

Last Night

by Ruby

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The city has a song, Catherine thought. The rock tune playing out a passing cab window as she went inside her apartment building seemed to bleed into the sides of the buildings and street lamps. The twilight pressed the lilac of the air into blue and then the black of the pavement cool from a recent rain. *But it won't rain tonight*. She smiled.

"...I move better in the night, I won't stop until the daylight..."

That was me and Vincent, she thought as the cool lobby muffled the sound of the music and the elevator clicked up, up, up. They walked together in the night, talked together, read together... she looked wistful. They didn't do much more during the night either. *Patience*, she chided herself. *We've been very patient*, another voice answered. She chuckled and turned the apartment door *click* and went inside to change.

"...Are you hiding somewhere behind those eyes..."

The line of the song playing on the stereo by her makeup table startled her from her careful work. Her Vincent's eyes were certainly an "electric blue" that made her blood sing, but it felt so often she only caught a glimpse of what he wanted her to see. He had been so ill, terribly ill, when Paracelsus died. She refused to think of Vincent responsible for an act Paracelsus had so carefully engineered. Vincent had recovered from his collapse in the catacombs to almost his former self. Almost.

Well, Halloween was a night where anything could happen. Where a wealthy woman could wear a gown made of rags, a harlequin's mantle. She tied her mask on. *We all need to hide sometimes*.

Far Below, in a chamber that should have been dark but was always filled with light, Vincent finished getting ready. Classical music was the soundtrack of the tunnels, most of the time. But on nights like this, only one of the cheekiest tunes from his little silver jukebox would do. He slipped his jacket on, bottle-green velvet lashed with black brocade that had been found half moth eaten in an abandoned building. Boiled clean and made new with buttons of old brass from the coffee tin full of buttons in the sewing chamber.

"...But I got no insurance for a broken heart..."

None of us do, friend, Vincent mused. He had been so terrified of losing Catherine, and even more terrified of keeping her from the light, that he had nearly torn the both of them in twain. He had realized something in the long months of his recovery; if she was his light, and she was, then he was her light. She hadn't walked into unknown darkness in the catacombs, she'd walked toward *him*, her light, her love, who she needed like he needed her. He hoped he could show a fraction of her courage back to her someday. But first he had a happy group of youngsters to walk to Ang's grocery.

Catherine could sense Vincent's contentment in the cab ride to Ang's. He had guided a group of children to the storeroom where Ang had set up a TV, so they and some of the Helpers' children could watch an animated special she remembered from her childhood. She slipped the cabbie some bills and walked to the door and it opened, ringing a little silver bell. She smiled at Ang and walked towards the back.

Vincent didn't need to hear the bell to know she was here - his heart felt full the moment he sensed her presence in the cab. He loved that he didn't have to move into the shadows as the door opened and she only had eyes for him. A harlequin in a crazy coat of colors, mint, silver, burgundy, yellow like butter, stood looking at him, her smile warmer than the soft hum of the electric heater that kept the space from being too cold.

Catherine looked at Vincent, gold and red in his coat of black and green, with brass buttons winking like stars. Some of the children cheerfully called out a greeting. She smiled, Eric's bat ears bobbing on the cowl Mary had knitted for his costume, his superhero cape a scrap of black linen that had been a tablecloth a week ago. Some of the children were riveted to the cartoon on the screen. Bright orange bottles of soda in their hands, a rare treat.

Vincent hugged a little girl dressed in fairy wings and walked toward Catherine. They stepped into the store completely unafraid, and a shopper picking up a gallon of milk didn't look twice. The soft, jazzy music of the TV program was still heard faintly through the door. A waltz tune. Vincent surprised her by taking her hand and dancing her down the aisle of potato chip bags and soup cans. Catherine laughed and the silver bell rang again as they left to make their way to the theater.

The theater was warm, with red walls and the smell of expensive perfume. From their box they watched the ballet, Lisa's gift of season tickets being happily used by anyone Above or Below who wanted them. They had spotted Lisa entering her box with Elliot; she'd given them a wink and they had smiled back. The lights dimmed and Catherine watched one of her favorite fairy tales spin out to the beautiful music. In this version, Cinderella proved her worthiness by giving a beggar woman bread, who turned out to be her fairy godmother in disguise. *Things weren't always what they seemed*, Catherine mused. A lesson she kept learning over and over again.

After the ballet they wandered where their feet led them. Past stalls selling hot cider and past clubs where people who were dressed for Halloween all year slammed their bodies to music that poured out into the street. They slipped into a smoky club where a woman sang sad and sweet and strong. Her voice winding through the space, and settling like dew on their costumes as they toasted each other and listened.

"...I'm wishing...wishing...for the one I love to find me..."

Catherine felt strangely sad. They had found each other, they were sitting across from each other lined in smoke and light from sconces on the wall. *We have each other. This is enough. Let this be enough.* Catherine forced the disquieting thoughts away and focused on the singer, not noticing Vincent watching her carefully.

You could have everything. But you ask for so little, Catherine. Is it because you know I can't give you what you want?

A thought curled in the smoke.

Or is it that I'm afraid too? On this night of ghosts and witches there are many things to be afraid of. But not you. Not us. You knew that far sooner than I did. To never be afraid of us. Perhaps I could begin to join you in that courage.

He turned his attention to the singer and the murmur of praise and applause when the song ended.

They walked slower now, the sky beginning to seep from charcoal to a dull grey of stone. Music still remained with them, this time playing from a wall of TVs in an electronics store. A spy movie from several years ago, a couple were sharing a drink in a beautiful garden. They both thought about spies, and keeping secrets, and never being able to tell other people who you really were. Or who you really loved.

Catherine squeezed Vincent's hand.

"A block more is my building. It was a wonderful night, Vincent."

"It was. I treasure spending such a night with you, Catherine."

He looked at her, her mask in her hand and her eyes like polished jade. He'd lost himself in those eyes the moment they had looked at him, not with hate or fear, but with compassion. With courage.

He said it before he could bite it back.

"It seems only right that on the night I can that I escort you to your front door."

Catherine did not hide her surprise, or her delight.

"I'd like that very much, Vincent."

And if all you do is walk me to that door it will be enough. It's a first step. And we've so many more places to go with each other.

The gently lazy voices sang out of the small radio in the kitchen as Catherine made breakfast.

"...Last night, thinking 'bout last night..."

She grinned. She could honestly say she was too. And about the day that now stretched before her. She turned to Vincent.

"How do you like your eggs?"

"Scrambled."

“Ok, just give me a minute.”

She turned to the stove. The most ordinary conversation. Between two people. Between two lovers.

Lovers.

She felt the word and knew Vincent could feel it too. She heard him get up from the table. He stood behind her and wrapped his arms around her.

“I like this song.”

“I do too.”

He began to sway back and forth with her and she laughed.

“Cut that out or you won’t get breakfast!”

“It can wait, Catherine. First I want to dance.”

And they did, in a sun-filled kitchen on a cold November day. And the walls would never be impassable between them again.

Playlist: (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLYY1IAYAOdnMGS0CM8p4cKi4HBxdOYrw>)

“Move Better in the Night,” Roger Daltry

“Electric Blue,” Icehouse

“No Insurance (For a Broken Heart),” Jimmy Jones

“The Great Pumpkin Waltz,” Vince Guaraldi Trio

“Cinderella, Op. 87, Act: 1 No. 5, The Beggar-Woman (Adagio),” Sergei Prokofiev

“You Know What You Are,” Ministry

“I’m Wishing,” Betty Carter

“Wine With Stacey,” John Barry

“Last Night,” The Traveling Wilburys