, Mouse, Jamie, Pascal and William. Mary and the children; she cried openly, but this time with a mixture of relief and joy. She could see Vincent standing there, tall and beautiful, arms held out to her, the candles flickering. She was so happy, yet there was still a shadow around Vincent's face.

Catherine turned up the volume slightly as she went to stand over the fireplace, a frown creasing her brow.

"You saved me, Catherine and now I am trying to save myself. I cannot live without you near, or the knowledge that you cannot recognize me, so I pray with all that I am, that this will bring you back to me. Catherine, without you I am nothing!"

The tape went dead.

She stood where she was, watching the flames jump about, her hand on her forehead, her heart crying out to the darkness. *"Why? Goddamn it, why couldn't she see him?"*

"Catherine."

She jumped, startled by his voice, staring at the tape, she was sure it had finished. Giving herself a shake, she decided she had imagined it, but a niggling feeling crept over her.

"Oh God, Vincent! Help me!" She started to cry again.

"Don't cry, Catherine." His voice of love flowed across the room.

"Vincent?" She was frozen to the spot, not knowing whether she was afraid it was him, or afraid it wasn't. "Vincent?" Her voice was shaky.

"Yes, Catherine, it is," and he came slowly inside, towards her. "Please don't turn around... not yet."

"Why? What will I see, Vincent?"

"Don't you know?"

"All I know is I love you, damn it! And whatever else there is, just doesn't matter."

"You are sure?"

Without answering she slowly turned to stand, face to face with the man she love; the father of her son and someone she knew she could not live without.

He stood there, magnificent and beautiful.

"Oh God, Vincent!" and she threw herself at him. *'How could she have not remembered him?'* She moulded into his arms, sobbing with the joy and pleasure she proudly felt.

"Catherine, please?" His concern vibrated through her as he kissed the top of her head.

"Hold me tighter, don't let go, not ever," she mumbled into his mountain of clothing. "I love you."

They stood together for a long time, waiting for Catherine to collect her feelings and face the future. Slowly, they pulled apart. Vincent's blue eyes jumping with love as he surveyed every part of her.

"You look more beautiful than my mind would let me believe. They held hands and she lifted his to her face.

"Oh, Vincent, how could I have forgotten you for so long?"

"You didn't, not really." They sat down in front of the fire. "Peter thinks that a fear of other people knowing me, and the fact that you had protected me for so long had caused the block."

"He could be right. All I was ever sure of was our love." She smiled up at him. "It was so powerful, it gave me all the strength I needed to go on."

Vincent bent his head and kissed her mouth, gently and fleeting, but all powerful. They parted for a second, then Catherine returned the kiss, only this time there was nothing fleeting about it!

It seemed the emotions of a year flooded back to them in a tidal wave that engulfed them completely. They kissed and discovered each other again, their love guiding them.

"Vincent?" Catherine stirred from his arms.

"Yes?" His head tilted to one side.

"Will you stay with us tonight?" Her eyes were pleading.

He looked down at her, then unravelled himself from the floor. Standing, with just his pants on, he looked wonderful, but she could feel his unease. He gently entered her bedroom and went to stand over Jacob's cot. As if he sensed his father, the boy stirred into life and Vincent bent to lift him. Holding him to his chest, he turned to Catherine and she could see the tears welling up in his blue eyes.

She came towards them and Jacob gave a tired, "Mummy, daddy," before falling asleep in his father's arms. Vincent held on, the feel of his son giving him such happiness.

"Vincent." Catherine touched his elbow to get his attention. "I could phone Peter, he could tell Father."

He turned to face her, his eyes shining, then merely nodded as he went back to watching his son for a moment longer, before placing him back in his cot.

She could hardly contain her joy. *'Vincent here for the night!'*

Lifting the phone, she could hear Peter, short of breath. "Peter?"

"Ah! That you, Cathy?" He caught his breath again. "Oh, you just caught me. Is everything all right?"

"Peter, it's wonderful."

"I take it the tape was helpful," he smiled at the phone.

"More than that! But I have called for a favour."

"Vincent is with you and you want me to tell Father!"

"How did...?"

"I know you and Vincent as if you were my own. Don't worry, I'll tell Jacob. That's where I was going anyway."

"Give my love to Father and tell him we will be down tomorrow."

"He has been waiting to hear that news for some time."

"Goodnight, Peter. Thanks."

"You're welcome," and the line went dead.

She turned to Vincent who was gathering up the scattered clothes.

"It's okay," and she went to his arms, loving the feel and smell of him so close.

He sat down on the end of the bed, holding and caressing her tiny hands, looking up at her with such a boyish look.

"Vincent, what's wrong?" She sat beside him, her arm around his bare shoulders.

"You realize that in the last few hours we have, do... achieved more than we had in the whole of our relationship?" He looked almost shy.

"I don't agree." She shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Catherine, I don't understand why you should disagree."

"Oh!" She moved around enough to face him. "I won't argue your opinion, but I do think that we have always had this relationship, only without the physical side." She grinned at her last words.

Her eyes shone with mischief and he had to smile. The physical side of their love had always been held back because of him, but not here he was, the leader in these activities.

"I did not intend for this to have happened, I only wanted to see if you were all right, and to hold you against me." He turned to her, his look of complete forgiveness turned her heart.

"Vincent, it was wonderful and I have never been as happy as I am right now." She kissed his lips gently. "We both know that our love would go its full circle, and our timing couldn't have been more perfect."

He lifted his palm to her face and slowly pushed the strands of hair back over her ear, then he leaned forward to kiss her before pulling her with him onto the bed.

"I love you," was whispered between kisses, then they once more travelled the journey they had waited so long to take.

Here was a family, ready for whatever was to come their way, and with such resolve, nothing would penetrate their love.

Below the city of New York an elderly man sat quietly crying, thanking God for his son's happiness and secure future with the family he loved.

END