

URBAN LEGEND

by Janet Rivenbark

Catherine was running a little late. The night before, she'd stayed on the balcony with Vincent until well after midnight, and this morning, she had overslept. She checked her watch as she left the cab.

At least I'll have time to grab some coffee at the shop in the lobby. I don't think I could face the sludge in the pot in the office. I really need to get my own pot for my office.

She made it to her office with a few minutes to spare, only feeling a little bit disheveled and unprepared for her day.

Since her promotion to Deputy in charge of Investigations the previous summer, she'd inherited Joe's old office. With a good cleaning, a fresh coat of paint, and some new, or at least new to her, furniture, it had become a pleasant place to work.

She set her coffee on the desk and then set her briefcase beside it. The soft-sided briefcase that she'd carried since law school had finally worn out, and she'd started carrying her dad's old black leather briefcase. She removed her coat and hung it on the coat tree by the door before sinking into her office chair. She took a sip of her coffee then opened the briefcase and removed the morning paper and some files.

One of the things that she'd added to the office was a credenza on the wall behind her. With filing cabinets on each end and a long, low cabinet between, it had become the perfect place to put things during the day so that her desk would be less cluttered and she would feel more organized and less overwhelmed. She set her open briefcase on the credenza and then turned back to her desk.

She checked the clock on the wall opposite where she sat and decided that she had time to drink her coffee and scan the paper.

The top of the front page had the usual headline; she didn't pay much attention. But when she opened it to its full length, the "below the fold" headline almost made her choke on her coffee.

BIGFOOT SPOTTED IN CENTRAL PARK

That sounded more like a headline from one of the city's less credible papers.

She went on to read the story:

**BIGFOOT SPOTTED IN
CENTRAL PARK**

One of New York's finest opened fire in Central Park last night – because he saw Bigfoot, or so he says.

The officer, who has not been named, fired several rounds near the Lake. He later told investigators that he'd nearly run into a creature who appeared to be more ape-like than man.

The area has been thoroughly searched, and no trace of any creature has been found – but the investigation is ongoing due to the fact a firearm was fired.

When questioned, the Central Park Zoo verified that none of their animals are missing; in fact, one of the primate keepers told us that the largest primates they have are Snow Monkeys. All the other zoos in the city also say that none of their animals are missing.

Melissa and Brian Gunn, who were crossing W. 74th Street across from the Park, said they heard shots at about 2am. They went into the lobby of one of the apartment buildings and asked to use the phone to call the police.

Catherine's first thought went to Vincent. He'd left her balcony only minutes before 2am.

She grabbed her phone and called Peter knowing he'd still be home at this hour.

"Alcott," the familiar voice answered.

"Peter, it's Cathy. Have you seen the paper this morning?" she asked.

"If you mean the Times, yes. And I think I might be wondering the same thing you are. Is it possible it might have been him?"

"He left my place late," she told him. "Just before 2am."

"I haven't heard anything, but I'll check and let you know as soon as I hear something."

"Thank you, Peter," she hung up the phone just as Joe walked in without knocking.

Joe was holding a newspaper, and he shook it in her direction as he approached her desk.

"This is the most ridiculous thing I've heard in a long time," he said.

"What is it, Joe?" she asked in her most innocent tone.

"The Commissioner has asked me to check last night's *Bigfoot* sighting against our files to see if there has been anything like it in the past."

Catherine caught a glimpse of the banner of the paper Joe held. It was the Post.

"So it wasn't only reported in the Times," she observed. "What did the Post have to say?"

"I read the Times too," Joe told her. "The Post added that the cop who fired the shots said that the thing he shot at wasn't the usual hairy beast of a Bigfoot that has been reported out West. This one was wearing clothes and a cape."

Oh my God! It was Vincent, she thought, then said aloud. "Did the cop hit anything? Was anything found? A body (*God forbid*), blood? Anything?"

"The Commissioner said that the officer thinks he missed. He fired three shots, and the investigators have found three slugs in a tree near where the officer said he saw the beast."

"Are we going to check our files?" she asked.

“Well, since Edie has been back and she and her department have been putting files on the computer, it shouldn’t be too hard. And since it was the Commissioner who made the request, it’s really more of an order. Do you have anyone you can spare?”

“Not really,” she admitted. “How far back does he want us to go?”

“He didn’t say, but I was thinking about ten years.”

“Edie’s department has only gotten to about five years back,” she admitted. “So it’s going to take more manpower if we want to get it done in a timely manner. What about the police records? Are they being checked? They’ve been on computer longer than ours.”

“He said he had someone on it,” Joe told her.

“I would imagine that they would have more than us,” she mused.

“I thought so, too, but we still need to check. Go back to the point where the computer records start. Who can you spare?”

Catherine checked her desk calendar. “Rita has depositions all day, Bailey has to talk to a witness down at the Tombs this morning and has to be in court this afternoon, Moretti will also be in court all day, and Kowalski is out sick.” She flipped through a couple more

“How do you even do that?” he asked. “I mean, search through all those files on the computer?”

“I had Edie show me how to use the database,” Cathrine told him. “I can search on names, dates, and places, but I think I can also have it search for particular words in the Notes sections.”

“What words?” he asked.

“Each word will be a separate search, but maybe words like ‘bigfoot’ or the word you used, ‘creature.’” She cringed inwardly when she said it.

“Animal, monster, beast?” Joe suggested.

“Maybe not ‘animal,’” she said. “I’ll be reading reports of every stray dog or cat in the city. So, if you will let me get to it, I’ll get started.” She pushed the button on the computer monitor on her desk and watched as it came to life.

“Let me know if you find anything,” he called back over his shoulder as he left.

“Please close the door,” she called back.

Once the door was closed, she got to work. By lunchtime, she was wondering if she was happy or upset that she’d asked Edie how to do these searches. The problem was that she couldn’t narrow the searches to just the park; the results were city-wide, but she was glad she had a printer in her office because she was finding not only reports from the park but from all over their jurisdiction. And she wasn’t searching on just the words Joe had suggested, but on a few others, like ‘cape.’

Most of the reports had nothing to do with Vincent or anything that might point to him, but a surprising number seemed to point straight to him. Before she left for lunch, she divided the printed reports into two stacks: the ones she was going to give to Joe and the ones she planned to show Vincent. The latter went into her briefcase.

On her way out of the office a little after one, she stuck her head in Joe’s office.

pages. “But I don’t have anything scheduled for today or tomorrow except for employee evaluations. They aren’t due until next month, so I can put them off for a few more days. I’ll do it.”

"I'm getting out of here for lunch today," she told him. Do you want me to bring something back for you?"

"Where you going?" he asked.

"The Deli up the block. It's not very busy this late."

Joe jumped up and grabbed his suit jacket. He put it on and straightened his tie as he joined her.

"Mind if I go with you? I need a change of scenery, too."

They hardly spoke until they were seated in the deli.

"How's the search going?" Joe asked.

"It's going," she told him. "The number of strange things people see in this city is surprising, and that's only in the last five years."

"Anything like what that cop said he saw last night?" Joe asked.

"Some, but there are also reports of little green men, flying saucers, gargoyles coming to life, and giant wolves roaming the city streets at night. Not every credible."

"But that's the thing," Joe argued. "A report like that from a cop is generally considered to be credible."

Catherine looked at Joe with an eyebrow quirked.

"Well, at least *more* credible," he qualified.

"But Bigfoot? In Central Park? If something like that did exist, how would it get there? There is a lot of city between the park and the nearest woods. Someone would have seen something like that, and nothing like that has popped up."

"What if it's smart enough to stick to the shadows?" Joe offered.

Vincent definitely is that... usually, she thought, then out loud, "Well, at least it looks like I might finish this today. It takes longer to read the reports than it does to find them."

When they arrived back at the office, the receptionist near the door signaled her.

"Miss Chandler, there is a kid in your office. He said he had an important message for you and he didn't want to leave it with me. I figured since I can see your office from here it was safe to let him wait for you in there."

"Thanks, Steffanie."

Geoffrey was wearing his best Uptop clothes and was sitting quietly on one of the office chairs when she entered. He jumped to his feet and smiled shyly before starting to speak.

Catherine held up a hand to signal him to wait, then turned and closed the door.

"What is it, Geoffrey?" she asked as she took off her coat.

"A note from Vincent. He said it was very important and that I was to make sure you got it." He held out an envelope.

"Thanks, Geoffrey." She took the envelope, and Geoffrey turned to leave. "Do you need to wait for an answer?" she added.

"Didn't say," he said with a shrug.

"Well, then, please tell him not to come Above tonight. I'll go Below."

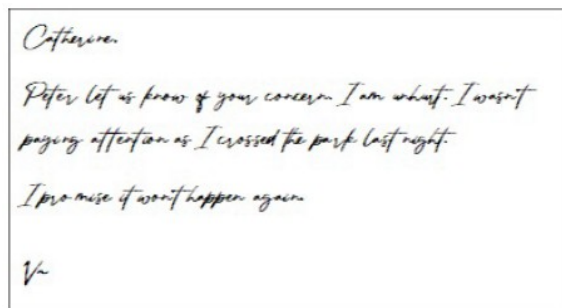
"Right. See you later." He opened the door just as Joe was about to walk in. Geoffrey stepped to one side to let Joe pass then he left.

"Polite kid," Joe commented. "What did he want?"

She glanced at the envelope. It was good quality stationary that she'd given Vincent.

"Just a wedding invitation from a friend. She had her nephew deliver it."

When Joe left a few minutes later, she opened the note and read it.



Catherine.
Peter let us know of your concern. I am what. I wasn't
paying attention as I crossed the park last night.
I promise it won't happen again.
V~

She'd been thinking as she'd worked, and she thought she might have a remedy; at least she hoped she did.

She was right. It was only a few minutes after 5:00 when she finished printing the last report.

She put the ones she wanted to show Vincent in her briefcase and on her way out she dropped the rest on Joe's desk. It was considerably smaller than the one in her briefcase.

"Here's some reading material for the weekend," she told him.

When Catherine returned to her building, she didn't even bother to change clothes; she went straight to the basement and headed Below.

Vincent knew she was on her way and met her at the first sentry post.

"I know the way," she told him after a hug.

"I know, but I was only a short distance from here. The walk is more pleasant with you than alone," he told her as they walked. "What was so urgent that you had to come straight from work?"

"It's about what happened last night," she said. "We need to talk."

"Will you be staying for dinner?" he asked.

"After we talk. It shouldn't take long."

Once they reached Vincent's chamber, they both settled at the table. Catherine pulled the files out of her briefcase and put them in front of Vincent. The stack was almost two inches high.

"I spent the day going through the computer database for the last 5 years. That," she pointed at the stack, "is over 65 reports from people living in Manhattan who claim to have seen Bigfoot, a very tall cloaked figure, or even a Lionman lurking in the shadows somewhere in the City."

Catherine had arranged the reports in Chronological order, and it didn't take Vincent long to divide them into 3 piles.

"This," he said, pointing to the first and smallest one that had only one report, "is last night. These," he pointed to the one in the middle, which was almost equal in height to the last one, "are all from the period of time last summer when you were missing. I will admit that without the Bond or much of any sense of others around me, I'm not surprised that I was seen so often. I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings. And this last pile," he pointed again, "is from the 4 years before that time."

"And the point is?" she asked deliberately.

"I suppose what I'm saying is that under usual circumstances, I am able to stay hidden."

“And that one last night could have gotten you killed!” she told him, raising her voice slightly. “Or at least wounded. That can’t be allowed to happen again.”

“Now you are sounding like Father,” Vincent retorted.

“When it comes to this particular thing, then he’s right. We can’t let this happen again. I know you feel the need to get out of these tunnels and see the sky, but we have to figure out how to keep you safe. From now on, you need to stay away from my balcony. After what happened last spring, we both know that it’s not as secure as we once thought, and after Anna Lausch, we also know that anyone in one of the taller buildings around the park could have a telescope and might be watching you... It could expose the whole community.”

Catherine added that last sentence, knowing that it would make Vincent stop and think.

He did just that, but after a moment, he asked. “Then what are we supposed to do?”

“I will come to you from now on,” she told him. “With the changes at the DA’s office, I’m not putting myself in danger anymore. And I’m being extra careful in just my everyday life. And... I have an idea that I want to run by you before I do anything about it.”

“If it involves quitting your job, I’m not going to listen,” he stated.

“It doesn’t,” she said with a smile, “but it does involve some changes and maybe some help from you and possibly Father.”

“What is it?”

“I’m going to move,” she told him.

“Move? Where?”

“That is where you and Father come in. With the extensive Helper network you have in this city, is there a way to put the word out that I’m looking for a house or a building that has tunnel access?”

“But you love your apartment,” Vincent protested.

“Where did you get that idea?” she did laugh this time. “It’s not even decorated to my taste. Daddy gave it to me as a gift when I graduated from Law School. It’s a great location, and I do love the view, but it’s terribly small; I have no room for guests. The kitchen is barely big enough to turn around in, same goes for the bathroom. And don’t get me started on the décor. Daddy hired an interior designer and told her that the apartment was for his 25-year-old daughter. That was it. It’s too frou-frou and feminine. I don’t feel like I can relax there. I prefer cozy, warm colors and comfy furniture... And it faces east. It gets the morning sun, and even when I can sleep in, the sun wakes me way too early.”

“I didn’t realize that you felt so strongly about it.” Vincent was smiling now, too. “And I think we can be of help. We have a Helper, Fiona Sullivan, who is a realtor.”

“That would be ideal!” Catherine exclaimed. “I wouldn’t have to cover things up or make up reasons why I have to inspect the basement so closely.”

“All right,” said Vincent, rising to his feet. “Now that we have that figured out let’s go get some dinner. We can tell Father about this while we eat.”

When they filled Father in, he was ecstatic about the plan and offered to send a message Above to Fiona as soon as they were done eating.

“Give her my number and tell her to call me at home when it’s good for her,” Catherine said.

It had taken a little over six months, but with Fiona’s help, Catherine had found a place, had some work done, purchased new furniture, and moved in, all in time to celebrate their third anniversary. She had surprised Vincent by inviting him to dinner to celebrate not only the anniversary but also the move that had been completed the previous weekend.

She placed the lid on the pot she'd been checking just as Vincent emerged from the basement. She looked at the clock; it was 7:00 p.m., and a glance at the window told her it was still daylight.

She turned to Vincent with a smile.

"What is it that smells so good?" he asked as she released him from a hug.

"It's Boeuf Bourguignons," she told him. "With roasted carrots, egg noodles, French bread, with apple tarts for dessert."

He glanced at the pot on the stove. "You cooked?" he asked in obvious surprise.

"Not you, too," she retorted with a playful punch to his arm. "Why does everyone automatically assume that I can't cook? I just never had a kitchen big enough to cook in before. About a year before my mother died, Daddy hired Louise, who was more like a grandmother than an employee. She cleaned and did the laundry, cooked, and even looked after me when I wasn't in school. Louise held the opinion that everyone should know how to cook, clean, do laundry, do some basic sewing, and balance a checkbook. She taught me all that. She retired when I left for college, but we have stayed in touch."

"Then I'm thankful to Louise. The menu sounds as wonderful as it smells."

"And it's ready to put on the table," Catherine pointed to the dishes on the counter. "We'll have to eat here in the kitchen. Cullen hasn't finished the repairs and refinishing of my Mom's set."

After dinner, Catherine led Vincent up three flights of stairs to the roof.

"It's not 280 feet above the ground, more like 40 feet, but I had some privacy fencing installed." She pointed at the 10-foot wooden fence on all four sides of the flat roof. "And it has a pretty good view of the sky, even with all the lights in the City. I still need to get some furniture up here and maybe have part of it turned into an all-season porch so it can be used year-round. What do you think?"

"This is very nice, but this is your house. What do you think?" he countered.

"I think I'm going to like it even better than the balcony. Especially once I have the all-season porch built. This is a lot quieter than a balcony overlooking Central Park West. The first few nights I was here, I actually had a hard time sleeping because it was so quiet."

"The all-season porch is a good idea," Vincent agreed, "especially since it's starting to rain." He took her hand and pulled her back toward the door back into the house.

"There's something else you haven't seen," she told him as they descended the stairs to the third floor." She led him down the hall toward the front of the house. "I don't know what this room was originally intended to be, but I've turned it into a private den/library for myself."

She opened a door and let Vincent enter before her.

The room wasn't big, but it was cozy. The front wall had a window with a window seat that was flanked on both sides by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. The wall across from the door had a fireplace that also had bookshelves on both sides. The wall opposite the window had more bookshelves. The shelves were almost all empty. There was a couch in the middle of the room with tables and reading lamps on both sides and a coffee table between it and the fireplace.

"The fireplace is gas," she explained. "I didn't want to have to carry wood up the stairs all the time. In fact, I had all the fireplaces in the house converted to gas."

"I think I'm beginning to understand what you meant when you said that your apartment wasn't decorated to your taste," Vincent said as he looked around. The bookshelves, wood floor, and all the wood furniture were dark wood; the one wall and the curtains at the window were the same shade of warm gold. The couch was dark brown, but pillows and a small blanket on it added brighter colors. The wall over the fireplace looked oddly blank.

Catherine saw him looking at the blank spot, and told him her plan.

“I wish Kristopher’s painting of us would fit there, but Mr. Smythe has several of his paintings that didn’t sell at the show. I’m going to buy one of them from him; I just need to make up my mind which one I like the best.”

“A fitting tribute,” he said approvingly. “And I imagine that Mr. Smythe will also be helping you fill these shelves.”

“And several other used bookstores in the city,” she said with a grin. “I also have several boxes of books in the basement that came from my place and from storage. I’ve been bringing up a stack every time I come upstairs. My bedroom is on the back of the house at the other end of the hall.”

She crossed the room and flipped a switch on the wall and the fireplace came to life. She sat on the couch and patted the cushion next to her.

“I don’t have the living room downstairs furnished yet,” she told him, “so I thought this would do for tonight.”

Vincent joined her on the couch, and she slid across it and snuggled into his side.

“I don’t know if you noticed when you came in, but the basement is finished too. There are three rooms and two bathrooms down there. One of the rooms has a private bath, and I thought that you might want to use that room if you want to get away. I’m sure it would ease Father’s mind to know that you were close and safe when you feel the need to *get away*... I know I would feel better.”

“Thank you, Catherine, but I wouldn’t want to use any of your guest space...”

“Vincent, there are three bedrooms and two bathrooms on the second floor. That is more than enough guest rooms. The basement is just bonus space. There is a little kitchen area, just enough room to make a pot of tea or make a sandwich. The only time I go down there is when I do laundry.”

“But the added expense of furnishing it...” he began.

She’d anticipated that argument. “I’ve put some of the furniture from my apartment down there. The living room area is small so it all fits pretty well. My old bedroom furniture is in the second bedroom. The only room that isn’t furnished is the larger bedroom with the attached bath. I thought that if you decided to use it, you might furnish it to suit yourself with stuff from Below, or I could get a catalog, and you could pick things from it.”

Vincent knew when he’d been beaten and admitted defeat with grace. It would be nice to have a place where he could be alone but not have to travel almost two days to get there. He’d also be closer if he was needed.

“You have it all planned,” he said.

“And you can input anything you want at any time,” she told him.

“I have two requests,” he said as he turned to face her.

“What?”

“First, please cook and invite me to dinner more often,” he said, holding up one finger.

“I even have cookbooks in those boxes in the basement,” she told him with a nod.

“And although I plan to do as you suggested and furnish that room with things from Below, I would ask if it is possible to get a larger bed. I hear they have beds that are about 6½ feet long. Would it be possible to get one of those? It would be nice to be able to stretch out and not have my feet hanging off the end of the bed or my head in the bookcase.”

That made Catherine laugh, loving the idea he would allow her to do something for him.

“I’ve heard that there are beds seven feet long. How about one of those?”

“Will it fit?” he asked.

“I’m sure it will. The room is long and almost as wide as it is long.”

Vincent relaxed back on the couch and pulled Catherine a little closer.

“I am looking forward to spending time with you in your new home,” he said.

“I’m looking forward to spending more time with you,” she added.

END