

# Yesterday's Promises

by

Joyce Clarke



## **YESTERDAY'S PROMISES**

**JOYCE CLARKE**

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments; Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove,  
O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the start to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown,  
Although his height be taken,  
Love's not time's fool,  
though rosy lips and cheeks,  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not  
With his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom,  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

**William Shakespeare**

**Sonnet CXVI**

It was just two days before her thirty second birthday that Dr. Vivien Hayward was selected by the hospital's Board of Directors, as the most suitable candidate to be put in charge of Pediatrics at St. Vincent's. Her appointment as the youngest successor ever, met with little opposition. The general consensus of opinion being that the department would be in safe hands.

Now, four years later, Vivien Hayward had earned the respect of her peers, and was fast becoming one of the most sought after pediatricians in New York.

She credited parents with intelligence, and rewarded them with the facts, and the children in her charge always came first irrespective of any financial considerations.

Vivien's life, was her children at St. Vincent's-----and they adored her.

She was known throughout the wards, as Vivi, a fun loving, caring, human dynamo in bright coloured jogging suits and sneakers. She was always available to any child or parent who needed her, day or night; and was loyally supported by her devoted team who staffed the children's wards.

Although Vivien had a spacious and comfortable apartment within easy reach of the hospital, she was very rarely there; preferring to live, as she was often heard to say, '*Over the shop.*' Some wit had even stuck a notice on her door that proclaimed, '*Open all Hours.*'

Her home town was Washington D.C. where her parents had lived, but after surviving twelve months training at St. Vincent's before qualifying, she felt, for some unaccountable reason, overwhelmingly drawn to the place, to the city, and to its people.

It was purely an instinctive reaction which made St. Vincent's her

first choice after qualifying with distinction; a decision that met with some opposition from her parents, as they had hoped she would have stayed nearer to home. The thought that she may not be accepted never entered Vivien's head.

Vivien had never married. She had been engaged on one occasion, which ended painfully, and she had come to the conclusion that to do justice to her chosen profession, which was to her a vocation, she could not split herself down the middle.

Vivien did not really hold out much hope for finding a man prepared to take second place to her work, and in her scheme of things he would certainly have to do just that.

Nevertheless, Vivien was certainly an attractive woman and had never been short of male friends and admirers. She was of average height, slim, though nicely rounded, with dark, naturally curly, shoulder length hair, which she usually wore fastened back from her face. She had bright bluey-grey eyes and a clear complexion that required little makeup. Without a doubt, her most redeeming feature was her inner glow and her love of life.

One of her dearest friends was Peter Alcott, who had taken her under his wing some fourteen years before when she had first arrived at St. Vincent's. Even then, he saw something in her that was strangely familiar, but had never managed to figure out what it was. Over the years he had become her confident, her sounding board, her loyal supporter and her friend. It was to Peter that she turned to now; devastated by the deaths of her parents in an horrific road accident, whilst they were holidaying in Florida.

It was Peter who helped her to make all the arrangements to have their bodies flown home to Washington and assisting her through all the red tape. Vivien took time off work to arrange the funerals,

a quiet affair as there were no living relatives and only a few close friends. All were shocked by the tragic news and offered Vivien as much help and support as she needed. Neighbours who had watched Vivien grow up, offered her everything from food to a bed for the night, so that she would not be alone.

Her parents had prepared a will and she had the name of the attorney's office where it was held in safe keeping; though she knew it would only be a formality as she had been their only child.

Although her parents were comfortably off, they could in no way be construed as wealthy. There was the house of course; a substantial double fronted two story building with a basement, and it was situated in a pleasant tree lined suburb of Washington, but after the funeral costs and incidental expenses had been paid out of their insurance, there was just a few thousand dollars left in cash.

Vivien had taken four days leave from the hospital, time for her to clear out of the family house all she wanted to keep, before putting it up for sale with a local estate agent.

Houses in this locality sold easily, so she had been informed, and with the money from the sale being eventually transferred to her New York bank, Dr. Vivien Hayward would become a woman of substance. She knew even then that this would be her final visit to her home town. There was nothing there for her anymore. She was acutely conscious of the warm, but uncanny feeling that home is where the heart is, and she had left her heart back in New York.

The knowledge that Vivien had been adopted at birth, had never been withheld from her and she had grown up always knowing that she had been especially chosen and especially loved. She

certainly could not have had a happier childhood and she had loved her parents dearly.

It was for this reason that she could never bring herself to make them feel slighted by searching for her own ancestry -----but now, having recovered from her initial grief, she felt she could pursue her quest with a good heart.

That she was now a orphan had a profound effect on Vivien. Even though she had lead a solitary life for many years; there was this gaping void inside her that she knew would take time to heal, but deeper still, was this vague, but certain knowledge that her destiny was yet waiting for her and that it centered on New York.

Armed with her own adoption papers which she had found amongst her parents personal effects, Vivien Hayward embarked on the search for her true parentage.



Catherine stood in the darkened tunnel entrance to the dimly lit cave, vaguely wondering where the shadowy shafts of light were coming from. It was sufficient for her to see the tormented soul within doing battle with some imaginary aberration, real only unto him but in actuality attacking himself, hell-bent on his own destruction as he shredded his clothing, and clawed at his body which was already slicked with blood. His face was an inflamed mask of fury, glistening with sweat and tears, that ran freely down his face and strong muscular neck, staining his tattered clothes and mixing with the splatters of blood and dust already there.

His mouth and fangs were dripping with foaming spittle as he lunged to rend his illusory tormentor limb from limb. Vincent was fast receding and in danger of being almost totally eclipsed by the

bestial and inhuman side of his nature, and in his weakened mental state he was letting it gain complete control.

Catherine could not allow this to continue. She could not bear to watch his self inflicted torture. The die had already been cast-----there was no turning back. They would leave this place together or not at all.

Catherine, who should have been transfixed with terror, felt only a strength of purpose, a certain knowledge that this was her fate. She trusted in her instincts and moved out into the cave.

This creature that was Vincent.....the creature there had never been, was hunched in the shadows against the far wall of the cave, inhumanly snarling and snapping, emitting deep low guttural growls, and like the predator he had become, was conscious of a third presence in his lair, and was stalking it, biding his time, waiting to pounce and go in for the kill.

Catherine moved a little closer overwhelmed by the brilliant blue of his night sighted eyes, shining luminescent in the darkness. Without warning, an earsplitting roar erupted from him, reverberating around the cave and he leapt out at her as though his hind quarters had been spring loaded and charged at her in a paralyzing frontal attack.

Catherine screamed in terror, "***Vincent.....VINCENT!***"

He stopped, transfixed, inches from her with his arm raised above his head, ready to strike, as some shred of recognition held him in its grip. He towered over her, as if suspended in time, and then as the echoes faded into silence he crumbled in front of her, dragging her down with him onto the floor of the cave in a tangled heap of arms and legs.



He lay there sprawled on his back, unmoving. Catherine scrambled up his body and onto her knees at the side of him.

"Vincent," she whispered, leaning over him and feeling for the pulse at the base of his throat. "Vincent," she whispered again in disbelief, resting her head on his chest listening for his familiar slow steady heartbeat, but there was only silence.

"No," she whispered, over and over. **"No,"** she cried in panic and fear, as a wave of unexpected anger welled up inside her.

***"No, Vincent, you can't. You can't.....not without me.....I won't let you.....I won't let you."***

Her panic and fear threatened to engulf her as she crawled higher until she was level with his face, and with a passion born of desperation and the fear of losing him, she kissed his mouth hard.

Breaking the kiss, she shook him uncontrollably, and almost screaming she cried, ***"You're not going to leave me..... I haven't loved you yet. We haven't loved."***

Tears were streaming down her face, her whole body convulsing with distress as she untangled her fingers from his hair, and dragged off her mack(coat), sweater and T-shirt. Kneeling beside him, naked to the waist, she pulled and tore at the tatters of his clothes, pushing them to either side of him and revealing the broad expanse of thick curling golden hair covering his chest, overwhelmed by her need to bury herself into it. She rose up onto her knees and leaned over him kissing his face, his mouth, his neck; nuzzling her nose into the curls at the base of his throat and feeling the warmth of his body against her nakedness.

With some maneuvering she removed her trousers and panties, kicking them free of her legs. Then this previously pampered and



perfumed uptown girl, oblivious to all the blood and sweat, the dirt and the smell that was distinctly not quite human, started to unbuckle his belt. She released the button and pulled down his zipper to ultimately discover what she had always known, that he was, after all, only a man.

"Yes, my love," she smiled a determined little smile that did not quite reach her tear filled eyes, as she tugged at his trousers to reveal more of him. "You are not departing this world without knowing you are loved.....without knowing that I love you and all that you are." Lovingly she caressed him, "Somehow Vincent, I'm going to make you mine..... only mine." Once again she rose up until she was level with his face, lowering her head she kissed him, willing him with all her heart to respond to her love, desperate to share herself, body and soul with this man whom she loved more than life.



It was some time later, exhausted and bathed in perspiration Catherine sat astride him, breathing heavily. She was conscious of him still within her. Her mouth was dry as she tried to moisten her lips and the merest suggestion of a smile flitted across her face, with realization sparkling in her eyes, she dared herself to consider this impossible dream. A warm glow began to ignite deep within her, spreading throughout her body and she lowered herself forward to lay on Vincent's chest, her head beneath his chin and her fingers curling into his hair, listening to the slow steady beat of his beautiful heart.



By the time Father appeared hesitantly at the cave's entrance, Catherine was dressed and had made Vincent respectable by

covering him with his cloak which she had found abandoned on the floor. She sat curled up with his head in her lap. Her hands were caressing his face and smoothing his hair.

Father's face was incredulous as he asked, "Catherine, are you all right? You're not hurt?"

"No, Father. I'm fine." She smiled wondrously up at him and Father, his bones protesting, knelt down at the side of them.

"What happened?" he asked, laying his walking stick on the ground before checking his son over with experienced hands.

"He died, Father. Everything stopped, for ages.....it seemed like forever. And then.....his heart started to beat again." More tears spilled down her face as she treated him to a watery smile that spoke of the whole event being some kind of miracle. In a spontaneous gesture of incredible relief, he and Catherine hugged each other fiercely.

"Thank you, Catherine.....for giving me back my son." So humbled was he by this slip of a girl who had stormed the gates of hell to save Vincent, or who would willingly have given her life trying.

Their eyes met and held in understanding, almost as if he knew exactly what had taken place. He leant across and kissed Vincent's forehead, once, twice, three times, gripping hold of Catherine's hand then straightening up and gazing at them both.

"This is what happened when he was young," Father explained.

"All his vital signs stopped.....he couldn't be roused no matter what we tried.....we thought he was dead.....then suddenly everything started up again. I think it is probably because his heart rate is only half the speed of ours that he is able to survive

something like this."

Catherine nodded her agreement not really caring how he had survived, only that he had.

"I'll go and get some help and then we'll carry him home." Father kissed them both again then asked, "Has he spoken at all?"

She shook her head. "No.....he hasn't even opened his eyes, but he is definitely conscious," she lowered her eyes before adding, "He's clawed himself rather badly though but I don't think it's anything too serious."

Father was a little intrigued, though more by what she was not telling him, but wisely he did not press her. "Well-----at least he's breathing steadily and seems to be holding his own." He touched her face, "There's hope, Catherine.....and right now that's all we need."



Vincent opened his eyes to a slightly nauseous and unnerving feeling of weightlessness as if he was floating in some kind of trance like state and not quite real. He looked around hesitantly seeing the amber half moon stained glass window, the candles, and the many books and assorted clutter that made up this rock walled chamber.

Curiously, he instinctively knew that he was safe and being cared for, but he could not rid himself of this vague indefinable wisp of awareness that he had been here before-----in a dream-----or another life-----but not this one.

He was not alone, curled up on the chair at the side of his bed was a beautiful young woman with a shawl around her shoulders,

clutching a warm quilt to her body. She was asleep with her head resting on a strategically placed pillow.

He stared at her with the same vague, but puzzling awareness that he shared some kind of affinity with this woman, though he was unable to grasp the reason for this assumption.

He watched her stir and open her eyes. Beautiful green eyes that soft focussed onto him, her whole face lighting up with pleasure at the sight of him.

"Vincent," her voice was barely a whisper, "You're awake." She uncurled her legs from under her body and sat forward causing the pillow at her back to slip to the floor.

He pondered, frowning as if weighing up this significant piece of information. He rolled the sound of his given name around his tongue seeming to try it out for size, and it came out a croaking questioning whisper. "Vincent?" He stared at her quizzically seeing her joy slowly fade to bewilderment. "Is that my name?"

"Don't you know?" Her question laced with fear and bringing her to sharp awareness.

"No." He shook his head, perceiving the worry lines furrowing her brow and her obvious concern. It suddenly occurred to him that she appeared to have gone many hours, possibly days, without sleep.

She pushed the quilt aside and moved to sit on the edge of the bed never taking her eyes from his face. "Vincent..... do you know who I am?" she asked softly.

He stared at her reaching into the confines of his mind and finding nothing but a blank wall. "I am sorry....." He shook his

shaggy head and looked down to watch her take hold of a large fur covered clawed hand. Her hands were almost childlike in comparison as she clutched this animal like limb close to her face. He frowned again, confused, feeling the beginnings of panic.

"My name is Catherine," she told him as she kissed the fur covered knuckles. "We have been so worried about you..... we thought you were never going to wake up."

Vincent watched almost mesmerized before snatching the fur covered clawed appendage from her grasp, realizing with shocked horror that it was part of himself. He lifted his other hand off the bed and stared in incredulous repulsion at his monstrous inhuman hands; shaking his head from side to side disbelieving and unable to comprehend how it could be. "No.... No," he whispered. "How can this be?" His eyes darting around the chamber as if searching for some means of escape from the nightmare that his hands conjured up in his mind. His panic and fear mounting with every passing second.

Catherine was up onto her knees at the side of his body. "Vincent.....Vincent," she soothed. "It's all right. Don't be afraid," she tried to hold him to her but he stiffened and refused to be drawn into her embrace, unable to take his terrified eyes from these hideous hands.

Catherine quickly realized that a different approach was needed and fast. She sat back on her heels, intuitively knowing not to touch him for the moment, fearing he might take flight. "Vincent, listen to me."

He seemed to ignore her as still he stared at his hands in disbelief.

"Vincent. Look at me," she ordered him in her best Catherine Chandler Assistant D.A. voice of authority. Her hands hovered over his quilt that covered thighs and she suppressed an overwhelming urge to shake him.

He raised his eyes, beautiful blue watery pools laced with fear and he released the breath he had been holding before resting his hands in front of him on the top of the blankets.

Her heart constricted painfully. "Oh my love, don't be afraid." Tears welled up inside her spilling down her face, her bottom lip tremulous. Her voice came soft almost a whisper filled with love. "Vincent, it is true.....you are different from other men, but to the many people who know you.....who love you.....your differences are beautiful, not terrible or repulsive.....and to me, you are the most beautiful man in the world. Her hands now rested on his body trying to convey through her touch all the love that she felt for him. It had no effect.

Vincent stared at her in disbelief, shaking his head from side to side as if she were mad.

Catherine gripped both his hands ignoring his protest.

"Vincent.....you have been so terribly ill for a long time .....and you still have a long way to go.....but you're home and you're safe....." Her voice caught in her throat as she drew his hands to her face and nuzzled into the fur, kissing his knuckles. "And you're loved," she told him determinedly. Her eyes swimming with tears met his. "We are going to take care of you.....and you are going to get better. You have to believe that."

They were both oblivious to the incessant tapping on the pipes and the rattle of a passing subway train high overhead. Vincent's

eyes never left her face. His chest rose and fell as if he had run a great distance, as he tried to make sense of what she was saying. *'He was different?'* He looked down at his hands, hideous hands that must surely belong to a monster, but to Vincent they still seemed curiously disembodied. Though he was beginning to feel slightly calmer and more relaxed the respite was to be short lived.

He finally lifted his hands to his face, tentatively touching and exploring his unique features. His blue eyes became larger as realization dawned and even Catherine could feel the horrified hysteria building within him once again. It came as no real surprise to her when he threw back his head and screamed in terror at discovering his imagined monstrous visage. His legs thrashed as Catherine scrambled speedily from the bed to the safety of the floor, covering her ears as the sound echoed around the wall of his chamber. What did surprise her was his unexpected human scream, not the roar that he would normally have made. But, whatever, it did summon instant help in the shape of Father, Mary and Pascal who hurried into Vincent's chamber with Father surprisingly in the lead.

Vincent was slumped against the pillows in his shocked distress, his chest still heaving and his eyes tightly closed. Catherine returned to kneel beside him sick with worry, her hands automatically soothing his chest.

Father moved forward as swiftly as his bad hip would allow. Pascal rushed past him to move the chair out of the way so that he could be closer to his son.

"What happened?" asked Father, his professional manner vying with the stomach churning fear that he felt.

Catherine remained where she was on Vincent's bed, but sitting



back on her heels looking around at them all, trembling in her own distress, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Father.....He doesn't know who he is.....or who I am and he's in a state of shock.....because of his hands..... because of how he looks. I don't think he can remember anything." She brushed her tears away with her fingers and Mary handed her a handkerchief. "Thank you, Mary," she smiled wanly at the gentle woman who was mother to them all.

Father lent over Vincent and felt his head which was hot. He checked his pulse and found it racing. Vincent's blue eyes opened and gazed warily up at him. Father batted down his own fear as he saw not the slightest hint of recognition in Vincent's eyes. He smiled at his beloved son, his voice encouragingly kind. "Vincent, do you know who I am?" Catherine shuffled back to allow Father space to sit on the edge of the bed. He covered Vincent's hands with his own.

Vincent shook his head in reply, then after considering his question further answered, "I would think that you are Catherine's father as that is what she called you." He stared down at this man's hand covering his own, giving him something else to wonder about.

Although Vincent had replied in unemotional monotone, Father felt some relief that his son had the capacity to reason and figure things out, even though his assumption had been incorrect.

"No Vincent," he smiled, "I am not Catherine's father..... though I rather think we have adopted one another." He reached out behind and squeezed Catherine's hand. "I am your father. We adopted each other when you were just a few hours old, after you had been found abandoned in the snow. For a third of a century

you have been the light of my life..... in all our lives," he finished as he patted his son's hand.

Vincent raised his eyes to Father's face, questioning the truth of his words. Father was relieved to see that some of his terror had abated for the moment.

"I want to see myself," said Vincent, but his apprehension was plain for all to see.

Father nodded and looked silently at Mary who turned quickly and disappeared out of the chamber to return a few moments later with a square mirror from the nearest washroom.

Catherine had not moved from her spot on the edge of the bed. She remained silent and unconsciously held her breath as Mary hesitantly gave the mirror to Vincent. He held it gingerly as if something within it was going to jump out and bite him, then cautiously he raised it up in front of his face.

His reaction was immediate and he showed all the fear of someone seeing him for the first time. He recoiled in horror. His lip curling with the revulsion of what he saw and the appearance of his fangs only added to what was to him the hideous nightmare of his face.

He began to scream, a human scream, "**Noooooooooo.....  
Nooooooooo,**" over and over again sitting bolt upright and flinging the mirror at the wall in front of him where it crashed and shattered into a thousand pieces. Father moved as quickly as he could out of the way, as his son's arms flayed out in his mindless tortured distress, and had Catherine not ducked she would have been knocked off the bed and probably injured in the process.

Catherine ignored all possible dangers and to the cries of fearful

warnings from Father and Mary who dare not come any closer, she fearlessly flung her whole body at Vincent's chest. She quickly scrambled over him until her knees rested at either side of him and fastened her arms tightly around his neck, refusing to let go as he tried to shake her off.

"Vincent.....Vincent.....no," she sobbed. "It's all right, my love, it's all right." She began kissing his neck and his face. "It's all right, it's all right," she kept repeating over and over again.

Father held his breath as he watched Vincent go to clasp Catherine to him and gasped as he saw his large clawed hands on the thin fabric of her shirt, but he need not have worried. Vincent's whole body shuddered as he expelled a heartrending cry of despair before loudly sobbing his heart out in Catherine's arms as she rocked him too and took the weight on her knees.

At last, Vincent's distress began to subside and his body relaxed as he slumped back exhausted onto the pillows taking Catherine with him, afraid to release her, feeling she was his only anchor in the sea of despair which surrounded him.

Sensing his need to keep her close, Catherine disengaged her aching legs and adjusted her position until she lay in the crook of his arm on the other side of the bed. She rested her head lightly on his chest, they were totally drained both physically and mentally.

Father motioned for Mary and Pascal to follow him as he turned and left the chamber, knowing there was nothing he could do for his son at the moment. Vincent already held in his arms the only person who had the power to heal his soul.



It was early evening when Father returned to Vincent's chamber. He stood in silent reverence at the sight of these two beloved people cocooned together in the large bed. Mary was organizing the preparation of a light snack for Cathernine, and some soup for Vincent, in the hope that she could tempt him to eat something.

After their earlier trauma both Vincent and Catherine had drifted into a healing sleep, but even in sleep some part of Vincent's subconscious had reached out and he had covered Catherine's body with his blanket and instinctively gathered her to him. It was Father's presence that woke them as he lowered himself to the bed.

"Vincent, are you awake?" He gently touched his shoulder. "Are you able to understand what I am saying? Because I do need to allay some of your fears."

Catherine yawned and eased herself up onto one elbow at the side of Vincent who also turned slightly, focusing his eyes on Father's face. He nodded with a degree of uncertainty, his eyes resembling large blue watery pools.

"Yes," He answered hesitantly.

"Good." Father rested his walking stick against the nearby chair. "Now, do you remember anything of what happened before waking up here in your chamber earlier today?"

"No.....nothing," his eyes seeming to search the chamber. "I am not even sure where I am." His voice trembled with uncertainty.

For the next few minutes Father relayed to him in a little more

detail of how he had come to them; a tiny scrap, wrapped in rags. A how he, Vincent, had become the focal point of their world. He told him all about this special place. A secret place below the streets of New York that was both his home and home to many others. He told him how he was loved and protected by so many people, including Catherine who supported Father with her silent acknowledgement throughout.

Father sat himself more squarely on the side of the bed, resting his arm lightly on his son's thigh. "Vincent.....you have suffered a terrible, terrible trauma. You have been to hell and back and your mind has simply closed down on everything that reminds you of your suffering. It is nature's way of healing." Father patted his hand. "I think that for the moment, Vincent, we will concentrate on your physical well being and try to build up the stamina you will need to cope as your memory returns."

Vincent pulled himself upright shuffling back and drawing up his knees. He held his head in his hands. He drew in breath and looked up, his eyes still seeming to seek a means of escape. Catherine was now sitting cross legged facing him and reached out to reassure him with her touch. Father adjusted his own position on the bed and waited for his son to speak.

"Father," he began, then he glanced at Catherine so close at his side. "You say that my min has closed down..... blocking out things too terrible to remember?"

"Yes, I think that just about sums it up," he answered encouragingly.

"But why then do I not **feel** mindless? Why do I know that I could pick up a book and read its contents or take a sheet of paper and a pen and write?"

Vincent looked down at his large alien hands, one of them now clasped firmly in both of Catherine's and resting in her lap. He held the other one up in front of him, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Father.....why do I feel nothing on the inside of what I look like on the outside? ***Tell me.***" His voice began to rise again in confused panic. "How do I cope with the way that I look? How do I cope with the fact that I am obviously ***not*** human?"

A long moment of silence hung in the air. It was Catherine who answered him, drawing up his large clawed hand to her face, nuzzling the fur and kissing his fingers. Vincent did not pull away and tears sprang unbidden to Father's eyes, so touched was he by Catherine's intimate gesture. She retained hold of his hands, her eyes gazing lovingly into his face, the front of her hair still tousled from sleep.

"Vincent, I know something of what you are feeling. Do you remember finding me in the park.....two years ago..... I was badly beaten and my face was slashed.....I would have died had you not brought me here. Father stitched my face up and you took care of me for ten days. Do you remember, Vincent?" She increased her grip on his hand to give hope to some reply.

He shook his head. A look of horrified amazement on his face as Catherine continued. Inexplicably, all the previous tension seemed to drain away from her because suddenly she understood exactly what he was feeling.

"I remember how I felt the first time I saw my face after the attack. I acted pretty much the same way you did and screamed my head off. I was terrified. I didn't know how to cope.....didn't want anyone to see me, not even the people I loved and who loved me. I wanted to go and hide away.....I didn't think I had the

strength to go on but.....you were with me, Vincent."

She sat gazing into his face, stroking the fur on the back of his hand and calmly telling him of what was to her, the turning point in her life.

"You told me I had survived, and that I **did** have the strength. You told me that what had happened would make me stronger and it did. You taught me to find myself, to know myself. You brought out in me the best part of who I am..... and Vincent, **you** have the strength to come through this too and it will make you stronger.....more able to cope with who **you** are. You have to believe that, Vincent."

They were all distracted by the sound of someone approaching and three pairs of eyes were drawn to the entrance to the chamber.

Mary entered with a tea tray and Samantha followed behind carrying a deep covered bowl held in a cloth as it was filled with soup. She placed it carefully on the table. Samantha was a pretty young girl not yet into her teens, but growing up fast. She always took great pride in her appearance and with her long dark hair and dark eyes she held the promise of becoming a beautiful young woman.

Father smiled at Mary's foresight, that a child's innocent chatter could do much to restore Vincent's equilibrium, so he moved from his spot on the edge of the bed retrieving his walking stick and limping over to sit at the table.

Samantha approached the bed. She had no reason to fear Vincent, he was her hero. She stood at the side of him, her hands reached out slowly to touch his face, gingerly fingering a stray lock



of his hair, her lips narrowing into a determined line.

"I'm sorry I shouted at you the other day, Vincent. I didn't know you were ill." She shook her head apologetically. It was something that had obviously troubled her.

Catherine suppressed a smile and quietly informed him. "This is Samantha, Vincent."

Vincent eased himself sideways, resting on his elbow, and his face softened with worry as he asked, "What did I do to make you shout at you, Samantha?"

She sat down at the side of him on the edge of his bed, her small face gazing earnestly up at him. "Because you missed our reading lesson, Vincent, and we were on the last chapter of '*Jane Eyre*', and it's not the same without you reading it to us.....you make it real and when you're teaching us English or Arithmetic or History, or anything else, you make it seem easy and interesting. If you're not there, Vincent..... it's.....it's.....**boring.**" She loudly enforced every syllable of the last word.

Vincent was dumbfounded. He gazed over to Father. "Do I do all of this?"

"You most certainly do, Vincent," Father beamed and so did Catherine and Mary, who was patiently waiting to serve the tea.

Vincent's eyes focused back onto Samantha's face. "And you don't mind the way I look?"

"Of course not, we love you, Vincent. You make us all feel safe." She hitched up her skirts and clambered onto the bed wrapping her arms around his neck, she hugged him tightly and planted a loud kiss on his cheek. "That's from all of us," she informed him

breathily and with such intensity that her bottom lip trembled. "Just get better, Vincent," her voice raised insistently, **"we all miss you,"** and she scrambled down from the bed and fled the chamber.



Catherine had been back at work for little more than two weeks, two long difficult and exhausting weeks. She had gone Below every night to see Vincent who was showing a marked improvement in both his physical and mental well being. Some of his memory had returned, though much was still vague and hazy. He was beginning to identify his surroundings, remembering familiar routes to favourite locations, recognizing friends and holding conversations with them. The most gratifying sight by far was to see him reading to the children.

Even so they all sensed that he was not the strong protective Vincent that they all knew and loved. He was vulnerable, almost childlike and the fear in his eyes was ever present.

The most heartbreaking reality was that Vincent had no recollection of either Father or Catherine, though he did retain what they told him and was aware of the purely instinctive knowledge of the love they all shared.

But as for the rest-----there was only silence.

One evening Father arranged to meet Catherine at her basement entrance. A meeting born of a mutual need to talk, to share their heartache and sum up the situation.

Over the past traumatic weeks, they had become very close, all rooted in respect, trust and the love of a special man. Father's son-----Catherine's life.

No father and daughter could have been closer than these two had become and Catherine's influence had had a mellowing effect on him.

"What can we do, Father?" Catherine asked, after they had hugged each other in welcome and companionably linked arms as they carefully made their way along the tunnels.

Father sighed, "I don't know, Catherine. Maybe it's too soon to **do** anything. I really think that he is still healing and to be honest, I'm afraid of even beginning to tell him all that had happened. It would be far easier on him if he could remember for himself.....and Catherine, there is so much we don't know.....so much damage that must have been done while Paracelsus was Below, impersonating **me**. We don't know what he filled Vincent's mind with."

"Yes," Catherine agreed, releasing Father's arm and gesticulating with her hands. "Paracelsus was certainly a master impersonator. I never suspected a thing until Vincent's revelation of what that monstrous man had indoctrinated his mind with. That he had not been born in the normal way, but had clawed his way out of his mother's womb, causing her death, and she only three months pregnant. I mean, who was he trying to kid? Any sane person would have laughed at the total impossibility of it all.....but, Vincent wasn't sane.....he'd already been pushed over the edge."

Father nodded. "I absolutely agree, Catherine. Paracelsus had very skillfully brain-washed him into believing whatever he put into his mind."

"Yes, and that, Father, was the moment that everything suddenly fell into place.....I remembered what happened last

Winterfest and I knew I had to find you." She hugged him fiercely. "Thank God Paracelsus hadn't killed you and thank God for friends like Elliot." Father nodded his agreement warmed by the mutual affection they shared and Catherine continued, "But maybe Vincent realized for himself that it wasn't you he'd killed. If you remember there was no look of surprise on his face when he turned to see us standing in the entrance to your study."

"Hmmmmmm.....maybe you're right....." Father suddenly paused, slowing his steps, he stopped and leaned heavily on his walking stick. "Catherine....." he hesitated again. "I know I'm changing the subject but have you any idea why Vincent should behave so totally out of character and smash his way into your apartment the way he did that night? I can't help thinking it must have been something in the extreme to cause him to behave that way.....towards you."

Catherine shook her head. "I don't know. The only thing I can tell you is that he kept repeating a part of a poem by Dylan Thomas over and over again."

"Can you remember it?" asked Father hopefully.

"I don't think I'll ever forget it." She stopped walking and turned to face him. She took a deep breath and began to recite.....

*'Though they go mad,  
They shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea,  
They shall rise again,  
Though lovers be lost*

*Love shall not,  
And Death shall have now dominion.'*

"Hmmmmmm," Father pondered. "You know Catherine.....or maybe you don't but.....during the second World War undercover radio operators were parachuted into France and Germany from England. They were often told to learn a poem or a verse. Something that struck them in a deep place. The poem was adapted to Morse Code so that the part of the poem transmitted back was in actual fact important information. Now.....the point I am trying to make is, if any of these courageous people were ever captured and tortured, then the poem often acted as a somewhat tenuous grip on their sanity.....a link with home and loved ones.....their link with reality." He raised his eyebrows quizzically at Catherine who then began to nod her head in understanding as she whispered.....

*"Though they go mad, they shall be sane....."*

"Yes," prompted Father.

*"Though they sink through the sea.....**of despair?**"* Her eyes questioned his, and she continued, *"They shall rise again."*

"Yes," Father's face softened, his eyes alight as he unconsciously clasped her hands.

*"Though lovers be lost.....love shall not....."* she looked up at him, hope shining in her eyes. "It isn't lost, is it, Father?"

"No."

Their excitement mounted.

*"And Death.....Paracelsus' death? shall have no dominion."*

He's not going to win, is he, Father?"

Their eyes were blazing in triumph and determination as they gripped and shook each other's hands, then hugged each other tightly.

"No, Catherine, he is not going to win." He smiled adoringly at this woman before him. "Thank you, Catherine."

"For what?"

"For loving my son."



Vincent was sitting quietly alone in his chamber when Father and Catherine entered. A book lay open on the table before him, but he was obviously lost in thought. They had decided to just go with their instincts as there seemed to be no right or wrong way to approach this problematic and complex situation. The only plan they had come up with to initiate what they were about to try and do was to go with care. It seemed logical for Catherine to commence the proceedings.

Their only real concern was that they could cause Vincent to regress even further behind his wall of fear.

"Hello, Vincent," she beamed cheerfully. "We're not disturbing you, are we?" she asked, kissing his cheek without waiting for his reply and was rewarded with a look of pleasure in his eyes at her affectionate gesture. She pulled up the foot stool and sat facing him, but to the side of his legs with her arms crossed and resting on his knees. She gazed up at him trying to project into him all the love that she felt.

Father limped past her lowering himself onto the edge of the bed,

realizing that for the first time in his life he was entrusting his son's well being to someone else. Vincent glanced across at him but made no comment.

"Vincent," Catherine spoke his name like a caress, reaching out to hold one of his hands. He responded with the returned pressure of his fingers, giving her the extra confidence she needed to continue. "Vincent.....you do know that Father and I would never hurt you."

He inclined his head, his face taking on a vaguely puzzled expression but agreeing with the question. "Yes," he nodded, "I know that."

Catherine drew closer to him. "Vincent, it breaks our hearts to see you this way, only a shadow of your former self.....we want to see you well and strong again.....I want my Vincent back.....Father wants his son back.....and to every single member of this community you mean so much. You are a father figure to many of the children, as well as a brother, friend and protector." She smiled. "Vincent, you make us **all** feel safe.....and as for the children, their need to feel safe is very important, **you** give them that." She paused smiling again. "Don't you know that this whole community revolves around **you?** Plus all the many helpers and friends who live out in my world. Good people who care about you.....and you care so much about them. **Vincent, that** is who you are."

He stared at her, wanting to believe her, but behind his blue eyes she could see the unknown fears lurking, and she grasped his other hand holding it firmly to her.

"Vincent.....all that has happened over the past few weeks.....all the horror, that you are afraid to



remember.....was an expertly engineered act of malevolent sabotage and brain washing. The kind of mental torture Father says they used on prisoners during the second World War." She grimaced. "In all wars.....to break men's spirits, to drive them insane. Vincent, that is what has been done to you and not only this past few weeks, but gradually over the past fifteen months or so."

Vincent looked from Catherine and then to Father, seeking confirmation of the wisps and fragments of memory that he was as yet unable to hold onto, Catherine's voice brought him back to awareness.

"Your confidence has been destroyed, your spirit broken and you have been filled with doubts about who you are..... indoctrinated into believing all manner of abhorrent things, made much more convincing **because** of who you are."

She lifted one of his hands and turning the palm uppermost, kissing it softly. Vincent sat, unmoving, unblinking, watching this beautiful woman before him almost lulling him into an hypnotic trance.

Catherine gazed up at him with all the love she felt for him evident in her eyes. "These hands are caring hands..... gentle hands. These hands are **my** hands." She held his gaze. "Vincent, these hands can give love.....remember, Vincent.....remember love?"

She could see him trying to search the dark places in his mind. She could see that he was trying. Catherine glanced in Father's direction and he nodded his encouragement, so she continued her gently nudging of his memory.

"You have to believe there is nothing terrible inside you. You have the most beautiful spirit, and generous heart of anyone I have ever known. Do you think so many people and so many children could love you, care about you, if that were not so? Do you feel that there is any fear of you in anyone here Below.....or in the little ones who scramble onto your knees and beg you to tell them a story?"

She waited with baited breath for his reply, none too sure that he would reply at all but at last he did. "No," his voice was almost a whisper, and she released the breath she had been holding.

"Then trust in that, Vincent. Please," she pleaded.

He inclined his head in acquiescence. "I will try, Catherine."

Father moved over from his place on the bed. He pulled a chair from the table and placed it in front of Vincent, close to the other side of his knees. He sat down laying his stick across the table before affectionately patting Vincent's arm.

Vincent looked from one to the other. "I feel surrounded.

Father smiled and so did Catherine, but it was Father who spoke.

"Try to think of it as being surrounded by love. We want to help you.....help you to accept that all your fears are groundless and don't hold water."

Vincent nodded, trying to relax. Father continued, taking his time and speaking clearly in his familiar clipped British accent.

"Catherine and I could relate to you much of the horrendous torture you have been subjected to.....both mentally and physically over the past weeks. In fact, I agree with Catherine that it has been building up for more than twelve months. It was all

cunningly executed to gradually achieve the desired effect.....but Vincent, it would be easier on you to remember at your own speed. There is much that even we don't know. However, we think we have found something that may help you.....help you to begin your recovery. Something to unlock your memory."

Father's eyes met with Catherine's, both of them feeling a tremor of anticipation as she began to explain. "Vincent, I think we have found the very thing you tried to hold onto, something that struck you in a deep place." He inclined his head to Catherine who took up from Father.

"Vincent, I know you don't remember but you were taken ill in my apartment....."

Vincent frowned bewildered, so Catherine continued.

"I nursed you there for three days, you were very ill, but during that time you kept repeating a poem the same few lines over and over again. It's by Dylan Thomas.

*'Though they go mad,*

*They shall be sane,*

*Though they sink through the sea,*

*They shall rise again.....'*

She recited it slowly, her voice almost a whisper and Vincent became agitated, gripping Catherine's hand tightly, and as she continued, he joined in.....

*'Though lovers be lost,*

*Love shall not,*

*And Death shall have no dominion.'*

He gazed at them both as if in some kind of trance-like state and repeated in a flat unemotional tone, "*And Death shall have no dominion.*" He shook his shaggy head in an effort to free himself from his reverie, looking from Father and then to Catherine suddenly showing a sense of awareness that neither had seen in his face for a long time.

"I don't know.....but I think I would like to be alone.....please, leave me," he pleaded.

They both rose to their feet. Catherine kissed his cheek and Father, having retrieved his walking stick pressed a kiss onto the top of his head. "Vincent, you know where we are if you should need us," said Father.

"Yes.....But I think this is something I must do battle with alone. Catherine, Father.....thank you for giving me the key.....I have the feeling that it is already unlocking a few doors.....but at the moment I don't feel I have the courage to do any more than just glimpse inside."

Father nodded his understanding and Catherine clasped his hand in both of hers not wanting to let him go.....wanting to share his pain and ease his uncertainties.

Vincent regarded them both with clear blue eyes feeling their reluctance to leave him. "It is all right," he assured them. "I know where I am now and I know that I am not.....alone."

//

Hamilton Lodge was a rather splendid and beautifully designed mansion. It was built at the turn of the century in the style of an

English manor house, standing in fifteen acres of landscaped parkland and gardens. Providing the roads out of New York were reasonably unclogged by commuter traffic, the journey there took little more than an hour.

Vivien had tried to find out as much as she could about the people who had arranged her adoption, before she departed for her Saturday morning appointment with Christopher Hamilton. She had been both hindered and surprised by the total lack of information on the background of the adoption agency.

They had a small registered office downtown, an unpretentious establishment that did not advertize its services. Vivien had the distinct impression that the office was only ever used for prearranged meetings and was left unoccupied for the rest of the time.

She was interviewed at length in the small dingy back office by two equally undistinguished middle-aged men and a pleasant woman in her sixties. She had to furnish all manner of documentation to identify who she was, and then when they were satisfied, she was politely told that they would be in touch.

As she stepped outside the building, to be enveloped into the noise and hustle of New York City, Vivien felt as if she had been interrogated. She felt almost punch drunk. Security was one thing she thought, but this was like trying to break into Fort Knox.

A few days later a letter was delivered to her at the hospital. The young man who gave into her hands had been waiting for more than an hour for her to come out of the operating theatre just to perform this task.

Even the envelope came as a surprise. It had quality written all

over it as had the letter enclosed, with the richly embossed picture of Hamilton Lodge at its head. It pleased her to learn that everything was still owned and run by the same family. It had been handed down through the generations and their impeccable, though unproclaimed reputation had stretched back unblemished since its concept in 1902.

Vivien had no way of knowing that she was about to embark on a very special journey, one that would not only reveal the secrets of her past but change her life forever.



On Vivien's arrival at Hamilton Lodge she was more than a little impressed with their attention to security. Although it was maintained in such a friendly courteous manner, one could be forgiven for being totally unaware of its existence. It was only on closer inspection that she noticed the whole place was discreetly monitored by a TV video security system as well as being particularly well staffed.

The atmosphere was so wonderfully warm and welcoming and any adult she encountered addressed her as Dr. Hayward. Obviously, they had done their homework too.

Vivien was shown into a rather grand, but very comfortable study with large French windows overlooking the gardens and was instantly struck by the one complete wall which was entirely covered with photographs of children. The third wall was lined with countless leather bound volumes and she moved across the room to scrutinize some of the titles. The open fire burning in the ornately carved fireplace completed the feeling of homely luxury.

Vivien smiled as she heard footsteps behind her and turned to be

greeted by a beaming jovial faced man whose hairline had receded out of sight and his proportions would best be described as large. He towered above her and she placed him in his late fifties. Vivien warmed to him instantly and her naturally friendly personality shone out as he approached her.

"Mr. Hamilton, hello." She knew it could be no other.

"Dr. Hayward." He welcomed her, enveloping her proffered hand in his large grasp like a long lost boyfriend. "Your reputation precedes you and yes I am Christopher Hamilton. Come, let us sit down. I'm glad that you managed to find us all right."

Vivien nodded and smiled in reply momentarily lost for words, she was overawed by his rich vibrant voice which inspired an air of trust and safety. He led her over to the two comfortable armchairs positioned either side of a small coffee table with a spectacular view of the picturesque gardens. Once she was seated he picked up a shiny portfolio from the large mahogany desk that dominated the room before lowering himself down opposite her in the other armchair which groaned in protest beneath his weight.

"Well now, Dr. Hayward, before I hand this to you I hope I can persuade you to accept my invitation to stay for lunch, and allow me to show you around afterwards. I'm sure you will find it interesting and I would appreciate your comments."

Vivien's face lit up, "I'd be honoured.....thank you. I don't often get the chance to see how the other half live." realizing instantly that she had spoken with a flippancy she had not intended.

His face took on a crestfallen almost disappointed expression. He sighed, "Dr. Hayward.....children's suffering, for whatever reason is not something peculiar only to the poor, but sometimes

universal and goes right across the board."

"Yes," Vivien blushed in embarrassment. "Yes, and I know that better than most, Mr. Hamilton.....but sitting here, amongst all this splendour thinking about what I sometimes have to see and deal with at St. Vincent's.....well, it's easy to forget that we are both fighting the same battle."

He rested the portfolio on his lap and smiled, his eyes sincere, "My name's Chris."

She grinned and visibly relaxed. "Vivien."

"Right, Vivien, I'm sure you're impatient to get down to the special business that has brought you here." He handed the portfolio over to her, hesitating before releasing it. "Vivien, before you open this and read its contents, I think I should tell you that about two years ago we had a visit from the woman who gave birth to you." He had chosen his words carefully. Vivien stared at him, shocked into silence. Chris released the folder into her hands and continued, "She was suffering from an advanced stage of terminal cancer at the time and did not want to die without leaving some written evidence of the true story of your adoption.....in the event of you ever wishing to pursue your roots."

Vivien sat gripping the portfolio with both hands, her face tense and hanging onto his every word.

"The only thing I could promise her was that we would keep this safe with your records in the hope that you would some day seek us out and read its contents." He sat quietly waiting for her reaction.

Vivien was momentarily stunned but asked, "Did you see her? What was she like?" Her mounting excitement was beginning to



make its presence felt.

Chris smiled and without answering her questions rose to his feet. "Vivien, I have a small private sitting room through here, where you can be undisturbed. I have no idea what is contained in your portfolio but I suspect it will furnish you with a history and the answers to all of your questions. Come, I'll have coffee and biscuits sent into you."

In the quiet of the comfortable sitting room with the morning sunshine streaming through the window Vivien kicked off her shoes, curled up on the couch and with a racing heart opened the surprisingly bulky portfolio.

On the top was a letter simply addressed to, *'My Daughtler'*. With trembling hands she opened it up and began to read.....

*I write this, in the forlorn hope that some  
day you will read it. I do not beg your  
forgiveness.....God knows, I have never been  
able to forgive myself, for all that I allowed  
to happen, all those many years ago.....because  
of my weakness.....because I could never find  
the courage to stand up for what I believed in.....  
for who I believed in. You see, it wasn't only  
you I deserted. I deserted your father too.....  
I am afraid I don't have the words to tell you  
how much I loved your father.....only that I never*

*stopped loving him. His name was Jacob Wells,  
and he was a brilliant doctor and research physician.....*

**A wondrous smile flitted across Vivien's face with the realization that she had unknowingly followed in her father's footsteps. She focused her eyes back onto the page and continued to read.**

*We were so very much in love, Jacob and I.....  
it always seemed so special from the very beginning.....  
something that was meant to be. We married in the  
summer of 1951, and my parents were so proud of their  
new son in law.....my husband.*

*In the autumn of the following year, the powers that  
be began testing atomic bombs in the Pacific. It was  
Jacob who discovered what catastrophic damage such  
explosions could cause, and how lethal the fallout;  
both to the people and to the land. Something we know  
all too well, today.....and they were pulling our armed  
forces out there, to watch the bombs go up.*

*Unimaginable now.....but not then.*

*The Atomic Energy Commission accused your father of  
subversive activities, and that they were Communist  
inspired. He was forced to retire from the Chillenden*

*Research Institute; stripped of his Medical License,  
and was blacklisted by the UnAmerican Activities Committee.*

*I have enclosed all the press cuttings, and the  
transcript from the trial. Alan Taft, one of his  
closest friends, risked his own career, to defend him.  
I loved your father.....never believed for one moment  
that he was guilty of anything, except perhaps, caring  
too much. My own father was a very rich and powerful  
man, that very few dared to argue with. I was a grown  
woman, but in his presence I did as I was told.....  
I never found the courage to stand up to him, even  
though it broke my heart. I was sent to Paris, away  
from it all, leaving Jacob with just a letter.*

*My father, with all his power had the marriage  
annulled.....and me, gullible fool that I was, did not  
even realize that I was pregnant until more than two  
months had passed.*

**Vivien's heart went out to this woman. She did not condemn her;  
could not condemn her. She carried on reading.**

*At least discovering that I was pregnant helped  
me to find my courage and I defied my parents and*

*came back to New York to find Jacob. It was not an easy task, I had to employ a private investigator.*

*I had money and jewelry that I could sell, and I thought we could go to another state, and begin again. To my horror, and my disgrace I was told that Jacob had been evicted the week before from a squalid apartment in a very seedy part of town, and no one had seen him since.*

*We were in the midst of one of the coldest winters we had known for many years, and I wanted to die.*

*If it had not been for you, growing inside me, I would have curled up in a snow drift and done just that.....but you were the only part of Jacob that I had left. I knew Jacob could never survive this severe weather, alone on the streets. There was nowhere for him to go.....even his friends seemed to have deserted him. Heartbroken, consumed with guilt and despair, I trailed back to my hotel; only to find that my parents had followed me back from Paris. They were horrified when I told them*

*I was pregnant, and insisted that I book into a private clinic and have my baby.....you.....terminated.*

*We had a terrible fight which seemed to go on for days, but I would not give in.....oh, that I had found that kind of strength for Jacob.*

*Finally, I agreed to put you up for adoption, with an agency exclusive only to the very rich; with an impeccable reputation, and based in New York.*

*You were born in New York, but being wealthy, we had the means to be discreet.*

*I will not discuss the extent of my suffering.....*

*I cannot find the words.....but I hope you were adopted by people who loved you.....as I, have hoped and prayed every single day that has passed, that you are having.....a happy life.*

*My parents died some years ago; bitter and broken hearted because in hindsight they knew that they were wrong. They forced me to give you away, their only grandchild.....I dread to think what their alternative would have done to us all.*

*I have put together a photo album, and I have  
been able to trace back as far as your great  
grandparents, on my side. Your father is British;  
and with the information you will find here, you will  
be able to discover your roots.*

*I do not know how much time I have left, and I am  
sorry. The pain that I feel for all the wasted years,  
cannot be put into words. I just hope and pray, that  
the wreck of my memories will somehow see the light  
of day.*

*Never doubt that I have always loved you, even  
though I only held you for but a few short moments.....  
on the morning of June 10th 1953.*

*Mother*

Four o'clock, on that same Saturday afternoon, found Catherine still at her desk in the strangely quiet DA's office. The few who had ventured into work on this Saturday morning had left at lunch time and Joe had not been in all day.

Because Catherine's mind had been on other things she had made a stupid mistake that week and a guilty man had gone free. Joe had been furious and said things in anger, some of which were true and had reduced her to tears. Something that seemed to happen easily of late and they had hardly spoken for two days.

For Catherine, working over was her small act of penance in the vain hope of clearing her desk before the weekend or at least what there was left of the weekend, and an attempt to show Joe that she was at least making an effort. But Joe was not even here to witness it.

She heard familiar footsteps along the silent empty corridor and smiled grimly. '*Speak of the Devil*,' she thought.

"What's up, Radcliffe? Ain't you got no home to go to?"

She could hear the warmth of friendship in his voice and looked up to meet his eyes. "I'm sorry, Joe. I know I've been a pain in the butt these past few weeks." Then for some uncountable reason the tears welled up inside her again.

"Hey, kiddo.....You could always tell me about it.....I'm always here." He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his pants and moved around her desk.

"Always....." she echoed as the tears spilled down her face remembering someone else she said, ***Always***.

Joe stood at the side of her chair and in a spontaneous gesture gathered her into his arms, trying not to admit how much he was enjoying it. Catherine wished that she could just pour it all out, knowing Joe would be the most likely friend she would confide in, but she dare not, though she did realize that the time had come to attempt to tell him something.

"Joe," she pulled away from him and tugging more tissue out of the box on her desk and blowing her nose. He waited for her to speak. "Joe.....some day I hope I will be able to tell you everything. I would dearly love to share it all with you, but.....right now, I can't." She looked up into his face and her

shoulders slumping in defeat. "The only thing I can tell you is that I'm not in any trouble.....it's personal." she drew breath. "It's the man I have in my life.....who has been in my life for more than two years.....His name is Vincent and I love him."

"Huh," Joe grunted, hitching himself onto the corner of her desk. "So, what's the problem? Hey, is this guy, Vincent, messing you around?"

"No.....no, Joe, nothing like that. The feeling is entirely mutual but.....you see, he'd been very sick.....at one point we thought he would die.....and his recovery is taking such a long time. I'm spending every spare moment with him. I stay over most nights, getting up at the crack of dawn to get to work....."

"And you're exhausted and in great danger of cracking up yourself?"

She sighed, "Yes.....yes, I am. I know I am....."  
Catherine pulled another tissue from the box and dabbed at her nose.

**"Jesus, Cathy."** Joe jumped to his feet turning slightly and resting his hands, palms down, flat on her desk. He leant forward, his face only inches from hers. "Cathy, why do you insist on trying to be **Wonder Woman?** You are just as entitled to sick leave as anyone else.....and anyway when did you last take a proper vacation for God's sake?"

"I don't like being away, Joe," she sniffed miserably.

Joe took her arm and gently hauled her to her feet, grabbing her coat off the stand and draping it around her shoulders. "Right, Catherine Chandler. I am ordering you to take two weeks leave."



She opened her mouth to protest but Joe silenced her. "And one word from you, Radcliffe, and you're on suspension. Two weeks from Monday. I want you back here, firing on all cylinders.....because then....." he smiled sweetly, "I'm going to work your butt off." He picked up her purse and briefcase and thrust them into her arms before firmly guiding her out of the office. Catherine was in not fit state to argue ad when Joe offered to drive her home she accepted gratefully.



It was some time later when Catherine lay back in a warm herbal bath with the bubbles up to her chin, closing her eyes in an effort to relax away the tensions of the day, before getting ready to go Below. But all she ever thought about in these quiet moments was Vincent. Replaying every second through in her mind's eye-----reliving the feel of him----- of being close to him-----making love to him in the cave below the catacombs.

She had tried to imagine what it would be like to love him, to be loved by him. From the very beginning there had always been that overwhelming physical attraction between them, intangible, undeclared but undeniable and they were both equally aware of its existence. Somehow just few short moments in his company was worth all the aloneness, all the secrets and all the sacrifices she had to make to ensure his safety, and her own. Also guarding the secret to ensuere the safety of his world Below. A world built by Father to protect his son and she had become so much a part of it.

Since her mother's death, all those years ago, home had never felt like home anymore. Something indefinable had always been missing and all her father's attempts to recapture that special

atmosphere had never quite succeeded.

Catherine had spent most of her life searching for that elusive something that had been snatched away from her so cruelly in her childhood. In Vincent she had found all she had lost, the comfort and safety, the love and trust, the acceptance and understanding, and an overwhelming need to be part of him, flesh of one flesh. She had searched deep within her soul to find the slightest germ of aberration to anything that Vincent was but there was nothing. She had watched him slash and kill men who threatened her life, and the lives of the people he loved. She had taken those hands, still covered in blood, and felt not a trace of revulsion towards him, and she had gone to him when no part of him would answer to the name of Vincent, because whatever happened, whatever came, that was where she belonged with him. He was her life.....and she was his.

Catherine smiled, contented knowing that Vincent was slowly recovering and at the possibility of a new life already growing within her.



It was just after four o'clock, across the city and Vivien pulled up into the driveway of Peter's house. The gravel crunched noisily beneath her feet as she made her way to the front porch and rang the doorbell seeing movement from within almost instantly.

Vivien was so full of the days events and monumental revelations, she knew she had to share it with someone or she would burst.

Peter answered the door, his shirt open at the neck and sleeves rolled up, which was just about as casual as Peter would ever be. "Vivien," he greeted her warmly, "Do you know, I've been half

expecting you all afternoon. How did it go? Did you find anything out? Come in, come in."

Peter knew how important this day was to her and he could see from her face that it had been successful, and suddenly realizing that he had not allowed her to get a word in, they stood grinning at each other. Peter took her arm and drew her inside.

"Come through to the sitting room.....here, give me your coat.....what will you have to drink?"

She pushed the portfolio into his arms. "Here, you have a look at this. You may even have known of them.....I'll go make us some tea. Anything stronger and I'd go into orbit."

Vivien was familiar with Peter's home. She had spent many happy hours there talking 'shop' with him and socially with others. They were close comfortable friends and their friendship had never ventured beyond those boundaries.

While she waited for the water to boil Vivien decided she felt peckish and peered into the refrigerator spotting a piece of cheesecake sitting there all alone on a plate.

"Peter." she called out, "would you miss this piece of cheesecake if I ate it?"

There was no reply from the sitting room, so crossing the hallway she stuck her head around the door. "Peter?"

She heard him gasp, followed by a shocked whisper, "Oh, my God."

Vivien moved into the room. Peter was sitting on the couch holding the letter in one hand and staring at the album that lay open on his knees. His mouth had dropped open and his face

drained of all colour. She knelt down in front of him.

"Peter, what's wrong? Tell me? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

He clasped his hand over his mouth to stop it trembling, staring at her while he gathered together his riotous thoughts and emotions before eventually realizing just what a miracle all this was.

The tension seemed to visibly drain away from him and he shook his head and began to chuckle. Putting the letter down he reached for and grabbed both of her hands. His voice was thick with emotion as he began to speak.

"Vivien.....Jacob Wells.....your father, has been my dearest friend since our days in medical school. He is a very special and wonderful man."

His still handsome face crinkled into a grin of confirmation as he waited for his words to sink in.

"Peter....." she whispered, her brain refusing to function for a moment until she eventually grasped what he had said.

"But.....why don't I know him if he is such a close friend?"

Peter expelled a loud breath. "Well.....in that fearful winter of 1952, when Jacob was evicted from that squalid apartment, he almost froze to death on the streets. He would have perished too had not someone taken him somewhere that was warm and dry.....and safe." Peter paused, waiting for Vivien to make herself more comfortable before he continued. "At the time I was in England and communications not being what they are today, I knew nothing of this and anyway, it was something they were trying to hush up. Vivien, that night, a woman called Grace and a few of her friends took your father to a secret place, that not many

people knew about.....and this place has remained a closely guarded secret for almost forty years."

Vivien pulled herself up onto the couch, and sitting cross legged faced Peter, her face full of expectation, waiting for him to continue.

"That night all those years ago your father deserted a world that had betrayed him, robbed him of all he held dear..... and he never returned to it."

The boiling kettle was heard whistling away frantically in the kitchen. Peter grasped her hands grinning, "Come on, we'll both go and finish making the tea.....then I'll tell you as much as I can."

He was still shaking his head at the improbability of it all as he poured boiling water into the teapot, both of them silently mulling over their own thoughts. They remained where they were sitting at the kitchen table, nursing their beakers of tea, Vivien's request for cheesecake forgotten.

Peter was the first to speak. "Do you know, Vivien, when something like this happens, it's enough to make anyone believe in miracles? There is certainly nothing stranger than life." He chuckled again shaking his head in disbelief.

"Come on, Peter," Vivien urged him. "Stop talking in riddles. Just ***tell me.***"

"Well.....there is one thing for sure. If we had not become friends, ***you*** would never have found your father. You see, there are only a handful of people who know who he is..... who he was. More importantly, know where he has spent the past forty years. Vivien, as far as the authorities are concerned.....Jacob

Wells is dead."

Vivien was once again reduced to a stunned silence.

"And I'll tell you something else," his face was beaming as his excitement mounted, "Dr. Vivien Hayward, **you** have got two brothers."

"Two brothers?" she echoed, her mouth dropping open.

Peter nodded, unable to stop grinning, his eyes sparkling.

"Devin is about a year younger than you and is of course your half brother. He's a likeable rogue who can turn his hand to anything. Why, once when he was stuck out in the wilds of Australia, he even successfully performed a caesarean section by following instructions from a medical book. We fear he will never settle down, but his heart is in the right place..... and then there's Vincent....."

Vivien watched Peter's eyes soft focus, as he smiled a smile that spoke of his deep affection for her unknown brother. He drew in a deep breath. His captivated audience, wanting to pinch herself to make sure she was not dreaming, and hanging onto his every word, beaker of tea forgotten, she waited.

"Vincent is special to us all. He was found, just a tiny scrap of humanity abandoned in the snow during the winter of '56 behind St. Vincent's Hospital.....hence the name.

"We thought he'd never live, but he did, and Jacob, raised him as his own son. Vincent has grown into one of the finest men I have ever known.....that any of us have ever known, but .....he is the main reason why this place of safety has remained just that for all these years. You see, Vivien, Vincent is different....."

Peter did not elaborate any further on Vincent's differences, assuring Vivien that it would be far better for her to wait and see for herself.

Vivien also agreed that it would be better, more thoughtful, for Peter to break the news to his lifelong friend and she gladly relinquished her now treasured portfolio into his care.

Peter suggested that the whole project would be made easier if he could enlist the help of a special friend, and it was with some feelings of relief when Catherine answered his call just after six o'clock.



Peter made his way Below alone, using Catherine's basement entrance but first tapped out a message for someone to meet him and guide him in.

Vivien waited with Catherine in her apartment, agreeing to give him an hour's start, before following him down.

After the shock of Peter's introduction and subsequent explanation, Catherine had been left in a state of high excitement with Vivien full of questions that Catherine was only too pleased to answer, but at the same time she, like Peter, was reluctant to steal Father's thunder. Vivien, being the kind of woman she was, patiently accepted that she would have to wait.

Catherine and Vivien, by coincidence, had met socially on a couple of occasions over the years, so they were not total strangers and now both hoped they would become friends.



The tapping on the pipes heralded Peter's arrival and Father,

delighted though puzzled at this unexpected visit, set off to meet him instantly sensing by his loyal friend's nervous excitement that something was afoot. After their initial warm greeting, they proceeded in frustrated silence to Father's chamber.

Peter sat him down, begging him to listen whilst he relayed all the events that had led up to his dear friend and colleague, Dr. Vivien Hayward arriving on his doorstep earlier in the day. He placed the shiny portfolio onto Father's desk in front of him and indicated that he should read its contents and be prepared for a shock.

Father looked at the mysterious portfolio, then stared questioningly up into Peter's face before picking up his spectacles and perching them on his nose.

Peter sat quietly opposite him, hardly daring to breathe, waiting in tense eagerness for his friend's reaction. He watched Jacob's stunned expression and the colour drained from his face in disbelief; followed by an incredulous questioning muttering, "Peter.....Margaret?"

He frowned then looked up, his colour returning as suddenly as it had left, staining his face and his eyes sparkling with tears. He whispered in shocked wonder and amazement, "I have a daughter?"

Peter grinned and relaxed. "Yes."

"And you know her? She is a doctor? What's she like, Peter? When can I meet her?" Father's list of exciting questions poured out in a jumble.

Peter grabbed a chair and went to sit at the side of him leaning forward. "Jacob.....your daughter and I have been friends for fourteen years, ever since she first came to St. Vincent's. For the



past four years she has been in charge of Pediatrics." He grinned at the mixture of emotions flitting over his dear friend's face.

"Catherine will be here with Vivien in a little while.....we thought it best that I give you some kind of warning before she came to meet you."

Father nodded, so elated he was lost for words, not knowing where to start, or what to say, until finally asking the obvious question again. "What's she like, Peter?"

Peter had anticipated his request and withdrew a photograph from his wallet. It had been taken on the ward. Vivien was sitting cross legged on the floor laughing and surrounded by children. He handed it over and Father gasped, "Dear God, she's the image of Margaret as a young woman."

"Yes. I saw something familiar about her when she first came to St. Vincent's fourteen years ago, but I could never put my finger on what it was."

Father suddenly frowned. "But why didn't Margaret tell me..... at the end?" His shoulders slumped. "Surely she could have told me during those final seven days we spent here together?"

He gazed back down at the photograph in his hand, but the frown remained on his face and Peter attempted to rationalize Margaret's decision not to tell him. "Jacob, what would have been the point? There was nothing you could have done..... nothing she could have done. It would only have caused you both pain at a time that was so precious. Just be grateful that Vivien wished to seek you out.....wished to find out where she came from." Peter rose from his chair to stand beside his friend and rest a reassuring hand on his shoulders.

Father smiled, and the frown disappeared. "Yes, of course, you are right. I just wish....." but then he frowned again and inclined his head, listening with intense concentration.

"Jacob.....what's the matter?" a worried frown creasing Peter's brow as he gently shook him.

Father held his hand up in consternation as he deciphered the message that was being relayed on the pipes from some distant source.



Although Catherine had become quite proficient at sending simple messages over the pipes, decoding messages was a different matter, which was just as well because as she and Vivien were making their way through the tunnels from her basement entrance, the metallic tapping of messages from all quarters of the subterranean world were homing in on Pascal's pipe chamber with the ominous news that they had all lost track of Vincent's whereabouts.

Since Vincent had become more mobile, though obviously not fully recovered, the whole community had taken it upon themselves to covertly watch out for him, they hoped without him being aware of the fact. Somehow, he had slipped through their net and disappeared not only out of range of their pipe system of communication, but also the sentries outposts.

The call went out and the whole network was systematically checked, narrowing down the possibilities. Mouse and Jamie had been dispatched from his last confirmed sighting. Mouse had the uncanny ability of being able to track Vincent down wherever his wanderings took him, and he and Jamie worked well together.



Vincent's memory was returning on the wings of a poem, intensified in the silent stillness far removed from the incessant tapping of the pipes. In his world Below.

The physical act of walking, climbing, investigating and crawling into confined spaces was all therapeutic to his awakening awareness, as doors began to unlock in his memory, opening up to his scrutiny.

Conversations and events played themselves back in his mind in crystal clarity, enhanced by the silent blackness that surrounded him.

He conceded that Paracelsus had been the master of his evil craft, that he had used expert skill and cunning in infiltrating his mind to locate his Achilles heel and rendering him susceptible to all his deranged, heinous and illogical suggestions. Paracelsus had systematically driven him over the edge of sanity into those dark alien reaches of his subconscious that held not an atom of dignity, or compassion, or human understanding, not even intelligence, just darkness, blood, primeval madness and.....

*"Death.....shall have no dominion,"* he whispered in the darkness, *"Though lovers be lost, love shall not....."* His feet slowed and stilled as more images flitted through his mind's eye. Images of....."Catherine?" he questioned softly, a frown creasing his forehead as the images became clearer. *'Catherine naked. He was.....naked. Had he dreamt it? Or, had it happened?*

He stood, his heart beating loudly in his ears and beads of perspiration breaking out on his brow, as the dreamlike quality of

the images disappeared and took on substance. His frown deepened. '*Catherine had loved him.*' In that cave, devoid of all human dignity, she had loved him, loved the creature there had never been; stripping away every last vestige of clothing and sacrificed herself to the beast within.

He gasped and cried out, "**Noooooooooo.....**" He hurled himself forward and staggered along the tunnel, gradually gaining momentum, whether running towards something, or away from something he did not know. His mind so plagued by his inherent fear of hurting Catherine, killing Catherine, and yet.....she had made herself completely vulnerable to him. Trusted in him, and loved him, loved **him**.....And all that he was.

Vincent charged on blindly, ignoring the crashing contacts his body made with the uneven tunnel walls. His natural instincts guiding him safely under low roofs, sure footed over potholes and rock strewn tunnel floors slicked and puddled with water seepage, he ran on.



Father was up on his feet pacing the floor with his limping gait and stabbing hard with his walking stick with each step, his mind in a state of flux. A mixture of fear because his son was missing, and nervous excitement at the prospect of meeting his daughter.

Peter sat quietly beside the desk, knowing full well that his friend would quickly run out of steam. Which he did and thinking out aloud, sounding more convincing than he actually felt, he looked at Peter and said, "Mouse and Jamie had been dispatched in search of Vincent. There is nothing to be done until we hear from them.....and Mouse will find him..... he's never failed before."

"Jacob," Peter asked patiently. "What exactly is it you're worried about? Vincent has always gone off exploring alone .....frequently away for days at a time.....and he unfailingly returns safely."

"Yes, I know that, Peter.....even when he was young..... but Vincent is not yet himself." Father began to pace again, a habit he seemed to have picked up from Vincent. "I am only worried that his own unique instincts have been impaired by the trauma he has suffered. It's a maze of tunnels down there much of it uncharted, even by Vincent.....dear God, I must try and be calm." He stilled his pacing and hovered in the centre of his chamber. "I'm probably allowing my imagination to run away with me and getting myself into a state about nothing."

He forced his mind back to the happy circumstances that Peter had presented him with. He looked up. "When did you say Catherine would be arriving with my daughter?" He grinned suddenly repeating the words, "My daughter," as if trying them out for size. "Peter, I hope she won't be disappointed in me. What if she doesn't approve of what we have built down here.....and how will she react to Vincent?"

As all the doubts and uncertainties crowded in on him, Father was unaware that Catherine and Vivien were standing behind him at the top of the steps. Vivien's face was a study of dumbfounded amazement, while Catherine was grinning from ear to ear.

They were both dressed in comfortable jogging suits and sneakers with warm quilted jackets. Vivien's outfit was on loan from Catherine, as she had not had the time or the inclination to go home and change. Fortunately, they both took the same size shoes and were of similar build.

At Peter's silent indication Father turned around pausing briefly before limping forward towards them. Catherine came down the stairs reaching for his hand and squeezed it before giving him an affectionate kiss on his cheek.

"Hello Father," she beamed, thrilled for him. "You never expected anything like this, did you?" Father released the breath he was holding and hugged her to him in reply.

Vivien cautiously descended the step, her face still a picture of rapt wonderment, her lips slightly parted. Her eyes seeming to be everywhere before coming to rest on the kindly welcoming face of the man before her dressed in the strange, yet oddly correct garb of this world below the city. The man who was her father. The man who had loved her mother so much, yet risked it all to stand alone because of something he believed in.

Her eyes filled with tears which spilled over at the magnitude of what little she knew, yet glad and grateful that against all the odds fate had brought them together.

She stood before him feeling suddenly shy, "I.....I don't know what to say to you," she sniffed and smiled.

"Neither do I," admitted Father, his own shyness and emotion matching hers. "We will just have to take one step at a time." He smiled, liking what he saw and conscious that they had both begun to relax. "You.....are the image of your mother, she was very beautiful and so full of life....." he hesitated momentarily, the bittersweet memories of those last seven days he had shared with Margaret suddenly filled his mind and he was unable to hide the pain of his loss.

Vivien's heart suddenly constricted painfully as she witnessed first

hand how deep her father's love had been for her mother. "Thank you," she said quietly, acknowledging the compliment he was paying her.

"No.....It is I who should thank you.....for giving me something of your mother to hold onto....." he swallowed hard as his emotions rose, threatening to rob him of the words he wanted to say. "Something I never dared to dream....."

They were both silent, they did not touch or hug. It was all too new, but in those few moments they both experienced the warmth of Margaret's love as it surrounded them almost as if she were somehow there with them sharing this precious moment.

Vivien was the first to break the silence. "That makes two of us....." she smiled and on a lighter note continued, "I mean, how could anyone possibly dream all of this.....It's beyond imagining."

"You haven't met Vincent yet." Catherine contributed without thinking from where she was standing beside Peter, and bringing them all back to reality. Peter groaned, and Father turned to glare at her affectionately.

"Hey, come on you two.....lighten up," Catherine chuckled before her face took on a more serious expression, and resting her bottom against Father's desk she directed her gaze at Vivien.

"Vincent is special, Vivien, and quite unique but he is as much your father's son, as if he was his own." Her eyes met Father's and they smiled at each other with love. "Is it all right if I continue, Father?"

"Of course," he replied as he went to sit behind his desk and started to fiddle nervously with his spectacles.

"You see, Vivien, Vincent is more than just different. He is so unique that there is no place for him in our world. At best he would be considered a freak.....and at the worst they would kill him.....or make him wish he were dead."

"This is the only place Vincent can live in safety.....A world that your father has built and given his life to.....to keep Vincent safe. We all protect him and he protects us..... protects me," Catherine paused. "You see.....Vincent is the man that I love....."

Vivien had already figured this much out for herself and nodded somberly. "I'm looking forward to meeting him, but in what way is he different?" Vivien was intrigued and without conscious thought moved to sit on the table.

"Well....." Catherine admitted smiling, "his looks are somewhat riveting, but I guarantee that within five minutes you will be captivated....." She turned her attention to Father. "Is he in his chamber, Father? I'll go and fetch him."

"Catherine," he advanced towards her, all his previous fears having suddenly resurfaced and he spoke more sharply than he intended to. It had the desired effect and Catherine sensed instantly there was something amiss, she stared questioningly at him.

"I'm sorry, Catherine," he reached for her wrist, "I didn't mean to....." He stopped and sighed, there was no point in prolonging the inevitable. "Vincent's gone missing..... Mouse and Jamie have already gone in search of him, picking up the trail from where he was last seen."

"Oh God." Her heart started to race and frown lines furrowed her



brow. "He's not well enough yet to go wandering off alone, is he?" She, too, grabbed his arm and glanced with mounting panic at Father and Vivien.

"No," he shook his head. "Catherine, there is nothing more we can do at the moment. I have every faith in Mouse and Jamie .....Pascal has put an '*all clear*' out on the pipes and is standing by. Everyone else is in position. All we can do..... is wait."

Within the next few minutes Father's chamber began to fill with worried faces gathering together, as was their custom at times like this, to await any news of their beloved Vincent. No one underestimating the seriousness of the situation because everyone knew how sick Vincent had been of late. They also knew how easily someone, even Vincent, could become lost, never to be found in the uncharted reaches of their subterranean world.

Vivien's arrival would normally have inspired a wonderful excuse for a celebration, as Father proudly introduced her to all who were present but for the time being that would have to be postponed.

Vivien herself accepting without reservation that for now she would have to take a back seat, but silently she admitted to being somewhat relieved that she was being allowed to settle in with the minimum of fuss and just treated like one of the family.



Vincent travelled on through the tunnels oblivious to where his feet were taking him and paying no heed to his surroundings. In his unseeing distressed flight his right foot landed heavily and awkwardly on a wet unstable piece of rock, and in that split second point of no return, Vincent felt his booted foot slip sharply

outwards at a bizarre angle and he heard his ankle bone splinter, snap, and explode inside his boot in a tortuous sickening agony. Vincent roared as the horrendous stomach churning pain shot up his leg and his body hit the floor.



Catherine screamed, "**VINCENT!**", before the blackness enveloped her and she slumped mercifully into Peter's arms. He lowered her onto the speedily vacated chair and pushed her head down between her knees. She groaned, then mumbled, "Vincent.....he's hurt.....he's in terrible pain ....."

Mary filled a glass with water and as Catherine was helped to straighten up, she guided the glass to her still bloodless lips.

"Stand back everyone," Father instructed, "give her some air." He stood back himself, allowing Mary to take care of her.

Vivien was completely confused. All of this was beyond her comprehension. With Mary's help, Catherine sipped her water and gazed around woozily, her eyes coming to rest on Father's face.

"Vincent is hurt, Father.....terribly hurt.....I felt his pain .....sickening pain.....so powerful that it knocked me out." She was favouring her right ankle.....circling her foot and frowning. "Father.....I think he must have injured his ankle."



Vincent was writhing on the tunnel floor in tortuous agony trying to quell the nauseous pain and the realization that his ankle was completely smashed. He was also conscious of the warm clammy wetness of blood seeping into his boot.

His mind was a whirl with the maelstrom of fearful thoughts, as he

battled with his light headed nauseous giddiness and terrible pain, recognizing all too well the danger he was in as he began to tremble uncontrollably with shock.

He had no idea where he was and neither did anyone else. There was no way he could move in his present condition; he gritted his teeth and eased himself gingerly backwards to rest against the tunnel wall. But his soul was alive. His soul was soaring, as in the midst of all his pain and fear he was acutely aware of something else.

"Catherine," he whispered in the darkness. **"CATHERINE."** He cried out hearing and feeling the reverberation of her name bouncing from the tunnel walls with such deafening intensity.

Vincent smiled. He could feel the beat of her heart. Catherine was with him, she was part of him. He was conscious of **her** distress and her fear. Catherine knew.



Vivien thought that Catherine was delirious and was puzzled as to why no one else thought so too. It frustrated her that Peter, smiling knowingly, assured her that all would be revealed in due course.

"Catherine?" Father's excitement mounted as he reached down and gripped her hands. Peter placed a chair behind him and guided him down on it facing Catherine. "Thank you, Peter.....Catherine, can you sense anything else?"

The dozen or so people gathered around stood silently and wondrously listening for her reply. Catherine's eyes refocussed onto his face as if her thoughts had been miles away, which of course they had. She smiled wanly at him, and around at

everyone else. Her lips tremulous, her eyes sparkling with tears of anguish and elation.

"I can feel he is in great pain.....Father.....I can actually feel his pain and.....his fear. I've never been able to feel it so strongly before.....never. He's with me." She returned the pressure of Father's hands, tears spilling down her face, as she confirmed what he suspected, her voice filled with awe. "Our bond.....our connection.....it's come back..... he's with me, Father.....and even though he's injured, he'll know he is not alone."

She laughed through her tears, she and Father hugged each other with relief, whilst everyone else nodded and grinned with a very audible sigh of relief.

Vivien had come to the conclusion that this mysterious brother of hers really must be someone special, and it seemed, so was Catherine Chandler.



"Vincent," Mouse called out in relief at having found him at last and the young man scurried forward in eager relief with Jamie close behind.

They could see him in the glow from the two candles that Vincent had lit to guide them to him. He was slumped against the tunnel wall up ahead. His head was resting back on the rough stone wall, his eyes were closed and he was taking deep controlled breaths, almost like a woman in labour doing her breathing exercises.

Vincent, to his immense relief, had been listening to their approaching footsteps for the past few minutes, but had continued to concentrate on his breathing, finding that it really did help to

take his mind off the pain.

He opened his eyes as they knelt at either side of him.

"Mouse.....Jamie....." his voice was more gravelly sounding than normal. His face was strained and tense, drained of colour and slicked with perspiration. Jamie played her flashlight over his legs, and gasped in horror whilst struggling to overcome a sudden urge to throw up. She adored Vincent and the thought of him being hurt was like a personal pain to her.

His right foot was twisted outwards at a grotesque angle. The blood had soaked through the soft tan leather of his thigh boots showing a dark stain in the torchlight. There was something else. A sharp splinter of bone had also penetrated the hide and was clearly visible in the bright artificial torchlight.

"Vincent hurt very bad.....worse than worse," Mouse mumbled in shocked disbelief, which nonetheless did nothing to dim his natural ability to assess the situation, and decide what needed to be done. He laid his hand on Vincent's arm, his face screwed up in distress. "Vincent.....you must stay still. Mouse go for help. Tell Father."

"Yes, Mouse." Vincent answered though he could not help but smile, and marvel at his young friend, he remembered what a frightened mouse he used to be, and a sudden feeling of joy filled him at having found the ability to remember that far back.

Jamie uncorked her water bottle and held it to Vincent's lips. He took the bottle from her and drank thirstily. "I'll stay with Vincent, Mouse," she stated, her young face set and determined.

Vincent drew the bottle from his lips and reached out to grasp her hand. "No.....Jamie.....you must go with Mouse..... Just

leave me your water bottle."

"But I can't leave you on your own, Vincent," she protested, shaking her head, causing her ponytail to swish from side to side.

"But I am not alone, Jamie....." he husked painfully.

"Catherine is with me.....she will know that I am hurt .....go quickly and guide them to me."

Although she could not see his face clearly in the dim tunnel light, Jamie suddenly realized the meaning of what he was saying, and gasped, "Oh Vincent, you're better." The joy evident in her voice as she hugged him.

"Yes," he gently hugged her back. "Now go.....please hurry."

It took Mouse a moment or two to figure out just what exactly was going on, but when the penny finally did drop, he grinned, "Okay, good. Okay, fine. Vincent's not alone no more."

Before they left him they both shed their warm jackets, covering Vincent with them for extra warmth. He did not protest, knowing full well how a still body could lose heat in these cold damp tunnels.



Father had lived with many fears for his extraordinary son, but without a doubt this was one of his greatest. Acting upon the empathic bond so recently and dramatically restored to Catherine and his son, everything was organized in anticipation of the worst.

They gathered at the sentries outpost, where Vincent had last been seen, to await Mouse and Jamie's return, hopefully with news of Vincent.

Whilst they were waiting, Father explained to Vivien that, although their facilities Below were limited, with Peter's help, and with what their other helpers could provide, he could take care of most injuries and illnesses himself. There were however, some instances when members of their community had to go Above into hospital, for example, if a limb was broken and needed an X-Ray, or even the more mundane things like visits to the dentist or the opticians.

"But Vivien," Father emphasized, as he finished checking the contents of the medical bag and snapped it closed. "For Vincent, this is not possible. It is not an option. It would not be safe for him to be discovered in your world. His differences prevent him from ever being free to enjoy even the simple pleasures of a walk in the sunshine." He passed the bag to Michael who placed it with the growing pile of rescue equipment.

"Oh, come on, Father." Vivien exclaimed in all innocence. "People will always stare, or even persecute individuals who are deformed or disfigured in some way. I know better than most how difficult it is, but he wouldn't be alone....." she stopped suddenly realizing from the expressions on the faces of those around her that there was something here that was beyond her understanding.

Father shook his head with a worried frown. "If that was all it was, Vivien, it would not be a problem, but....." He was unable to continue, the truth of the matter being, Father had no idea how to define his son's differences to someone who was a virtual stranger.

His eyes met Catherine's, with a silent plea for assistance and he nodded imperceptibly, allowing her to explain to his new daughter.

It was cowardly maybe, but he felt that she would make a better attempt than he ever could.

"Vivien," her voice was quiet. "Vincent is not deformed or disfigured or retarded in any way. In actual fact, he is quite magnificent.....but his appearance is strikingly different .....unique.....you see," she drew in breath, "Vincent is not altogether human."

No one uttered a sound but waited to see what Vivien's response would be.

"Not.....human?" Vivien's mouth dropped open, then snapped closed again before asking with just a hint of skepticism. "What exactly do you mean?"

Father fidgeted nervously, desperate for his daughter's acceptance. Mary moved to his side taking his arm, in reassurance. Catherine continued, unperturbed; her feelings written on her face for all to see.

"No one knows why he is the way he is and obviously he was not expected to survive, but he did.....and he has already experienced the cruelty first hand in our world. He has been shot, stabbed, knocked down by a car, caged like an animal, and strapped down to a laboratory table.....so we protect him."

"And you love him.....?" The question was unnecessary. She could see that it was so.

"He is my life.....without him, there is nothing." Catherine smiled and lowered her eyes.

Father and Mary openly watched this exchange, as did everyone else present. Vivien felt as if she was being ganged up on, but not



threatened. This mysterious brother of her was obviously no one to fear and they were all waiting for some reaction from her. She sighed. "Yes, I see....."

Catherine raised her eyes again. "No.....I don't think you do see, Vivien."

Father moved the few steps across the confines of the tunnel, placing his arm protectively around Catherine's shoulder, and taking over the conversation he added, "But as long as you are prepared to give us time then you will see..... everything.....and I hope.....understand."



Mouse and Jamie had been gone for over three hours before their running footsteps were heard echoing along the tunnels, and everyone surged forward to meet them.

They were both distressed and breathless, though Jamie was able to clearly explain Vincent's condition to the sea of worried faces, whilst Mouse hopped from one foot to the other repeating, "Very bad, very bad, worse than worse."

Catherine was very conscious of the pain that Vincent was in as it came to her in waves. She quietly hugged herself with the miracle of this newly restored bond they shared, and the wonder of it was, she could feel it too.

"Dear God," Father nodded. "Well, at least we know..... Mouse, Jamie.....I'm sorry to have to ask you to lead us back out there before you have had a chance to catch your breath. But....."

"Father," Jamie interrupted, standing firmly in front of him, drawing

herself up to her full height and with all the authority she could muster stated, "It took Mouse and me well over an hour from leaving Vincent and we didn't hang about. It's a rough route," she explained, almost losing her nerve, "and I think it will be too much for you, Father."

He shifted his position and leaned heavily on his stick. "Thank you for your concern, Jamie, but he his my son ad he's badly injured. I must go to him."

Vivien stepped forward to stand beside Jamie. "Let me go, please?"

All eyes turned to Vivien, then back to Father and back again to Vivien, as she continued, "Father, Peter isn't dressed for it, plus it would be just as hazardous for him.....and it will give me the chance to get acquainted with my unique brother."

Her request was met with stoney silence for a moment, until Father conceded with a heavy sigh. "All right," and everyone relaxed and began giving instructions as to who whould carry what. It had already been decided who would be making up the main rescue party.

Mary poured Mouse and Jamie a cup of cool tea, and William had some food packed for them to eat on the way. Within five minutes of their arrival, Mouse and Jamie, in borrowed jackets, were ready to lead their party back to where Vincent waited in painful vigil.

Father grasped Vivien's hands, still somewhat concerned at her going in his place. "Vivien, whatever my son appears to be.....he is anatomically correct."

Vivien grinned, "You mean.....everything is in the right place? Don't worry Father, I'll look after him." Catherine watched, smiling,

as for the first time, father and daughter hugged each other.



Many of the tunnels, caverns and chambers below the inhabited areas were comparatively warm and dry; but Vincent could not have picked a worse spot to have his accident. The cold and damp began to seep through to his bones, even through his protective tunnel clothing and the extra jackets that Mouse and Jamie had left him. Of course he knew his lowered resistance was due to the shock of the accident and of not being able to move, plus the constant waves of mind numbing nauseous pain from his smashed ankle, which he was fighting to control.

He had lost all track of time, and attempted to doze until the pain became almost unbearable. His one hold on reality was the miraculously restored empathic bond he shared with Catherine and she was with him, part of him.

He could feel her love, sense her fear and feel her ever closer giving him strength and remembering----- everything.



As soon as Catherine saw the glow of candlelight up ahead she was off and running to the cries of, "Be careful, Catherine. Don't go and fall now."

Catherine ignored their warning as she dropped to her knees beside him, "Oh my God, Vincent. My love," she sobbed in distress at the sight of his grotesquely smashed ankle. She was afraid of causing him more pain, but the need to touch him, to touch each other, blocked out all other conscious thought as hands and mouths rediscovered their dreams filling them with relief and joy.

"Catherine," he husked, his hands buried into her hair, drinking in the sight of her, his face wet with tears. "Catherine," he husked again, because he could think of nothing else to say and his mouth claimed hers, mixed with tears, devoid of passion, filled with love, and bubbling laughter, as Catherine broke the kiss and clutched at his hair.

"Vincent." The joy in her face shone like a beacon in the darkness. "Vincent, I felt your pain.....I felt your pain."

"I know," he kissed her, "I know.....I felt that you were with me....." Their eyes drinking in the sight of each other, hands touching-----touching.

Vivien stood as if suspended in time, taking in the miracle before her, bathed in the artificial light from their torches. Her heart soared with the wonder of it. She dragged her eyes away to give his ankle a cursory glance, knowing at once that Vincent was in for a very rough time. Then Dr. Vivien Hayward took control of the situation.

"Right. Vincent is cold. Let's have some blankets over here, please. That's fine, gently now," as blankets were shook out and passed over. "Catherine, would you go around to the other side of Vincent, please.....Thank you." She looked at Vincent and her gaze locked immediately with the most beautiful blue eyes she had ever seen. She smiled, "Vincent, hello."

Vincent said nothing, but it crossed his mind that he knew this woman or at least she reminded him of someone he knew. He watched as she knelt in Catherine's place at the side of him, resting the medical case on the floor close to hand.

"My name is Vivien.....and you have made one hell of a mess

of your ankle."

"Yes," he answered, still unable to tear his gaze from her face, sensing no fear or apprehension in her, only experienced professional concern-----but there was something else.

Vivien sat back on her heels and relaxed. "Well, now Vincent, before you can be moved, I'll have to cut you out of that boot and straighten your ankle. Then, I'll have to strap you into an emergency splint but.....before I begin, I'll give you something to ease the pain and to help you relax." Her eyes twinkled with humour, as she continued, "We don;t want to be scraping you off the ceiling now, do we?"

"No," he answered, a slight smile playing around his unusual mouth. He liked her and so did each member of the rescue team as they stood around smiling with approval.

"Who are you?" Vincent asked, as another wave of pain swept over him and he gritted his teeth.

She calmly took his hand, turning it palm up and laying it onto her lap. Gripping his wrist, she pushed up the sleeve of his sweater and undershirt, revealing the soft hairless skin of his inner forearm. She snapped open the lid of the medical case and took out a disposable hypodermic, removing the protective wrapping and filled it from a small bottle.

"Would you make a fist for me, please?"

He watched her face, his mind filled with questions, but knowing there would be no answers until she had completed her task. The pain killing liquid took almost immediate effect and he was floating although he was still aware of what was going on around him, and he was able to answer Vivien when she spoke.

"Are you all right, Vincent?"

"Yes," but he seemed to be somewhere above it all with her voice seeming far away. His other hand was clasped in both of Catherine's, who was close at his side and watching everything.

"Right," Vivien had everyone's attention. "Do I have a volunteer to cut Vincent's boot open, down to about here?" She indicated a point halfway between his knee and ankle, then removed a pair of cutters from a rolled up pack of surgical instruments.

"I'll do it," said Mouse, coming forward and kneeling down, he took hold of the cutters. Vincent was unworried, he knew Mouse had steady hands when concentrating on some absorbing task.

While Mouse began cutting steadily down the supple tan leather, Vivien took hold of Vincent's hand still resting on her lap. She turned it over and smoothed down all the ruffled fur on his forearm and hand while studying his face with undisguised wonder; observing that the painkilling drug had done its job and the initial floating effect had ceased.

"Vincent," she drew in breath, "My mother was Margaret Wells.....by the time she discovered she was pregnant with me, your father.....my father.....had disappeared from the face of the earth."

Vincent stared at her, trying to comprehend what she was telling him. All thoughts about what else was in store for him faded from his mind as he continued to stare at her face.

Vivien patted his hand and smiled. "It seems, Vincent, that I have acquired a very unusual brother."

His face softened with the wonder of what she had said, "Do you

not find that prospect, alarming?"

"Alarming? No.....**Amazing,** yes." She grinned at him before glancing over at Catherine. Their eyes met and held for the briefest moment but in that moment, Catherine knew, without a doubt, that Vivien understood, and she hugged Vincent's hand and arm to her body smiling adoringly into his face.

"Done it," Mouse announced.

Vivien turned to check. "That's fine, Mouse.....can you manage another two or three inches down to here?" she pointed.

"Okay, good." Mouse edged closer and re-engaged the cutters with intense concentration to complete the task, and satisfied, Vivien turned back to Vincent.

"Now, Vincent. The rest will not be pleasant." She looked up at Cullen, Michael, Jamie and Mouse, who was now on his feet. "I suggest that you all go for a walk and let me and Vincent get on with it.....I don't want anyone throwing up or passing out on me.....It's a long walk home."

There was a reluctant hesitation as Cullen asked, "But don't you need us to hold Vincent steady?"

She held Vincent's gaze as she answered, "Vincent and I will do this together.....pass me the splint, will you please?" she requested with quiet confidence.

The splint, lined with thick foam rubber was laid ready at the side of Vincent's feet, but still no one moved.

Vivien turned in mock exasperation. "Out of here. All of you. You too, Cathy."

It was an order and no one argued. A fleeting smile played around Vincent's mouth as everyone sheepishly moved off into the darkness and with a swift hug and a kiss, Catherine quickly followed.

"Right. Vincent, I'm going to give you another injection, then we'll go for it. Ready?"

"Yes," he answered with the unquestionable certainty that he was in safe hands.

It took just over sixty seconds for Vivien to deftly remove his boot and manipulate his shattered ankle into the splint. It was thanks to the pain killing drug that what discomfort Vincent encountered was the familiar, but watered down version of the original accident but it still left him feeling nauseous, trembling and bathed in perspiration.

"You still hanging in there.....brother?"

He gazed down the long length of his body to this capable woman at his feet. Their eyes met in trust and understanding.

"Thank you, Vivien.....for trusting me.....for not being afraid.....and yes, I do feel much more comfortable."

"Good. Then let's get you home."



"Dear God," Father exclaimed in distressed panic that he only dared to express now he was back in his own chamber where Peter and Vivien had arrived several minutes earlier. "This is one of my greatest fears.....some injury to Vincent that I cannot handle myself. We just don't have the facilities here, Vivien.....he'll need X-Raying, and from what you say.....a



multiple fracture.....he will need to be plated and pinned.....and for that....." Father raked his fingers through his hair in frustrated worry. "We need a fully equipped operating theatre with a highly skilled anesthetist." He slumped into the armchair near the table, absentmindedly smoothing the black box that housed his chess set.

"I daren't risk smuggling him into St. Vincent's," Peter commented, thinking aloud and stating the obvious.

"No.....but I have an idea where we can take him," Vivien suggested, as she moved from where she had been sitting to stand in front of her father.

**"Take him? Take him?"** Father's voice was shrill. He pushed the chess box away from him and stared at Vivien as if she had lost her mind. **"Vivien, we can't take Vincnet anywhere. Don't you understand? If he were ever discovered in the world Above.....they'd kill him, or make him wish he were dead."**

She glowered back at him, determined to be heard. "Father, believe me, I do understand all of that.....but even with the best of what you can do for him here, Vincent would be left a permanent cripple and probably have to live in constant pain.....could **you** live like **that? Is that what you want for your son? My brother?"**

A look of surprise crossed Father's face.

"Yes, Father," her face softened in affection. "I am both proud and honoured to call Vincent, my brother, and I wouldn't risk a hair on his head." She smiled. "Would you at least hear me out?"

Catherine entered Father's chamber looking pale and exhausted. It was two thirty in the morning and it had been a long day. Peter

rose to meet her and drew her down the steps. "How is he?" Peter asked for all of them.

"Sleeping.....peacefully at the moment. Mary's with him."

She crouched at the side of Father's chair, her hand resting on his arm. "Father, we have to listen to what Vivien has to say."

He looked down at her, nodding his head, resigned to the inevitable. "I know," he answered quietly. But Catherine could both see and feel the fear in him, as he turned his attention back to his daughter. "All right, Vivien.....tell us what you have on your mind."

She took a deep breath. "It's Hamilton Lodge, where my adoption was arranged.....where I spent most of....." she glanced at her watch, "yesterday. Father, they are security conscious in the extreme. The CIA couldn't have vetted me more thoroughly than they did."

Vivien crouched down at the other side of his chair. "It's a place of safety for the children of rich families.....a refuge for whatever reason.....and, as Christopher Hamilton pointed out to me, suffering is not only peculiar to the children of the poor. There are children there who have been physically and mentally abused by their rich parents; deformed children, the mentally retarded, and several who would certainly be classed as freaks.....and there are also terminally ill children. They all live in freedom and comfort. At Hamilton Lodge they have the money and resources to provide everything that is required, and the medical staff to man it. The atmosphere is wonderful; I was astounded by it. They really care, Father, and I know happy contented children when I see them. In fact, many of their charges have grown up there, and stay on to help with the smooth running of the place." She pushed

herself upright, giving her father time to consider her words and moved around the table to pick up a chair, placing it near to him, she sat down and waited for his response.

"How do you know they will help us?" he asked finally.

"Because Chris and I made friends. We hit it off straight away, and he has invited me back socially, and as a member of their medical staff.....even if it is only in my spare time. He would like to be able to consult with me about certain children, and of course, I was happy to agree."

Catherine and Peter had remained silent, knowing this was a decision that Father would have to make. He picked up his spectacles and began to clean them. "Vincent is the most loved and important person in our world. Without him, it would be a very dark place.....and Catherine," he squeezed her hand. "Catherine gave Vincent a dream, for which I shall be forever grateful." He smiled down at Catherine before adding, "The love they share warms us all."

Vivien smiled, "I know, I've seen it too, and it warms me..... makes me believe in miracles."

Father nodded in acquiescence, satisfied with the reaction, as was Catherine and Peter.

"Go then and see what you can arrange."

Peter stood. "I'll go with her, Jacob."

"Good," Father nodded to his friend, "and God speed."

Catherine and Father were left alone in the silent familiar candlelit chamber, seemingly swamped by endless haphazardly piled up books and assorted literature. Catherine kissed his cheek before

wrapping her arms around his neck to reassure him. "Don't worry, Father. Everything will be all right."



Peter drove his black transit van which doubled as an ambulance to the 14th Street entrance, dowsing all the lights before reversing up to the freight elevator. Vivien jumped out of the passenger side and on hearing the elevator already on its way up, she opened the back doors of the van and unfolded the steps.

Lighting was minimal because they did not want to draw attention to this clandestine operation. Father came as something of a surprise to her as he stepped out of the elevator, suited, with a dark overcoat and trilby hat. He looked every inch the eminent doctor although appearing slighter of build due to the absence of his many layers of tunnel clothes.

Catherine was with him and Vincent's stretcher bearers were William and Matthew, who quickly transferred him to the waiting ambulance. They resettled the protective cage over his legs and covered him before saying their goodbyes and returning Below.

Peter drove and Vivien navigated. They were both relieved that it was Sunday and that neither of them were on call.

Vivien had telephoned Hamilton Lodge from Peter's surgery, and although Christopher Hamilton had to be disturbed from his sleep, as soon as he had grasped the emergency of the situation, he was more than happy to help. However, with his inbuilt attention to security Chris had to know exactly who would be with her, and the details of the vehicle so that they could be cleared by security at the gatehouse. Vivien had not really thought of that and crossed her fingers, hoping that Chris would not feel she was abusing his

generosity. She took a deep breath and with some feelings of trepidation began to explain.

"Chris. It would be better if the man at the gate didn't see Vincent. At least, not before you do."

"Not see Vincent?" frowning, he scratched his bald head. "Why, Vivien? Does he wish to remain anonymous?"

"Yes, very much so, but not for the reason you imply..... Chris, Vincent is different."

He shrugged. "Well, so are a few others who live here."

"Yes, but Vincent is really different and has been protected because of it. This is the first time he has had an injury that my father could not deal with himself." There was such a long pause from Chris' end of the line that Vivien began to panic.

"Chris.....there is nowhere else we can go....."

"He's your brother?" Chris interrupted, stating what has suddenly become obvious.

"Yes," she answered, the panic subsiding.

"And that pleases you?"

"Oh yes," her voice leaving him in no doubt.

"All right then, Vivien," she could almost feel him smiling. "Tell me who else will be with you, and I will meet you personally at the Lodge gatehouse."

Vivien expelled her breath of apprehension, feeling the tension ease from her body. "Thank you, Chris.....I'll have Peter with me, you know Peter Alcott?"

"Yes, I know Peter."

"My father, Jacob Wells."

"Jacob Wells?" Chris' eyebrows shot up and she heard his gasp of surprise.

"Chris, is something wrong?"

"No, no.....on the contrary, Vivien," he smiled to himself. "Is there anyone else?"

"Catherine Chandler.....she's with the DA's office."

"And **who** is she?"

Vivien tried to find exactly the right words. "She's the woman who loves my brother.....and all that he is."

"She must be a very special lady," Chris acknowledged.

"Yes, she is."



Before they left the tunnels, Vincent had to be cut out of his trousers and helped out of the rest of his clothes to be given a blanket bath, then he was dressed in a clean nightshirt, as well as being assisted with the more intimate calls of nature.

He bore all of their ministrations stoically, appreciative of their business-like manner and their efforts to retain his dignity.

When Catherine was finally allowed back into the Hospital chamber, she was permitted to brush his hair into some kind of order and indeed it seemed to have a soothing effect on him.

Father stood at the other end of the narrow hospital bed thinking

how incongruous his son looked, propped up with pillows and a cage protecting his legs. He feared that one sudden move, and Vincent would fall out of bed and onto the floor. He picked up Vincent's large hand in his, smoothing down the fur. Vincent squeezed his hand in acknowledgement, inclining his head affectionately.

"It is all right, Father. Do not worry. I **will** survive, you know .....I have much to survive for.....I have you....."

Catherine put the hairbrush down and reached for his other hand, as Vincent turned his gaze upon her face, "And I have Catherine....."

Their eyes met and held, filled with as yet unspoken, newly discovered revelations, he dragged his eyes away and back to Father.

"And you have a daughter.....and I a sister....." His face took on a wondrous look. "We did not expect anything like that, did we?" His voice had reduced to a whisper.

"No....." Father agreed, his face breaking into a smile, "and Devin has yet to be told."

Vincent nodded, smiling, then releasing both Catherine's and Father's hands, he reached out and drew them close, kissing first Catherine's head, and then Father's. "I am so glad for you, Father.....something of Margaret.....for you to hold onto.....one of yesterday's promises."



The journey to Hamilton Lodge was a tense and nerve racking experience, but uneventful, much to everyone's relief. Vincent had been in some considerable pain, and unable to sleep though

exhausted. He had remained uncommunicative throughout the journey. There was little conversation between any of them, and they arrived at the Lodge gatehouse about an hour before dawn.

As promised, Christopher was waiting for them, his large bulk seen clearly in the security lighting, illuminating both the gates and the gatehouse.

Vivien wound the window down to identify herself and the electrically controlled gates slid open to allow them to drive through, closing silently behind them once they were inside.

Two security staff were in visible attendance, but did not intrude. Vivien and Peter climbed out of the ambulance to be greeted warmly by Chris, who could not disguise his eagerness to meet his mystery patient, and allowing him to assess any difficulties before they entered the main building.

His desire to meet Jacob Wells was just as keen, but this, he kept to himself. It was Chris who helped Father from the ambulance, welcoming him like some revered friend. Father too, was surprised by the man that Christopher Hamilton was; adding to the relief of being out from the back of the ambulance, it was not the most comfortable of journeys for a man with an arthritic hip.....but then, he would have walked over hot coals for Vincent.....or Catherine for that matter, he mused to himself, as he stood at last on terra firma and breathed in the clean night air, before returning his attention to his host.

Chris had released his guiding arm and moved to face him, each of them seeming to scrutinize the other. Both were conscious of the unseen hand of friendship.

"Mr. Hamilton....." Father was the first to extend his hand,



smiling. It was grasped firmly in welcome.

"Chris.....please call me Chris, everyone does," he grinned and retained his hold on Father's hand.

"Chris," Father smiled, his instincts liking him already. "Chris, I cannot tell you how grateful we all are for your help.....my son....." They released each other's hand and stood.

Chris patted his arm, in reassurance. "It's all right, Jacob..... may I call you Jacob?"

"Of course.....though I'm Father to most people." he inclined his head, his whole face breaking into a smile. "It will be a rare treat to answer to my given name.....and i can see that you are eager to meet my son." He moved to allow Chris to pass, not consciously aware that he had been guarding the entrance to the ambulance, but then, forestalled him for a moment longer, suddenly apprehensive again. "Chris..... please, do not assess Vincent by his appearance."

With one foot on the step and his hand holding either side of the doorway, Chris turned to face Father. "Jacob, don't worry so. Here we never taken anyone at face value.....but dig a little deeper to find the person within."

Their eyes met and held with complete understanding, and all Father's remaining tensions and doubts evaporated, knowing he had found another kindred spirit. He moved to one side, glancing over at Peter and Vivien who had been silently watching the two patriarchs of their different worlds becoming acquainted.

Chris entered the back of the ambulance. Vincent was on a bed. There were two beds in actual fact that pulled down from the reinforced sides of the van and when not in use they could be

fastened up out of the way. Vincent was on his right hand side as he entered and Catherine was sitting on a pull down seat as close to Vincent as she could get, her hand clasped to his chest.

Chris was overawed by the scene, and they both heard his sharp intake of breath. The internal lighting of the ambulance was bright enough for them to see his face, filled with a mixture of wonder, astonishment and compassion. Chris seemed to fill the confined space with his size, and he grinned, "Vincent and Catherine, I presume?"

Catherine released her hand and reached out to shake Chris' hand, grinning back. "And you will be Chris.....hello..... this is Vincent."

"Vincent," and they too shook hands, but Chris retained hold as he affirmed. "I gather you have done a rather splendid job of smashing your ankle?"

"Yes, so I have been told." The sound of Vincent's voice came as a pleasant surprise to Chris, as it did to everyone else who heard it for the first time, he smiled, and released his hand. "Well, we have everything here to put it right, Vincent.....and I promise you, you **will** be safe here."

He observed the very obvious intimacy between them and he was pleased that they made no attempt to hide it. Vincent tensed with pain as he answered, "Thank you.....I hope Father has been reassured of that too.....he is very worried about my safety."

"I will make certain of it, Vincent. Now, it's just over a mile up to the house, and I think your father would be much more comfortable in my car."

"I'm sure he would be," agreed Vincent, as he entwined

Catherine's fingers with his own in an unconscious gesture of possession, which did not go unnoticed.

"Good.....then I will see you in a little while, when we can at least make you more comfortable."



The hospital wing was situated at the back of the house, on the third floor, overlooking the gardens. Vincent was transported through the silent empty hallways on a standard hospital stretcher trolley. Chris made sure that no one was about and they went via the elevator, straight into the X-Ray room, which was next door to the operating theatre.

Father was fascinated as well as being somewhat overwhelmed by all the modern equipment, light years removed from anything he had used forty years before. Catherine kept well out of the way, whilst, with Chris' help, Peter and Vivien took a series of X-Rays of Vincent's lower limb, and some minutes later the plates still wet, were hung on the illuminated screen where they could now see for themselves all the damage he had done.

Father pointed to the screen. "Four complete fractures..... look.....it will need to be plated and pinned in two places .....here.....and here."

They all nodded in total agreement. "Right then," Chris interrupted their discussion. "Do you wish to commence now, before the house stirs, or leave it until after breakfast?"

"I'd like to get on," Father answered, moving over to Vincent's side where Catherine was standing; both aware that Vincent was in great pain. "But we still don't have an anesthetist."

'Oh yes, we do," said Chris.

"Who?" They all asked in unison.

"Me," replied Chris with a grin.



The hospital wing was composed of four bedrooms, all facing south overlooking the gardens and spacious grounds beyond. Apart from the operating theatre, X-Ray room, recovery room and the usual facilities, there was a comfortable sitting room with a balcony that also had a clear view of the grounds.

It was here that Catherine waited-----watching the dawn break-----hearing the unaccustomed noisy dawn chorus of the birds and the sunrise, sending a shimmering dappled light through the trees, which, as the sun rose higher in the pink dawn sky, and became myriad shards of brightness, glistening onto the dew covered grass.

Catherine's heart soared and she had the almost uncontrollable urge to shout with joy into the morning air -----to tell the birds and anyone else who cared to listen, that here there was hope, that she and Father could fulfill a dream-----to take Vincent out into the sunshine.



Vincent came through what had been a skillfully executed, but quite complicated piece of surgery, and Christopher Hamilton was more than a little impressed with Jacob Wells, the surgeon; as was Vivien, but she was also bursting with pride. This man was her father.

It was Peter who finished off, neatly stitching up the two long

incisions at either side of Vincent's ankle; the inner side being more difficult as the broken bones had burst through, tearing the flesh during the accident. With Peter's assistance, Vivien made her contribution by easing a stretch tubular stocking on up to Vincent's knee, also securing a thin nylon tube, let in at the site of the operation to drain off any fluid, and this collected in a bag which hung at the side of the bed. Next, she wrapped plaster soaked crepe bandages around his ankle, right up to his knee then back again, up and down she wrapped it encasing the whole of his leg and foot from the knee down, leaving his toes free. Within minutes the plaster had cooled and set solid, keeping all Father's work safe and secure.

An area of fur had been shaved away from the back of Vincent's hand to locate a suitable vein, enabling them to set up a drip feeder which hung on a stand at the side of him, and would remain attached for a few hours.

Chris, now familiar with Vincent's unique vital signs, and satisfied that everything was normal, disconnected his charge from all the monitors and carefully removed the tube from his throat.

Father roused his son, quite unperturbed and smilingly glanced around, when Vincent's first thickly mumbled words were, "Catherine....bring Catherine."



Vincent spent the rest of the day sleeping off the after effects of the anesthetic. He had been transferred into one of the hospital bedrooms. Father and Catherine took turns to sit with him. Apart from the odd low growl, Vincent progressed normally and without any undue problems.

Peter and Vivien had to get back to the city after lunch, leaving Father and Catherine in charge, and promising to relay all the news Below, and to return the following day.

Father and Catherine stood with Chris watching Peter's black transit van disappearing down the long driveway. Catherine hugged Father before excusing herself to go back upstairs to Vincent. At last, Chris had Jacob to himself and invited him to share a pot of tea with him in his study before he too joined Catherine to watch over Vincent.

They settled down in a matching pair of wing backed chairs in front of a blazing fire, the day had turned quite cold. Father's memory flew back over many years to the last time he had enjoyed such luxury, but all the pain and bitterness, tears and anger that he had suffered at that time, also infringed on his subconscious and he quickly hut out the corrosive thoughts, fixing his mind firmly where it belonged-----in the present -----because now he could look to the future with more hope than he could have ever dreamed, knowing that in the end Margaret did not desert him-----Vivien was living proof of that.

They sat in companionable silence, whilst savouring their tea, before Father became aware that Chris was openly staring at him. "Chris?" Father inquired, with a puzzled frown.

Chris drew in a deep breath. "Jacob Wells.....never in my wildest dreams did I think you would still be alive. I thought, like most people, that you must have perished in that terrible winter of '52."

Father's mouth dropped open, his face aghast. He was knocked right off his axis at Chris' words and gasped, "What do you know

about that?"

"Rather a lot actually.....it's a small world, Jacob.....but don't look so worried." He leaned forward. "You're safe..... all of you." Chris smiled reassuringly, and placed his cup and saucer back onto the tray. He eased himself back into his chair. "We were a large family, Jacob," he began to explain, "and I was the youngest.....I grew up here....." He lovingly gazed around his comfortable study. "I had four brothers and three sisters.....our mother died six years ago.....she was a good age."

He drew in another deep breath. "My father, and my brothers, were all in the armed forces.....My father was a Colonel, and my brothers were officers.....stationed out in the Pacific.....at the time they were testing the atomic bombs." Chris' voice was noncommittal, but even so, Father tensed, and shuddered involuntarily with feelings of foreboding; that spectres from his past were about to reach out and haunt him again, regardless of how he had tried to lock them away.

Chris continued talking. "The war had already ended when I received my call up papers, and then I failed the medical, but I did still manage to serve as a civilian doctor.....there was still much to do.

"Jacob.....by 1957, my family and I stood by and watched helplessly as my four brothers and my father, died agonizing deaths from cancers and leukemia. Two of my brothers had wives and families, but I was the only remaining son.....and unfortunately I was unable to father a child.....**am**, unable to father a child. Fate had been cruel, I was hurting, bitter and angry.....and Jacob, I wanted to **make someone pay.**" He

snarled the words through gritted teeth, and Father nodded in understanding.

"I know **that** feeling."

"Yes," said Chris, knowing it was true. Drawing in a new breath, he continued. "My oldest brother, Rob, was an attorney and before the war was a partner in an prestigious law firm in the city.....one of his closest friends was Alan Taft."

"Alan?" Father sat forward in his chair, astounded.

Chris nodded. "Like I said.....It's a small world, and it gets smaller. Alan struggled with his conscience for a long time, knowing how revengeful I felt, before he came to me one evening and showed me your file.....all the detailed evidence that you had amassed years before, proving without a doubt, the decimation that atomic fallout could cause, both to people and to the land, and about all the long term devastation.....you knew.....but no one would listen..... you lost everything.....everything."

Chris stared at Jacob in horrified awe for all that he had endured.

"Yes," Father agreed, "And I did almost die out there, in that terrible winter.....but tell me what happened then..... what did you do?"

Chris shook his head. "Nothing.....in the end, I did nothing. Alan talked to me for hours, making me realize that you can't beat the system even when the system is wrong. I would still be the one to lose. He said revenge is **never** sweet and invariably backfires.....and even if I won in principle, which he admitted was possible, I would still lose, feel tainted.....because it would rake up things best forgotten and left to rest. Things that would



cause a great deal of pain to people who had already suffered enough," he paused while the pain of the memory subsided and he felt more in control. Father waited.

After a few seconds, Chris continued with his revelations. "Alan advised me to pick up the threads of my life.....I remember his words exactly.....he said I should '*gather my family around, and build a new life with what we had.*' He said.....'*take the reins and go forward into the future, with dignity and courage. Let the pain of what we had all suffered make us stronger, more compassionate.....more understanding.*' He told me to use that to build on.....and it made sense, Jacob. Though it certainly hasn't been an easy route to follow, it had without a doubt been a far better one to achieve all that we have."

Father sat for a moment, humbled by this man's confession. He leaned closer to him. "You can be proud of all you have done here, Chris.....and I am glad that Alan was there for you.....he was a very special man, and a true friend to me, too. Did you know, that he risked losing everything himself by defending me at my trial?" Father did not wait for his answer but carried on, "And he still went ahead....." His mind flitted back to the day he had found his old friend murdered-----the terror of his own arrest-----being locked up in jail, accused of murdering his own dear friend -----and Catherine, dear Catherine, if it hadn't been for h..... "Jacob?.....Jacob?"

Chris' voice dragged him back to the present again. Father shook his head and drew in a deep breath, he smiled across at the younger man, as he released his breath and relaxed. "I'm sorry, Chris. I was just remembering something none too pleasant that happened. But it's history now and life goes on."

Chris was aware that the distant memory still lurked in Jacob's eyes. Even so, he still had more to disclose. More secrets to dust off. "There is more, Jacob. Someone else close to you has been instrumental in what we have built here."

"Someone else?" Father frowned, puzzled, giving Chris his full attention.

"Margaret." Chris smiled at the shocked expression on Father's face.

"You mean my Margaret? Vivien's mother?" Father sat forward tense and expectant. His mouth still open and not daring to breathe.

Chris nodded. "Margaret has been one of our most generous benefactors and a welcome friend for many years until her death. Before she died, she set up a trust fund so that her help would continue after she was gone. She was a lovely lady, Jacob, who fought a constant battle with bitterness and regret. Her public face was always smiling.....she refused to feel sorry for herself. Only her closest friends ever saw her pain."

Father smiled. "We did find each other, Chris, in the end..... and thanks to Catherine and Vincent, she spent the last seven days of her life.....with me."



Gradually the unremitting pain from Vincent's plaster-encased limb was dragging him back to lucid awareness, clear and free of the mind befuddling after effects of the anesthetic, mixed with the pain killing injections. His first consciously spoken word as he opened his eyes was, "Catherine?"

"I'm here, my love."

And she was, curled up in an armchair, pushed close to his bed with her head on his chest, her fingers intertwined with his. She lifted her head and gazed up into his beloved face. "Would you like a drink? Father said you could have a drink if you wanted one."

"That would be most welcome," he reached out to touch her face with a gentle finger. Their eyes met and held in a silent *'Hello'*.

She sat up and poured some water into a glass and popped in a bendy straw, guiding it carefully to his lips and then returning it to the bedside table after he had taken a few cautious sips.

Her hands resting on his chest, she could sense the tension in him. "You're in pain, aren't you?"

"Yes." He was drawing in deep breaths in an effort to control it.

"I'll ring for Father. You're about due for another injection." She stood and reached behind his bed to press the call button.

"No," he restrained her hand. "Catherine....." He studied her face, his eyes brilliant blue in the unaccustomed brightness of the afternoon. She leaned her body against his chest, lovingly caressing his face with her free hand. Vincent could never remember having seen her eyes so green, but another sudden sharp spasm of pain caused him to draw in a sharp breath, as it passed he had to start again. "Catherine .....I remember what happened in the cave.....below the catacombs....." He could not meet her eyes.

Catherine lifted his chin, forcing him to look at her. She smiled into his eyes. "I'm glad.....I'm glad you have remembered, Vincent." She said quite unperturbed by his revelation.

He looked at her in disbelief, confused by the happiness that seemed to shine out from her face. "But Catherine.....I lost myself completely in that cave.....eclipsed, all of me that was human.....I could have killed you.....and not even remembered doing so." He lowered his eyes again, ashamed of what he had become in that cavern.

Catherine hitched herself up higher and planted a chaste kiss on his lips, then drew away. "Yes, Vincent, you could have killed me.....but you didn't." Reaching for his hands, she drew them to her face, kissing the fur covered knuckles, each in turn, before raising her eyes to meet his.

"Vincent.....my fate is in these hands.....**safe**..... and if you ever doubted that before, you need never doubt it again."

He was still hesitant and not convinced. When he spoke, his voice was the merest whisper. "But, Catherine, that is not the only thing that happened in that cave, is it?"

"No.....Vincent, I almost went out of my mind.....I thought I was going to lose you.....without you knowing how I love you....."

He refused to meet her eyes again, turning his head away as if seeking some means of escape. He had to force the words out, "But, we were.....naked," his bottom lip trembled.

She suppressed a smile. "I wanted to be close to you..... part of you.....and to have you.....part of me." She waited as he turned back to face her. She was drowning in his eyes, as she whispered, "I wanted to know.....that I love you.....however you are.....it makes no difference, Vincent. **You** are the man that I love. You are mine."

"But Catherine," he lowered his eyes, "we **did** love....." His tongue moistened his full bottom lip, and Catherine had to resist the urge to kiss him. Instead, she confirmed his recollections.

"Yes, we loved.....and it was beautiful."

"I hardly think that beautiful is the way to describe it, Catherine." The words rushed out and his voice was tinged with the revulsion and disbelief that he felt. "it was base..... we were like....."

Catherine helpfully supplied the word he did not wish to speak. "Animals?" Her eyebrows raised questioningly.

He focused his eyes back onto her face. "Yes," he said quietly.

"Vincent," her voice the merest whisper, but crystal clear in the quietness of the room. "Vincent.....love is like that sometimes.....desperate, undignified, pure animal lust .....that is how you make me feel, Vincent.....have done so for a long time.....and you know it." She stared at him, but failed to hold his gaze.

"Yes," his eyes seeking a means of escape from something he knew to be true but could not quite come to terms with.

"Vincent," she tried again, "when you stopped breathing, I went crazy.....I would rather have died at your hands than never to have known your love....." She was unable to continue, even if she'd been able to find the words. They lay there quietly, mulling their thoughts, whilst the empathic bond they shared was behaving like an out of control rollercoaster and they found themselves holding each other tighter and tighter-----hanging on-----until the sensation subsided and returned to a peaceful haven.

Vincent was the first to speak as hitherto unconsidered thoughts,

flitted through his mind, causing a further panic.

"Catherine.....what if I have made you pregnant? I do not know if it is possible.....but what if....."

She looked up at him and smiled, unworried. "I'm afraid, Vincent, that safe sex was the last thing on my mind. Anyway .....whatever happens.....whatever comes.....know that I love you."

Vincent's chest was heaving, too overcome to speak, he drew her head down to his shoulder. He could feel the tremor within her, feel her mouth and her breath as she nuzzled into his neck and as his other furry arm gathered her closer, Catherine's arm snaked around his body, moulding herself to his warm muscular frame. But a small voice inside her reminded her that she would soon have to speak to Father about things that although had remained unspoken between them, were nevertheless at the forefront of their minds, something Catherine already suspected could not remain unspoken for much longer.

Vincent lay with his love enveloped in his arms, feeling all the tumult of her emotions. Staring blindly up at the ceiling, he tried desperately to keep his own riotous thoughts under control.



Because of Vincent's unique biochemistry he soon became immune to the pain killing injections, refusing anything stronger, instead bearing the pain without complaint.

During the night Father and Catherine took turns to sit with him, reading or talking to take his mind off his pain. By late Monday morning he was helped out of bed to sit in an armchair with his plaster encased leg propped up on a stool, topped by a pile of

pillows to give him some comfort. He was beginning to look more like his normal self.

After lunch, Vincent suggested that Catherine and Father should go outside for some air, while he took a nap, but he had to become insistent before they finally left him alone.



The afternoon sunshine peered out from behind a bank of grey clouds, brightening the blend of variegated greens, yellows and browns of the autumn foliage along the tree lined footpath, ankle deep in a golden carpet of fallen leaves.

Catherine and Father ambled along, arm in arm, Father and daughter, because that was what they had become-----united in their shared love for one unique man, and Catherine, understanding how Father would be savouring this time spent out of doors in the open air.

Catherine scuffed up the leaves beneath her feet, cascading them out in front of her, whilst she gathered her thoughts. Father was not insensitive to the suspicion he had held for some time-----that Catherine was holding something back -----something she needed to confide in him.

He waited while absorbing all the sights and sounds and the smells that surrounded him. Both of them aware of the impending occasion, and slowing their steps until they had stopped altogether.

Catherine stared down at her feet before finally finding the courage to make her confession. "Father, there is something I must prepare you for."

"Ah," he acknowledged knowingly, causing Catherine to look up and meet his affectionate gaze. She hesitated, reading the expression on his face and tilting back her head she frowned at him with affection, and asked what she knew to be true. "You know, don't you?"

He raised one eyebrow. "I would only be guessing, Cathy..... so tell me." He eased his weight from his bad hip, leaning heavily on his cane, continuing to watch her face.

There was a moment's silence before she spoke. "I think I'm pregnant, with Vincent's child."

Hooking his walking stick over his arm, Father put his hands onto her shoulders, seeing the look of wonderment mixed with apprehension on her face. "So that is what happened in the cave below the catacombs?" Suddenly thoughts catapulted into Father's mind and his expression showed concern, doubt and his voice betrayed a hint of fear. "Catherine.....Vincent did not.....force you, did he .....he wasn't himself that night.....dear God, say he didn't force you." His grip tightened on her shoulders.

Catherine shook her head and smiled to reassure him, and he relaxed his hold. "No, Father. I promise he did not force me, or hurt me in any way. It was me.....I loved **him**. It seemed the thing to do at the time." She looked down at her feet, feeling strangely shy and not wishing to go into any further detail. She raised her eyes to his, daring him to be horrified but all she saw was understanding and complete acceptance as they stood and instinctively hugged each other.

Father pulled away and posed another question, as they linked arms and began walking again. "Catherine, it has been barely a



month since that night. What makes you so sure you are pregnant?"

"Well.....since knowing Vincent, I have been celibate.....I had no need of any form of contraception and.....safe sex just wasn't a consideration that night. My period was due about four days later, but it didn't arrive."

"It could be all the upheaval," suggested Father companionably.

"Maybe, but.....I don't think so.....I just feel that I am pregnant."

They came to a stand still again, and Father turned to face her.

"Catherine, you do realize what this means. If you are indeed pregnant, it means that Vincent is **human**, or at any rate human enough or you would not have been able to conceive."

Catherine hooked her fingers under the lapels of his overcoat and shook him slightly. A smile lighting up her face. "Father.....did you ever doubt that?"

He frowned. "As a medical man.....and unable to test my theories, I could never be sure.....but anyway, quite apart from all the unknown risks involved, it doesn't alter the fact that you could bear a child who looks like Vincent."

It was as if a cloud had passed over the sunshine and Catherine's chin trembled slightly as tears filled her eyes. "Is that so terrible, Father?"

"No.....not to us," he replied gently. "But what about the child? Another child to grow up in hiding, like Vincent..... and there is always the possibility that you could give birth to a child more alien than Vincent is." He shook his head forlornly. "It is all so

unknown, Catherine, and we cannot have any conception of what Vincent has suffered, unspoken, throughout his life."

A look of desolation filled Catherine's face as the words she uttered almost choked her. "You think.....I should have Vincent's child.....terminated?"

The same look of sadness mirrored itself in Father's eyes, not wishing to see this precious gift destroyed any more than she was, and his voice held not a trace of incrimination.

"I think you should allow Peter to run a pregnancy test when he comes tonight. And.....if it proves positive, then I think we should sit down and discuss it.....that's all I am saying.....and I am none too sure how Vincent will react."

Catherine nodded, knowing that Father was not condemning any of it and knowing that now he was very much on their side. But she knew all his doubts and fears were no less than the ones she herself had struggled to come to terms with over the past two years-----and would undoubtedly be endorsed by all of Vincent's uncertainties, some of which she had already seen. Abruptly she changed subjects.

"Father.....there is one dream we can fulfill for Vincent while we are here." She smiled up at him. "We can show him the sunshine," a wide grin lighting up her face.

He squeezed the hand that she had linked through his arm. His own face suddenly breaking into an excited smile, and his eyes sparking with possibilities. "Yes, Cathy.....we can do that.....we can show him the sunshine."

Both were unaware that someone else shared the same idea -----but in a much more spectacular fashion than either of them

had ever considered.



Peter confirmed Catherine's pregnancy with silent misgivings. She could sense his unease as he dried his hands on the paper towel, and saw the tension in his face as he turned towards her.

"Peter, come on, spit it out?" she said as she sat up, swinging her legs over the edge of the high examination couch.

He shook his head and sighed, "Do you want to continue with this pregnancy, Cathy?"

She frowned, metaphorically digging her heels in. "Yes, I want to try, Peter. I want to try and give Vincent a child..... can you imagine what that would mean to him?" She watched as he seemed to struggle with her question.

"I don't know, Cathy," he sighed. "So many things could go wrong."

"Good heavens, Peter," she answered in exasperation. "I have three top doctors in the family to watch over me..... monitor my every move. **You** don't believe all that rubbish Paracelsus fed to Vincent.....do you?: Her voice rising in irritation.

"Of course not, Cathy.....that was all psychological propaganda."

She jumped down from the table. "Come on then, let's go break the news."



If Catherine had been expecting joy from Vincent, she was to be devastatingly disappointed as Vincent's face recoiled in horror.

**"NO!"** he roared, seeming to rattle everything in the room and shaking Catherine to her very roots. Even though she had sensed his apprehension earlier, nothing could have prepared her for this angry denial.

Vincent's features were set in a mask of fury, his blue eye blazing at Catherine's ashen face as she stood bereft, shocked and immobile beside his chair.

***"I want it ended, Catherine."*** It was virtually an order that brooked no argument and he continued in the same manner.  
***"Catherine, I will not be responsible for the possibility of another child to grow up like ME."***

His jaw and teeth clenched together with all the horror and fears that had remained dormant throughout a lifetime of unspoken personal suffering and denial. It was both mirrored in his eyes and etched deeply on his face.

It broke Catherine's heart, both for herself and for him, as she stood shaking her head from side to side in her abject misery, tears rolling unchecked down her face. Her whole body convulsed with sobs as she forced the words from her trembling lips.

***"Vincent.....I can't.....I can't do what you ask. I have part of you inside me, growing.....and I WILL NOT DESTROY IT. Not for you.....not for anyone. It is MY body, and you do not have that right to decide."*** She had leaned forward, her hands braced on the arm of his chair, tearfully defiant and unafraid; a side of Catherine he had had experience of, on another equally distressing occasion.

"Catherine.....?" He spoke more in amazement than anger and began to protest anew, gripping her forearm as she held his chair.

**"No Vincent,"** she snapped and dragged herself away from his hold. **"You WILL hear me out. You have as much right to father a child as anyone.....becasuse it's what I want too.....with everything that is in me. What if Vivien's mother had been persuaded to terminate her child....."** The words were left hanging in the air to ponder on, while their mutual misery resonated through their bond of love.

Vincent sighed as all his anger drained away and he reached out, not touching her until she came of her own volition, then drawing her onto his lap, ignoring the painful discomfort that her added weight caused. He held her until he felt taht she was calmer and that he was too.

His voice was barely more than a whisper, but it seemed amplified through his chest where Catherine's head rested.

"Catherine.....what we share is unique.....that you can love me at all is a miracle.....that you wish to consummate our love by giving me a child.....is out of the question."

She sat up abruptly. "No Vincent, I'm sorry, but you are wrong and you are not only being negative, you cannot even come up with one good reason why we should not have this child." She remained on his lap, stiff backed and defiant.

His features clouded over and he drew in breath. "You want good reasons, Catherine? I will give you some.....because of **who** I am. Because of **what** I am." Although his voice was calm she could feel his turmoil within. "And who is to say what kind of a child we would produce?"

"That wouldn't matter, Vincent, we would love him anyway." Her face was set, refusing to give into him.

"Would we? Can you be sure? There are too many children rejected at birth, or at some time in their young lives for taht to be a certainty.....and you, Catherine, cannot split yourself in half. It is all a recipe for disaster."

Catherine eased herself around again and opened her mouth to speak, but Vincent placed his fingers gently over her lips to silence her. "Catherine.....the tremendous burden that the love we share already puts on you.....you cannot deny it sometimes becomes overwhelming."

She nodded gravely. "It's true, but it's worth it.....It's worth whatever it takes."

He inclined his head in acknowledgement. "But then, Catherine, try and imagine how it would be as a pregnant woman, your pregnancy by necessity, to be shrouded in secrecy. Friends like to be involved, like we do in the tunnels. And what if you went into labour unexpectedly..... and Peter could not be reached.....and you gave birth to a baby who looked like me.....or worse."

Vincent shook his shaggy head forlornly, drawing in breath. "It must **never** happen, Catherine. The risks are too great and too many."

Catherine remained on his lap, absentmindedly smoothing down the fur on the back of his hand whilst she tried to marshal her thoughts. She was an assistant DA, **dammit**, trained to put up a good argument on the facts presented -----but her legal brain had deserted her and all she was left with was what she felt in her heart.

"Vincent.....I do understand your fears, probably better than

anyone apart from Father.....but you are allowing your insecurities and hangups about who you are to override your common sense. We are not living in the dark ages, and we do have three highly trained doctors in the family to watch over me, to monitor my every move, with every manner of test of subject me to at their disposal."

She waited for some response to her reasoning, but he gave none, so she continued. "Vincent, we will know well in advance if anything is wrong.....or different. And if my being at work worries you, I'll quit as soon as my pregnancy becomes evident." She took his face into her hands, searching his eyes. "I love you. I want to be part of you, and you to be part of me.....yes, our love is unique and special, something that has never been. All the more reason to consider that when we die, if we don't leave a part of ourselves behind on this planet to bear witness to our love.... what is it all for? We cannot allow it to be forgotten when we're gone.....we **have** to try, Vincent. We just have to **try.**"

There had been total silence from Vincent's hospital room as Father stood waiting in the corridor; apart from Vincent's initial outburst he had heard nothing. He moved forward and tapped on the door.

"Vincent? Catherine? Are you both all right in there?"

He was greeted with a moment's silence before he heard a reply. "Come in, Father," invited Vincent.



Peter joined Peter and Vivien in the sitting room feeling torn between the devil and the deep blue sea. He marvelled at Catherine's determination to continue the pregnancy, but at the

same time he understood all his son's fears because he shared them too, and wished he could do something to ease the pain for all of them. Neither Vivien nor Peter were surprised by Vincent's reaction, and Peter knew Catherine well enough to know that she would never give in once she got the bit between her teeth.

Vivien's heart went out to this woman who had to sacrifice so much to love this special man. Knowing that however much they wanted it, dreamed about it, he could never share her world; never share the same simple freedoms that the rest of mankind takes for granted.

Vivien had been part of this family for such a short time, but knew that her life would never be the same again. She knew she had become part of something wonderful, that few people have the honour and privilege to know and be part of. One thing was very certain, her life would be richer because of it, because of Vincent, and Catherine-----and her father. She smiled and reached out to squeeze his hand as he smiled wanly back at her.

"They'll be all right, Father. They've come this far. They won't let this destroy them."

He returned the pressure of her hand. "I know that, Vivien..... but even I, who once opposed them and all that they share... even I am allowing myself to dream....." He looked up at Peter with tears sparkling in his eyes. "I think I will stay tonight, Peter, in case I am needed. Will you get a message Below?"

"Of course, but I may not be able to come for you tomorrow."

"Don't worry," Vivien volunteered. "I'll be able to manage a few hours off. You'll just have to expect me when you see me.....and anyway, Cathy gave me the keys to her apartment



so I can collect a few clothes for her."



Chris had remained in the background throughout the evening, his whereabouts known should he be needed, but was not intrusive. It had been very late when Peter and Vivien had left and Chris took Jacob's arm, leading him into his study for a nightcap, sensing the elder's distress.

Chris handed him his requested malt whiskey and joined him in front of the fire with his brandy. They sat companionably in the firelight before Chris leaned forward.

"Come on, Jacob," he coaxed, "you can tell me."

Father nodded, knowing that he could and for the first time in more than a third of a century, Vincent's father poured his heart out.....shared all the joys, trials and fears for his adored son. When he had finally talked himself out, Chris topped off their glasses, allowing a moment's silence before stating the obvious.

"Jacob.....you must be very proud.....of both of them."

"Yes.....more than proud.....but I just wish there was something I could do to ease their pain. I feel so damn impotent."

Chris took a mouthful of brandy, pondering before asking him. "If you had the means at your disposal to find out why Vincent is the way he is.....could you do it?"

Father's heart fluttered in anticipation and he met his gaze. "Yes. it is what I used to do, Chris. It has been a frustrated dream of mine since the first time I held him in my arms..... why?"

"Because, my friend, I have a fully equipped laboratory in the

basement which I will gladly place at your disposal."

Father's face was a picture, as the mind of the research physician went into overdrive and with eyes sparkling he was thinking aloud. "I took all the samples I neede while he was under anesthetic," he looked sheepishly at Chris and shrugged. "It was but a forlorn medical gesture, while everything was at hand.....but with what I have, I can certainly do a complete cellular analysis to determine his DNA levels." Father's face was alive and animated with this long held dream. "You are serious, aren't you, Chris?"

"Of course I am, Jacob. I'll show you how everything works then it's all yours. I think first thing tomorrow would be good."

Father grinned. "Do you have any idea what this means to me.....and could mean to them?"

"Yes, Jacob," he nodded. "I really think I do."



Father looked in on Catherine before he retired for the rest of the night; though not really expecting to sleep. His mind was in a whirl. He was unperturbed at finding her bed empty and headed for the only other place she would be-----and there she was, curled up in Vincent's arms looking none too comfortable in the limited space of Vincent's bed, mindful of his plaster encased leg and the protective cage. But he had covered her over. enveloping her to him and they were both fast asleep.



It was late, well after eleven o'clock. Manhattan's District Attorney, John Moreno was sitting alone at his desk, in the silent office building with only the solitary pool of light from his reading lamp

for company; together with his troubled thoughts.

John Moreno was a man in fearful turmoil because of what he knew; because of evidence he had both concealed and revealed and because he was being blackmailed for one lousy misdemeanour that happened years ago. He'd been set up, but could never have proved it and if discovered, it could have destroyed him-----Could still destroy him.

His original crime was that he had been a gullible fool. John Moreno sighed. How many people in high office did this evil power hungry fanatic hold in his grasp? For that was the name of the game-----Power.

Money was not the driving force in this man's corrupt transactions. His obsessive need was to own a man's soul -----giving off strong conations of a warrior from ancient times, who would drink of the dead man's blood, or even cut out and eat a living heart, In the belief that he would gain the other man's strength. This man had turned evil into an art form; never having need to even raise his voice because he ruled by fear, and John Moreno's original sin palen into insignificance against what had been demanded of him since. Even though this man's need of his services had been spasmodic over the past twelve years. John Moreno hung on by his fingernails, plagued by fear and the certain knowledge that there would be a next time.

What was it that he had always told Joe Maxwell? *'The difference between them and is, is what's in here.'* He sat with his hand on his heart, placating himself with the small comfort that most of the time he did give of his best, and that there still **was** a difference, inside him-----somewhere.

He gazed down at the single sheet of paper laying open on his

blotter, it was handed to him earlier by some anonymous messenger. Like a summons from Hell. But this Firemaster from Hades was cold, reptilian, and devoid of all human feeling. John Moreno shuddered, gripped by a fear and a revulsion, he would never be able to ignore; whilst he read the words on the note again.

**Moreno**

***I will be waiting in the usual place***

***at midnight.***

**Gabriel**



John Moreno remained in low gear as he crawled silently along the Park's drive through, between trees that seemed not only eerie, but threatening to an already tortured mind. John Moreno wondered for the umpteenth time, how in God's name he had allowed himself to become entrenched with the aberration of a man that he was going to meet.

Head lamps flashed on and off in the darkness up ahead, and Moreno pulled into the curb, killing his lights before turning off his ignition and leaving the comparative safety of his car. His leather soled shoes crunched on the tarmac, and as he drew level with Gabriel's limousine, the rear door clicked open and a disembodied voice from its dark and sumptuous interior invited, "Mr. Moreno.....please, would you sit inside with me for a moment?"

So polite, so cordial and laced with venom. Moreno did as he was bid in slow deliberation, that belied the fear he was struggling to

control, hardly daring to hazard a guess at what would be required of him this time. He did not have long to wait, as he raised his eyes to look on the long, thin, almost gaunt lipless face of his persecutor, who was nodding his head up and down in an affected way, engineered to set his teeth on edge.

"Mr. Moreno.....I need your help in finding a long standing associate of mine. He supplies me with a regular quantity of a very rare drug.....has a brilliant mind.....but is a very solitary individual.....He calls himself, Paracelsus, and he is a man not to thwart. But, Mr. Moreno, we understand each other very well.....have a similar disposition. However, he has failed to keep his last two appointments with me and I fear he may have met with some demise. It is imperative that I find him."

"What makes you think that I will be able to find him when your people have had no luck?"

Gabriel sighed, "Mr. Moreno, I have requested your assistance because I happen to have discovered that one of your investigators has, let us say, crossed swords with this man on more than one occasion in the past, and may know something of his whereabouts."

"One of *my* investigators?" Moreno frowned.

"Yes, a lady by the name of Catherine Chandler."

**"Cathy?"** Moreno gasped, as icy fingers ran up and down his spine. Whatever he had been expecting, it certainly was not this.....But at least Gabriel was not going to get things all his own way and Moreno felt some slight relief, as he informed him. "I'm afraid you're still out of luck. Miss Chandler has gone away and won't be back until a week from Monday."

"I am perfectly aware of all that, Mr. Moreno; had I been able to locate her, the information I required would have been already extracted from your assistant."

Moreno shuddered anew at the implications, knowing full well what Gabriel was more than capable of and the thought of Catherine being at this man's mercy filled him with dread.

He became aware of Gabriel's eyes, sinister and intimidating, seeming to burn their way through to his most private thoughts. The thin moist slit of a mouth, smiling, in such a way as to cause the hair on the back of Moreno's neck stand on end and his only thought was to flee.

Gabriel always managed to secure the psychological upper hand and moved his face threateningly close to the District Attorney. "Catherine Chandler is somewhere in New York. I want you to put the word out that you require to contact her on urgent business. She will have no reason to suspect anything is amiss.....you, after all, are her boss, and she trusts you.....but do not delude yourself that you can protect her from **me**, because I have eyes and ears, watching and listening where you least expect them to be..... and where Miss Chandler least expects them too."

Gabriel reached across him and unfastened the car door. "Good night, Mr. Moreno. I will be in touch."



Joe Maxwell was sprawled out on his couch watching a late night movie on TV, the remains of a takeaway meal left congealing on the coffee table beside him. As he swigged the last mouthful from his can of beer, the telephone rang.

"Who the hell is this?" he muttered quietly as he pulled himself upright and reached for the phone, turning the sound down on the TV with the remote control unit at the same time, and still more interested with what was on the screen than who was at the other end of the phone.

"Yeah.....Joe Maxwell," he grumbled into the mouthpiece.

"Joe.....sorry to disturb you, I know It's late"

Joe recognized his boss' voice. "What's up, John?"

"Nothing really.....I was just wondering if you knew how to contact Cathy?"

**"What?.....Now?"** Joe grimaced, conscious of the noticeable nervous tremor in Moreno's voice-----and Joe had never known John be nervous over anything.

"No, of course not now, if it isn't possible.....but do you know how to get in touch with her?"

"You're out of luck, John.....Cathy and I don't hang out together. She keeps her private life, just that, private..... sorry, I can't help you on that one."

Joe could almost feel the other man's despair, even over the phone, and puzzled worried lines furrowed his brow. "What's the problem, John?"

"Nothing serious, Joe," he lied. "See you in the morning. Sorry to have disturbed you. Good night."

Joe was left holding the hand set and Moreno's rush of almost panic stricken words left him with a bemused expression on his face, and an inexplicable sense of concern for Catherine's

welfare. He replaced the hand set onto the cradle and sat staring vacantly at the moving pictures on the silent television screen before coming to a decision.

He turned off the TV and rang Catherine's number, hearing her familiar voice on the answer phone, he didn't leave a message, but went in search of a pair of sneakers and his anorak(waterproof jacket).

Joe was acting on pure gut instinct, and he was going to investigate Catherine's apartment, even if he had to break in to do it.



Gabriel-----his wiry body was completely relaxed, head back and eyes closed was cocooned in the sumptuous interior of his chauffeur driven limousine. He was humming quietly to himself. Only a man devoid of conscience, compassion and humanity-----a man without a heart could be so at peace with himself and oblivious to all the misery he inflicted on others.

The telephone, set into the armrest at his side, burst into life. He gently lifted the hand set. "Yes?" He whispered, totally unconcerned by the interruption but intently listening to the disembodied voice on the other end of the line.

"I thought you might like to know. Joe Maxwell has just gained entry to Chandler's apartment. He seems to be looking for something."

"Will he find anything?"

"That depends on how good he is," the voice answered.

Gabriel's head again gave the impression of a nodding dog. "If he



finds anything he can use, bring him in.....and if he doesn't.....leave him alone.....for now."



Joe had entered the elevator in the basement garage, leaving a floor below Catherine's apartment and going the rest of the way via the backstairs. It was past one o'clock in the morning and all was quiet. Joe was unsettled by how easy it was to gain entry to her apartment, without kicking the door in as he had had to do once before, the night Catherine had been kidnapped. He made a mental note to insist she invest in better locks and with a rueful grin acknowledged the wide range of skills at which one could excel in this business.

He closed the door behind him and turned on the light, a sixth sense already telling him that the place was empty. His foot caught in something on the floor and he looked down to find her briefcase, dropped on the carpet at the side of the door, as if she had just walked in from work, but that would have been on Saturday, early evening. Today was Tuesday, early hours of the morning.

Joe had no idea what he was looking for. All it amounted to was a peculiar premonition that he'd picked up from John Moreno's mysterious request and if his hunch was wrong, he knew Catherine would trust him enough to know that he was only watching out for her.

He moved across the room to stand in front of her answer phone, and before he began to debate further, the rights and wrongs of his intrusion, he pressed the rewind button. Maybe he could learn something from her messages, but the rewind button clicked off almost immediately. He pressed '*play*', but all he got was his own

silent response to her answer phone from half an hour earlier. He pressed '*fast forward*' and listened again-----nothing. He took the small tape out and turned it over, listening, again silence.

Joe did not believe for one moment that no one would telephone Catherine over a whole weekend and he left the telephone and wandered into the kitchen. His eagle eye instantly spotted the glass coffee percolator, quarter filled and the tell-tale sign of small circles of green mould floating on top of the dark brown liquid. He opened the refrigerator door and smiled. It was as well stocked as his usually was; its sole occupant being a very limp and dejected looking chicken salad covered with cling film. It was enough to convince Joe, that Catherine had been away for days, probably since Saturday evening, and, he hoped safely taking care of her sick mystery boyfriend-----what was his name? Vincent.

But Joe still could not rid himself of the feeling that something was not right. He remembered the fear he had sensed in Moreno's voice, and even at that distance, he knew he had not imagined it. Joe checked out the bedroom and the bathroom; everything left as if she had been in a hurry to get away. He walked back over to the phone, picked up the hand set and unscrewed the telephone.

'*Jesus!*' he mouthed silently. Staring up at him from the dismantled mouthpiece was a very small bugging device. He swallowed and screwed it all back together again, realizing that Catherine's apartment was obviously bugged and therefore, most probably being watched. He looked around for the most likely places where any other bugging devices would be concealed, the one most logical place being the glass topped coffee table, between her two '*dinky*' couches.

He removed a couple of magazines and glass ashtrays, then

upended the coffee table and there it was, a small example of modern day technical wizardry stuck into the inside corner joint. Had he not been looking for it, it would certainly have gone unnoticed.

Joe's heart was thumping as he lowered the table back onto the floor, certain that whoever was listening would know he was in there. Even though he had his gun with him, Joe had never been put to the test and had always managed to talk his way out of any threatening situations, but right now, he wondered what the odds were on his getting out of this apartment building in one piece. He was seriously contemplating just staying put until morning.

Then, because the building was so quiet, he distinctly heard the elevator stop and the doors slide open down the hallway, followed by the sound of footsteps-----two people. He relaxed slightly, as he heard voices and the rattle of keys, naturally assuming it was Catherine returning with a friend.

Joe did not want to startle her too much, so leaving all the lights on he stood as visible as possible in front of the door, ready to '*shush*' them before they voiced their presence. As the door opened it was Joe who gasped, recognizing Peter Alcott, but not the woman he was with. Quickly recovering, Joe herded the surprised nocturnal visitors back out into the hallway, switching out the lights and pulling the door closed behind him.

"Joe? What the hell's going on here? What on earth are you doing in Cathy's apartment?" Peter demanded to know as they were moved protesting away from the door.

"Shhhhh, Peter," Joe gripped his arm moving them even further down the hallway and keeping his voice low, he explained. "I had a very strange phone call about an hour ago. It caused me to fear

for Cathy's safety. I came to check up on her, that's all, and as it turns out, my instincts were correct. Cathy's apartment has been bugged.....the phone as well. I've no idea why, or who it could be." He looked from one to the other, his face tense with apprehension as he added, "We can also assume that the place is being watched."

Peter's eyes met Vivien's, knowing she understood his fears all too well and he in turn voiced them to Joe. "This is something we can really do without right now, Joe, and what concerns me is how long these bugging devices have been in place?" Peter paused for a moment considering his next questions. "Joe.....has Cathy told you anything?"

They stood in a close knit group halfway down the hallway. Joe was mystified and answered with a hint of cynicism. "Huh? I think I'd be the last person she'd tell any secrets to," he frowned wondering, "Until I packed her off home on Saturday evening....."

"Joe, what has she told you?" The tone of Peter's voice coming as some surprise to him and he couldn't help but feel slightly disconcerted by his knowing attitude.

Joe shrugged and answered, "Nothing much, except that she's been nursing her seriously ill boyfriend and it was all becoming too much to bear.....so I insisted she take some time off.....and that's it.....that's all I know." He fixed his gaze directly at Vivien. "Now, do I get to meet the pretty lady?"

Vivien smiled and looked down at her feet, liking this man who obviously cared so much about Catherine's well being.

"Sorry, Joe," Peter apologized for his tardiness and introduced

them. They shook hands, seemingly approving of what they saw before Joe reluctantly turned his attention back to Peter and the situation that they found themselves in.

"I take it then that you know where Cathy is?"

"We know where she is, Joe.....but are **you** sure that you have no idea what this is all about?"

"None.....it was only the very curious late night phone call from my boss that got me here in the first place. He wanted to know how he could contact Cathy, and he sounded scared. Anyway, it was enough to get me over here to check up on her.....she is kinda special, you know."

"We know," they answered in unison, smiling at the look of surprise on Joe's face and Peter's brain kicked into gear. "What reason could there be for John Moreno wanting to contact Cathy so late at night?"

"I've no idea.....but then even **you** seem to know more about Cathy than I do."

Peter inclined his head and sighed, "Joe.....I'm sorry but I am going to have to leave you in the dark on this at the moment. It's something I am not at liberty to confide in you off my own back. Just trust me for a while.....there is a lot more to keep safe here than just Catherine."

Joe drew in a deep breath and sighed loudly. "As long as she's safe, right now that's all that concerns me." He tried not to feel disappointed and he nodded his acceptance somberly.

Peter turned to Vivien who had sunk down onto the chair beside the hall table. "I think we'll abandon the idea of collecting fresh

clothes for Cathy and try and get ourselves out of here, if possible, without being seen."

Vivien nodded. "Good thinking, Peter," before gathering up her purse from the table and rising to her feet.

"And I'll keep a close watch on my boss.....to try and discover what he's up to. I take you know can warn Cathy to stay clear?"

"Don't worry, Joe," Peter assured him. "Cathy is in extremely safe hands and has no intention of returning until she has to."

"Good," Joe nodded but could not help but feel slightly shut out.

The three departing conspirators left by the back stairs and the hallway was silent once again.

Had there been anyone to observe, they would have seen the apartment door open at the other end of the hallway, and two of Gabriel's men moving silently to the elevator.



Gabriel was almost ready to retire for what was left of the night; although he needed little sleep. He was dressed in silk pajamas and quilted dressing gown, swishing a generous cognac around a bulbous brandy glass and mulling over the events of the day.

The telephone beeped at the side of him and he lifted the receiver to his ear, listening intently to the recognized voice on the other end of the line. He nodded his head, but made no comment, until he heard something that warranted a reply and some instruction from him.

"Find out who the woman is.....and don't lose her. We may need to bring her in.....and her companion.....I think a chat

with him would not go amiss. See that he is taken to 1900 Sixth Avenue.....and you can wake me at seven o'clock with your findings."



Peter dropped Vivien off at the hospital and being the gentleman and friend that he was, he parked his car and saw her right up to the door of her room. A rather non-descript door, one of several along the silent hospital corridor.

"This is nice, Peter, but there is no need....."

"Yes there is, my caring friend. I wanted to make sure that you don't spend what is left of the night checking around the wards."

He grinned. "Get some sleep, Vivien.....I'll ring Hamilton Lodge first thing in the morning and I'll see you after my surgery. With luck, we can have coffee together."

He kissed her cheek and they hugged each other good night.

"You make sure that you follow your own prescription too, Peter," she called after him as he waved and disappeared down the corridor.

Peter approached his car in the deserted hospital car park. He had his keys out ready, but his mind was on the events of the evening. He was about to unlock his car door when a sudden premonition caused him to stiffen in fear and he glanced behind him to find that he had been hemmed in by three heavy set men-----and there was no means of escape.



Joe knocked and entered Moreno's office as soon as he arrived at work the following morning. He was sitting behind his desk looking

as if he had spent a sleepless night. "Morning, John."

"Joe," Moreno acknowledged. Cordiality over there was no mistaking the air of tension between them, and Joe, not being one to sit on the fence came straight to the point. He stood in front of him, his whole demenour uncompromising.

"You going to tell me what that phone call was about last night, John?"

Moreno lowered his eyes unseeing onto the document laid out on his desk before replying as nonchalantly as he could. "Nothing to concern you, Joe. You've said you don't know anything about Cathy's private life.....so that's an end to it as far as you're concerned."

**"The HELL it is!"** Joe exploded, leaning forward with both hands splayed out on the desk. **"Cathy is my friend. I thought you cared about her too. If she's in some kind of trouble then I want to know about it. So, come on..... give!"**

Moreno glared angrily up at him. **"You're way out of line, Joe.....Just remember who you're talking to."**

**"Don't pull rank on me, John. I've been in this game long enough to know this has nothing to do with the DA's office."**

Joe leaned further forward across the desk, "It's off the record.....isn't it?"

The fact that Moreno was afraid was plain to see in the split second that he let it show in his eyes, and Joe picked up on it immediately. Moreno cleared his throat and pushed his fears to one side. His anger evaporated though the tension remained.

"Joe," he sighed, "Will you just tell me what **you** know?"



"I don't **know** anything," he answered, still tense, "except that her apartment has been wired for sound. So you tell me? What the hell is going on?"

"All right," he sighed. "I'll tell you what I know....." He leaned back in his chair and Joe, too, pulled up a chair and sat down, waiting. "Have you ever heard of a man called Gabriel?"

"No," Joe answered abruptly. "Who is he?"

Moreno toyed nervously with an expensive looking fountain pen. "He's the head of a powerful world wide consortium, supposedly legitimate but in actuality funded by all manner of vice and corruption. This man believes that Cathy has knowledge of the whereabouts of one of his contacts, whom it would seem has gone missing. He wants to ask her a few questions, that's all."

**"That's all?"** Joe almost choked on his words. ***"I don't believe I'm hearing this. You would deliver Cathy into the hands of a man like that for questioning?"*** Joe's eyes narrowed suddenly and he asked quietly. ***"What's this guy got on you, John?"***

It was too close to the truth and Moreno jumped to his feet, his eyes blazing, ***"Get the HELL out of here!"*** He ordered angrily. ***"I'm not here to be interrogated by YOU!"***

Joe hauled himself to his feet and in an almost threatening manner leaned over Moreno's desk. ***"No.....but you are perfectly willing to hand Cathy over to this man, who by your own admission, is probably the most corrupt man in the country."*** Joe retorted with equal anger and disbelief.

Moreno glared back at him. ***"One more word out of you, Joe,"*** he warned, ***"And I'll put YOU on SUSPENSION!"***

With a look of seething contempt for the man he had always respected, Joe turned on his heels and stormed out of his office, slamming the door behind him; leaving Moreno sitting at his desk, feeling as though he had just pressed the button and started the countdown to doomsday, and consumed with guilty misgivings at having allowed the situation to become so out of control.



At ten forty five a call was put through to Vivien's office from Peter Alcott's receptionist. Some of the children from the nearby ward had gathered outside her office and were being particularly noisy, so she got up and closed the door.

"Hi Janet, what can I do for you?" Vivien inquired, now she could hear what was being said.

"Vivien, do you know where Peter is?"

"Isn't he in surgery?" she frowned

"No.....and he's about an hour behind with his appointments. I've rang his housekeeper and she tells me he hasn't been home all night."

Vivien's throat constricted in apprehension because of the unexpected meeting they had had with Joe Maxwell last night. She shook herself. *'Come on, Hayward, you're over reacting,'* as she calmly replied to Janet on the other end of the phone. "Don't worry, Janet.....spin some yarn to his patients; you know the drill.....and I'll look into it. Okay?"

"Okay. Thanks, Vivien."

Vivien informed the duty nurse she was going out for a few minutes and headed straight down to the street level car park.

She stopped dead in her tracks, because even though the car park was now packed solid with cars, she spotted Peter's instantly. It was exactly where he had left it last night. She automatically approached it, walking around it, trying all the doors, looking for-----she had no idea what she was looking for. All she did know was that the incident last night had unnerved her and she was afraid for Peter's safety.

As Vivien moved around to try the driver's door, the toe of her shoe caught on something metallic on the tarmac. She bent down to investigate and found a set of keys that had fallen just underneath the car. '*Peter's?*' she questioned herself. With a thumping heart, she pushed the car key into the lock and hey presto-----it opened.

Vivien rushed back into the hospital and to the nearest pay phone, she had to look up the telephone number of the DA's office. She picked up the phone then cursed under her breath, realizing she had no money with her. She replaced the receiver and quickly scribbled down the number and headed back to her own office to call Joe Maxwell, refusing to give her name until he came on the line. As soon as she heard Joe's voice the questions and answers came short, sharp and straight to the point as their mutual tension mounted.

"Yeah.....Joe Maxwell."

"Joe.....It's Vivien Hayward. We met last night."

"Hey, Vivien.....How are you?"

"I'm fine, but listen Joe, Peter's gone missing."

"What do you mean, missing?"

"He's not been home all night and he hasn't arrived for his surgery this morning." Vivien went on to explain briefly about the abandoned car and finding Peter's keys.

"Vivien, where are you calling from?"

"My office.....why?"

"Go and have a cup of coffee in the coffee shop. I'll find you there, but make sure you stay where there are people around you."

"I thought you would think I was being paranoid....."

"If you are," he interrupted her, "then so am I. I'm not taking any chances. See you soon."

Vivien replaced the hand set and took a deep breath to calm herself, then stood up to make her way to the hospital coffee shop. Suddenly the door to her office opened and two men walked in, though smartly dressed they seemed somehow intimidating. Vivien felt her blood run cold as her attention was drawn to the trench coat that one of them held over his arm and she gasped in horror, as she saw the muzzle of the concealed gun levelled directly at her.

"Dr. Hayward, just do as you are told.....no sudden moves .....and no one will be hurt. We only want to ask you some questions."

Vivien had never been subjected to anything like this in her whole life. Violence or serious intimidation were things alien to her and she found herself paralyzed with fear and unable to utter a sound. Her legs refused to cooperate, but she had the muzzle of the gun pressed into her side. She did not want to die and there were too many children around. Somehow she found the strength to

coordinate her limbs as the second man moved to her side and taking her arm, he guided her from the room through the hospital corridors and out of the building to a waiting limousine.



"I'm Joe Maxwell, DA's office." Joe flashed his ID at the receptionist, who stared at the small wallet for a moment before looking up into Joe's agitated face. He had inquired in the coffee shop for Vivien but no one had seen her all morning.

The young receptionist, once completely satisfied that he was who he appeared to be asked, "Yes, Mr. Maxwell, what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for Dr. Hayward. Do you know her?"

"Of course," she nodded and smiled at him pleasantly.

Joe did not return her smile. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes, I saw her a short while ago over there at that pay phone," she pointed. "I think she was looking up a telephone number."

"Have you seen her since?" he fired back at her.

"No, I'm sorry," she shook her head then changed her mind as she began to sense Joe's mounting alarm. "Wait a minute," she paused, to clarify her thoughts as to exactly what it was she had seen. "I saw her leave a short while ago, through the main entrance. She was with two men."

"Did you see their faces?" he asked hopefully.

"No, I only had a rear view of them, but they got into a black limo waiting on the front." She watched as the colour drained from Joe's boyishly handsome face. "Mr. Maxwell.....? She

inquired, now thoroughly worried herself.

"Jesus," Joe whispered to himself, his pulse rate accelerating at a speed of knots. Since his meeting with Moreno first thing this morning he had made it his business to find out about this man, Gabriel. He was an elusive character, but what little information Joe had unearthed, caused him to break out in a cold sweat, just like he was doing now. He refocused his attention back onto the young receptionist. "Tell me something.....but think about it first .....did you get the impression that Dr. Hayward was being forcibly put into that limo, or did she get inside of her own free will?"

The receptionist could see from his face that the situation was serious and she thought carefully about what she had seen. "Now that I think about it, Dr. Hayward certainly wasn't herself."

"What'd you mean?" His hands gripped the counter until his knuckles showed white.

"Well, she walked right past me as if she was in a trance or something.....that just isn't like her. she always stops to speak, always has something to say....." she paused and a frown creased her brow. "Yes, the more I think about it .....yes, it seemed as though they had to help her get in the car....." she shook her head apologetically. "I'm sorry, Mr. Maxwell. It never registered at the time that she was behaving strangely.....I was so busy on the desk, and....."

"Don't worry about it. You've been a great help. Can I use your phone? I need to call the police."

The receptionist had already moved the telephone onto the counter in readiness for him to use, before he had finished

speaking, and Joe quickly tapped out the number.

"Greg Hughes.....Joe Maxwell....."

////////////////////////////////////

Greg and Joe met up in the garage of the DA's building. It was lunch time and there was much activity going on around them as the populace of the building were either departing for lunch or returning from lunch. As it was, no one took any notice of the two men in close conversation by the side of Joe's car.

"Okay, Joe. Photographs of Peter Alcott and Vivien Hayward are being circulated.....now, what is it you're not telling me?"

Greg and Joe had been friends for years, and they knew each other's moods. There was a mutual trust between them that was never questioned. Joe stood silent, reluctant to put his thoughts into words; but Greg had no trouble voicing what he suspected.

"You think someone in the DA's office is dirty, don't you?"

The question was left hanging in the air as Joe looked at him, his very silence indentifying the person he suspected.

"Moreno?" Greg asked incredulously. "You think it's Moreno?"

"I don't know, Greg. " Joe thumped the side of his fist down onto the roof of the car in frustration. "The conversation I ahd with him this morning was real weird. I've never had cause to doubt John before and it doesn't set well with me now. I just hope I'm wrong. Hell, Greg.....what do I do?"

"Moreno's all we've got to go on, Joe," said Greg, trying to rationalize. "We can keep his part of it off the record for now .....no good shooting him down in flames until we're sure... and

we could be wrong, but it seems he definitely knows something, and we, or I should say you, have got to find out what it is.....he's hiding."

"I know.....and I think it stinks."



John Moreno was nowhere to be found in the building and had left no messages as to where he could be contacted, which was not just out of character, but completely unprofessional for Manhattan's District Attorney.

Joe pulled down the slats of the window blind, drawing in a deep breath as he gazed out at a grey, overcast, New York City. "Do you think I'm jumping to conclusions about Moreno?"

Greg slowly shook his head diverting his attention from the stack of documents in his possession. "No.....there are too many unexplained incidents and disappearances..... and we're only following the statutory modus operandi..... and so far, giving him the benefit of the doubt. Anyway, I'll put a man outside Catherine Chandler's apartment just to be on the safe side should she return. I feel as you do on this one, Joe. I, too, hope to God, Moreno isn't involved in any of this....."

"Amen to that," said Joe, but both men already knew they were hoping for an impossibility.



Peter Alcott was no longer a young man and at this moment he did not know how much longer he could hold out. He had been questioned for hours without success. The same damned questions over and over again with the unremitting lights blazing



into his face, preventing him from seeing his tormentors. They were just two disembodied voices coming out of the velvet blackness beyond the arc lights.

He was tied to a straight backed hard wooden chair and even though he had suffered no physical beating, his body ached in every limb and his extremities were numb, swollen and painful. He suspected that he had totally lost his ability to stand up, let alone walk.

Peter had reached the end of his endurance and he welcomed the merciful blackness that claimed him as he slumped against his unyielding restraints like a rag doll.

Gabriel was amazed and in some considerable awe of this none too robust friend of the Chandler woman. Somehow he suspected there was much more at stake here than her whereabouts. His fortitude suggested to him that other secrets were being protected by his silence.

Gabriel was alone in the control room staring at one of a bank of visual monitor screens before him, watching the solitary broken figure of Peter Alcott. A light flashed on the console, illuminating Gabriel's gaunt features in the dimly lit surroundings.

He lifted the telephone hand set, "Yes?" he questioned, his voice little more than a whisper.

"We have the woman.....where do you want her?"

Gabriel grimaced, drawing in a deep breath. "Put her in with her colleague and leave them alone.....I'll keep them under observation. Maybe the shock of seeing the condition of her friend will loosen her tongue.....and if not.....then doctor, we will resort to your mastery of persuasion by the use of your specially

formulated drug."

Gabriel did not wait for any response but replaced the hand set, sitting back comfortably to observe Peter and Vivien.



The weather was abysmal, dark and grey, with persistent drizzly rain that looked set for the day. Chris was disappointed, knowing that he could not spring the surprise he had planned until the weather cleared. He smiled, not even Father knew exactly what he had in mind but he had been sworn to secrecy anyway.

Vincent had become more upwardly mobile on a pair of crutches, impressing Chris with his rate of recovery from what was quite a major piece of surgery. But with Vincent's natural athleticism he soon got the hang of the crutches and was glad to be up and about. His ankle still gave him some considerable pain, but as always, Vincent resigned himself to enduring it.

Father had been missing for most of the day on the pretext of spending more time with his new found friend, Chris. He was also very much aware that Vincent and Catherine needed to spend some time alone together and this was his attempt at arranging it without it appearing too obvious. In the event, it turned out to be no lie and he also discovered that his host was in fact an extremely capable technical assistant; certainly a man of many talents.

Catherine and Vincent spent the day quietly, watching videos some of which Vincent found most intriguing. They finished a jigsaw puzzle and spent some time reading to each other. By mutual consent they kept off the subject that was uppermost in their minds.

Vincent was having difficulty coming to terms with this dramatic change in his life. Catherine knew deep in her heart that even with his initial horrified and angry rejection, he would never have been able to live with himself, had she gone ahead and done what he had demanded of her and terminated her pregnancy.

Her love had been put to the test, and she had shown strength enough for both of them. Now she was giving him the space he needed, knowing that if he had been at home, Below, he would have gone off somewhere into the darkness of his world.....alone, to ponder his inner self.

Darkness came early that evening, encouraged by the dull grey sky. Father returned in a chirpy mood, having had a very successful session in the basement laboratory. His tests however, were not yet conclusive and he thought it better not to elaborate on how he had spent his day.

Chris followed him into the sitting room pushing a two tier trolley laden with tea, assorted dainty sandwiches and cakes. Afternoon tea being an English custom that had been adopted in many households, including Father's, in their world Below. Chris excused himself and left them to enjoy their tea alone.

It was Catherine who asked for the early evening news to be turned on, and the three of them watched the news and events from around the world, something she knew would be missed on their return Below. Catherine made a mental note to see if something could be done to keep them all abreast of world affairs.

It was a local news report, however, that brought them all to attention, as they sat in stunned, disbelieving silence, while the news reader informed them that two of New York's eminent doctors had been abducted.

As the details unfolded and photographs of Peter and Vivien were flashed onto the screen followed by another photograph of John Moreno, the news reader continued.

***'Deputy DA, Joe Maxwell is also concerned about the mysterious disappearance of Manhattan's District Attorney, John Moreno, but in his press statement this afternoon, he admitted that it was unclear as to whether there was any connection between John Moreno's disappearance and that of the two doctors. We will keep you informed throughout the night of any further developments.'***

As the news reader continued with the other points of the news, Father turned the TV set off and Catherine, who had been curled up at the side of Vincent was now on her feet.

"I must phone Joe." She moved over to the telephone at the other side of the bed.

"Yes," Father agreed and thinking out aloud said, "and I must try and get back Below, and organize our Helpers in the search. Dear God.....I dare not even begin to imagine what this is all about." He glanced at Vincent, trying, with little success, to hide his fears for his new daughter and his life long friend. He remained on his feet unable to settle, hoping that Catherine could contact her boss and friend, Joe Maxwell.

Catherine was already at the phone, staring silently at them both, whilst waiting, fingers crossed that Joe would answer. "Joe," she exclaimed into the mouthpiece, "thank goodness you're still there. It's Cathy. What's going on?"

"Cathy!" Joe responded in his usual exuberant manner. "Are you okay? Are you safe?" The tremendous relief he felt was more than evident in the sound of his voice.

Vincent and Father smiled at one another in silent acknowledgement that other good people cared about Catherine too.

"I'm all right, Joe, but tell me what's going on.....Peter and Vivien were here with us until late last night."

Vincent reached over and gripped her hand, drawing her down close to him on the bed as she listened while Joe put her in the picture.

"I don't know what's going on, Cathy.....all I do know for certain is that you're tied up in it somehow."

"Me?" She glanced at Vincent and then at Father.

"Yeah.....your apartment's been bugged.....completely wired for sound. Greg's put a man outside your door, to warn you, in case you came home.....though I've just had the place swept.....so it's clean now."

Vincent's ear was close to the hand set and he could hear all that was being said. Joe continued, "Listen Kiddo, so long as you're safe.....you sit tight. I've got enough missing people on my hands at the moment without having to worry about you."

Catherine could feel the unease in his voice and her eyes locked with Vincent's. "Joe.....what's the bottom line?"

Joe sighed heavily. "Cathy, I don't want to alarm you, but I have a gut feeling that it's you they're after. Is there someone you trust who can liaise with me?"

Catherine's eyes rested on Father. "Yes Joe. I can arrange that."

"Good. Well, I'll leave that with you then. I'll be here till late. Just

be safe, Cathy, be safe."

"I will, Joe," she nodded, "and thanks." Catherine stared thoughtfully at the hand set before replacing it onto its cradle, and they all looked towards the door as Chris entered.

"Have you seen the news?" realizing from the look on their faces that the question was superfluous.

"Chris," Father announced worriedly. "I must get Below and alert the Helpers. The more people out looking for Peter and Vivien, the more chance we have of finding them."

"Yes, of course," Chris agreed readily. "I'll have the car brought round and we'll go straight away."



Joe met Father in the lobby of a hotel, close to the DA's office building, and after their formal introductions they moved to sit in the hotel lounge. The meeting had been arranged by phone only minutes earlier. Joe was intrigued and more than a little surprised by the man who introduced himself as Jacob wells. They settled themselves in an alcove table and the waiter took their order, tea for Father and a coffee for Joe.

"I'm very pleased to meet you at last, Joe.....may I call you Joe?"

"Sure," Joe nodded, intrigued.

"Catherine has told us so much about you over the past two years, I feel I know you all ready." He smiled at the look of puzzled astonishment on Joe's face and continued with his explanation. "I am Vivien's father, and it is my son. who Catherine is in love with. My son's.....illness, has been a worry to us all these past few

months. Peter and I are lifelong friends, we went through medical school together."

Joe gasped, pleasantly surprised. "You're a doctor?"

Father nodded. Joe pondered this information before a frown creased his brow. He had run a check on both Peter Alcott and Vivine Hayward, hoping to find a link, or something to go on. This man's claim that he was Vivien's father did not check out with the information in their computer. A small seed of doubt entered Joe's mind, even though this man seemed to know a lot about Catherine, he had to satisfy himself that he was who he said he was.

The tray of tea arrived together with Joe's coffee and they waited until they were alone again before Joe voiced his thoughts. "Wait a minute. Vivien's parents were killed in a road accident about two months ago."

Father immediately recognized Joe's suspicion and quickly tried to put his mind at rest. "Yes, I know. They were her adoptive parents. After their deaths she felt that she could fulfill a long held ambition.....to trace her ancestry, and she found me." Father smiled and began to pour his tea.

Joe took a mouthful of coffee, all his instincts telling him that he had no reason to doubt this man who began elaborating further.

"Joe, I didn't even know I had a daughter until very recently, and now that we have found each other.....well, I don't want to lose her again."

Joe nodded, understanding and wanting to help, but he couldn't let this opportunity go without asking him about some of the secrets in Catherine's life-----all the unanswered questions

and mysterious incidents that has caused him so much speculation over the past two years.

Father did not answer him straight away, but when he did, he asked him a question. "Joe, If you have always suspected Catherine of have secrets in her life, why, with all you have at your disposal.....why, have you never checked her out, had her followed, or even followed her yourself?"

"Good question," Joe acknowledged. "And I'll tell you why. I owe Cathy a lot.....she stood by me in my hour of need .....I value her friendship.....and the mutual trust we have in each other. If I started to spy on her, all that would be lost. In this business you need people around you, you can count on. We watch out for each other, that was the reason I was in her apartment and how I discovered it had been bugged."

Father nodded completely satisfied and happy to shed light on at least some of the mysteries that had plagued this young man's natural curiosity since Catherine had entered his life.

"Joe," Father began, his whole approach was one of friendship and trust. "I am glad that you are Catherine's friend.....doubly glad and grateful to know how you watch over her.....so is my son. You see, Joe, it is my son she protects with all her secrecy."

Joe leaned forward, nursing his coffee cup in both hands. "Why, what's he done?"

"It is not waht he has done, it is more what he is that you may not be able to accept."

Joe frowned and drew back his head. "Hey, come on..... I'vehad my fill of weird conversations over the past twenty four hours."



"Then tell me about them. Tell me what you know. When this is over, Joe, I promise I will introduce you to my son....."

Joe sighed and slouched back into his seat. For reasons Joe could not fathom, he relayed to Father everything that had happened up to Moreno's disappearance earlier in the day.

Father agreed that the District Attorney seemed to know more than he was letting on. "Might I make an observation, Joe?"

"Sure." He straightened up in his seat, giving Father his full attention.

"You and Catherine have a good working relationship with John Moreno?" Father unconsciously toyed with the teaspoon on the table.

"We do.....he's always been there for us.....always supportive, though we don't always see eye to eye.....but we've never had reason to doubt him."

Father replaced the teaspoon onto the saucer and sat back in his chair. "The I think you are right in not prejudging him.... and you have not, have you?"

"No.....I only told the police what I wanted them to know .....to give John a way out.....and myself for that matter, if I'm wrong."

Father nodded. "It is good to know that you do not prejudge. I hope you will apply the same logic when you meet my son."

"Jacob, I just hope I am wrong. I've always looked up to John Moreno, both as a friend, and someone to use as a sounding board. I have a great deal of respect for him as a man. To find that he has deceived me.....us.....would be like being

betrayed by a dear friend.....who has died."



Joe stepped off at his frequented eating place in Astoria, ordering one of his favourite lasagne's.....though tonight he was unable to do justice to it and ended up leaving half of it, but he finished his coffee and headed home.

As he approached the door to his apartment, keys poised ready, a familiar voice stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Joe?"

He turned. John Moreno was before him, looking grey, crumpled and unshaven; appearing much older than his years, and Joe could almost taste the fear in him.

"John." Joe's heart was thumping with all the implications this man represented, and for a split second, Joe was not sure he wanted to know, but then, he felt a sudden gratitude that John had come to him, at all. "You look in need of a stiff drink.....come on in."

Moreno stood in Joe's apartment the picture of apathy, and Joe knew a man living on a knife edge when he saw one. He helped him off with his overcoat. "Sit down, John.....have you eaten?"

He did not answer but sank down onto the couch, his head falling back against the plump cushions and closed his eyes. Joe dropped both their coats over a nearby chair, then poured a brandy and collected a beer from the refrigerator for himself.

"Here, drink this," he said as he handed the brandy to Moreno who looked up at him from his place on the couch. Joe sat down opposite him. "Talk to me, John.....tell me I'm way out of line.....tell me I've got a vivid imagination.... tell me."

"I'm finished, Joe." His words hung quietly in the air.

"Hey, don't tell me that. Don't tell me I've been wrong about you all these years? I don't believe that. Talk to me, John, whatever it is, I want to know." But Joe felt the panic rise within him. Could he really have been so wrong about this man?

He sat forward in his chair watching Moreno take a shuddering breath. He could not meet Joe's eyes as he began to talk.

"It all began not long after I was appointed DA, twelve years ago. I was ambitious, but I wanted to do it my way..... straight down the line. There was a very complex corruption trial going on at the time and it was going well. We were all set to win the case and send the man in charge of an international drug ring and three of his degenerate underlings down the line, for a long, long time. Before it actually got to trial, I was approached by a man who offered me a vast sum of money, if I would see to it that these people were acquitted. I was the new boy, and they were in the market to buy themselves a DA."

He took a swig of his brandy, shuddering as it hit the back of his throat then he continued, "Joe, I told him to go to hell. I wasn't for sale.....so they set me up.....the details aren't important now, but there was no way I could have cleared myself." He gave a short mirthless laugh. "I didn't have the friendship or loyalty of someone like Cathy Chandler on my side. There was no one but me, and there was nothing I could do about it, Joe. I would have lost everything, so I did what they wanted. Over the years the demands of this man, Gabriel, have become worse and I have lived in constant fear that one day I would be found out. I just didn't have the courage to say no to this man."

Joe sat in shocked silence unable to think, unable to speak. He

was sick to his stomach listening to this incredible confession as John's voice droned on.

"Now, this same sam is trying to contact a drug supplier by the name of Paracelsus. You and Cathy almost had him, about fifteen months ago, but there was a tip off and he slipped through the net."

The words *'tip off'* caught Joe's attention and he snapped, **"Who tipped them off?"** But Joe already knew the answer to that and his heart sank even further when he remembered that this same drug dealer, Paracelsus, a name to conjure with, had gone on to murder Jimmy Moreno and Bernie Spirko, and that was without the rest who had died or had been institutionalized because of the drug he supplied.

Joe stared at the stranger before him who appeared to be almost shrinking before his eyes. Without a doubt, John Moreno was a broken man.

Joe hauled himself to his feet and began pacing the floor thumping one hand against the other in mounting anger and frustration.

"Joe," Moreno croaked, "I contacted you because I knew you would see that Cathy was safe. There are still some thing I will not stoop to, and I wanted to keep you out of it, as well. The thought of Cathy at the mercy of Gabriel, does not bare thinking about."

"Cathy's safe," he informed him, all friendliness gone from his voice.

"I'm glad," he answered contritely.

**"You're glad,"** Joe sneered bitterly, wondering how he could

have been so wrong about anyone, especially John Moreno. ***"And what about Peter Alcott and Vivien Hayward? What will this Gabriel do to them?"*** Joe stood glowering, unable to conceal his anger at this man's betrayal.

"He'll either use drugs to make them tell him where Cathy is, or he'll use them as hostages to draw Cathy out into the open."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Yes.....I've made it my business to find out.....call it easing my conscience. Maybe there is still a difference between them and me."

Joe was non committal, he would not trust himself to answer and he waited for the requested information.

"1900 Sixth Avenue."

Joe jumped to his feet and walked over to the phone and tapped out a number. "Get me Greg Hughes.....***No, I can't wait,*** he snapped. ***"This is Joe Maxwell speaking, just get him to the phone."*** Joe waited feeling like he was going to explode at any minute.

"What are you going to do, Joe?" Moreno asked tentatively.

***"Do? I'll tell you what I'm going to do.....get Vivien and Peter out of that place.....alive I hope.....and then I'm going to nail that bastard, Gabriel, to the wall,"*** he sneered.

"I mean.....about.....me?"

Joe stared at him, consumed with such a mixture of emotions.....anger, contempt, pity.....but he answered, ***"You? I don't give a DAMN about you."*** All of a sudden Joe

felt and overwhelming urge to weep, but held his control, as Greg came onto the line and he passed on all the information that Moreno had volunteered.



Gabriel sat pensively gazing at the TV monitor screen. One of many in the bank of screens before him. Peter and Vivien were being held captive in a stark white windowless room---- not that they were capable of going anywhere, as they lay prone on single beds in a drugged stupor.

Gabriel turned to his collaborator, a doctor, skilled in the art of drug induced mind control-----a more subtle form of extracting information and much less messy than beatings and physical torture.

"We'll leave them until morning. They are no good to us dead."

They had discovered nothing, at least nothing that seemed to make any sense, and Gabriel had called a halt. Now, all they could do was wait until their captives had slept off some of the effects of the drugs-----a process that was uncertain and would be a somewhat traumatic experience for the patients.



Within the next ninety minutes a crack team of army style commandos, attached to the New York Police Department had been mobilized and without any warning had descended on 1900 Sixth Avenue. They were lowered onto the roof from two police helicopters and another team went in at ground level.

The decision from above had been to 'go' for it and the occupants of the building did not know what had hit them, giving up without a

struggle when they saw how vastly outnumbered they were.

Gabriel and his accomplice doctor, were being held under close arrest in the control room, while his other men were disarmed and rounded up and taken out to the waiting police prison van.

Peter and Vivien were located in the windowless cell they had occupied, totally oblivious to what was happening around them. The paramedicas in attendance checked them over and discovered what drugs were being used from the doctor and in what dosage. They were able to reassure Joe, that Peter and Vivien stood an excellent chance of a full recovery.

As soon as Joe had seen them safely on their way to St. Vincent's hospital, he left Greg in charge and went to make a very important phone call to the number that Jacob Wells had given to him earlier. He was surprised when he heard the sound of an oriental voice on the other end of the line, and even more surprised when he was told he had been expecting his call and would be delighted to pass his message onto Father.

"Father?" Joe queried, feeling even more perplexed.

"Yes, he is Father to us all."

Joe smiled as he put the phone down. He was looking forward to meeting Jacob Wells again.....and his son.

When Joe returned to his apartment he found it empty, but on the mantelpiece he found a note.

*Joe,*

*Thanks for all your Loyalty and support.*

*I'm going to turn myself in.*

*John.*



Chris accompanied Father to St. Vincent's hospital the following morning. Peter and Vivien were released into their charge and and they all returned to Hamilton Lodge, which was the ideal place to continue their recovery from the effects of the drugs. It was a slow and somewhat distressing process which needed specialist care. The facilities at Hamilton Lodge were better than anything Father could have supplied Below.

Father began to wonder if things would ever be the same again and if the truth were told, he was homesick. All this toing and froing had made him realize that he could never leave the world he had created, Below. He was not alone with this feeling. Vincent too, felt the urge to go home. He was comfortable and he had been made to feel welcome here, but home, was the one place he felt safe----- and free. Even Catherine felt its pull-----she too had become so much a part of their world, that to her, it had become-----home.

Catherine had been in close contact with Joe by phone, as he filled her in on all that had happened. A large cache of drugs and armoury had been discovered at 1900 Sixth Avenue; worth millions of dollars on the streets. There was no doubt that Gabriel and his cohorts would never walk the streets of New York again, as more and more of their corrupt enterprises came to light, but Joe and Catherine, were under no illusions, that someone would be waiting in the wings to take Gabriel's place. Out on the streets nothing ever changes. But then-----a man as powerful as Gabriel could rule an empire from his prison cell.

It gave them all food for thought, and indeed seemed a strange



act of fate that Paracelsus had been in league with Gabriel for many years. The man who had ensnared John Moreno, and probably had many others, in high office, on his payroll-----men and women, bought and paid for, owned body and soul. Joe vowed he would never leave himself vulnerable enough for anything like that to happen to him, and would learn from Moreno's mistakes. It was only by the hand of fate that Catherine had escaped the clutches of this ruthless man, because Vincent would have been unable to come to her rescue due to the disconnection of their empathic bond and the inconvenience of his broken ankle.

The safety of the world Below was a fragile thing, and for the moment, all was safe once again, but they were all well aware that Paracelsus had come close to succeeding in death, what he had never achieved in life-----to destroy Vincent and the security of the world beneath the city of New York.

John Moreno had been true to his word and turned himself in. He had been rigorously questioned, then released on bail, pending an internal investigation and subsequent trial. Joe Maxwell was appointed acting District Attorney and had the circumstances been different he would have been delighted with his appointment.

Joe thought he would hate Moreno for betraying the trust he had been given, but his feelings were more of pity for a man who had been destroyed. This was not the way he had envisioned stepping into John Moreno's shoes.



It was early on Friday evening when they were all gathered in the sitting room in the hospital wing of Hamilton Lodge. Physically, Peter and Vivien were recovering well, though their mental scars

would take longer to heal. The haunted look that lingered in their eyes told of their fearful ordeal.

Chris sensed that at least, Father, Vincent and Catherine were more than ready then to go home, but he was not ready to let them go just yet. He stood up, and clearing his throat to get everyone's attention, he made his announcement.

"Well now, before you all depart me, as I know you will. Please, will you do me the honour of spending this weekend here.....so that I can fulfill a dream.....It is something I have been quietly planning for day. I make no excuses for being a sentimental old fool, but it was something that Vincent said that touched me in a deep place.....and to me, it is a tragedy that you, Vincent, have never seen the beauty of our land. I know that for **you**, Jacob and you, Catherine.....it has always been your dream to show it to him." He smiled at their waiting, silent faces....."Well now, the weather forecast for tomorrow is clear, cold, but fine none the less. I will have my helicopter primed and ready to go on the back lawn, ten minutes before dawn tomorrow morning."

The pleasure shown in his face as he watched their communal gasp of delighted surprise and he focused his gaze on Vincent.

"You, young man, have the treat of a lifetime in store.....you can watch the sunrise over the sea before we turn inland and head to the mountains.....I'll provide warm clothes for you all. Be sure to put them on, you'll need them, it will be cold where we are going."

"But Chris," Father was suddenly worried. "What about the pilot?"

"What about the pilot, Jacob?" Chris answered, face blank, purposely being obtuse.

"Who's going to pilot the helicopter, Chris?"

"Me," he answered with a smile. "Who else?"

A short time later Father made a phone call to Joe Maxwell, then disappeared for a couple of hours to complete his work in the basement laboratory.



The morning was as had been predicted, cold, crisp and clear, with the first of the winter frosts. Stars still twinkled in the black velvet sky as Chris led his small party from the house, through the gardens, and across the lawn, covered with a white frost that crunched beneath their feet, and onto the giant flying bird that squatted silently in the middle of the open land, set well away from the house. It was illuminated by a huge spotlight operated from a nearby hanger.

Their excitement was tangible, as Vincent followed behind Chris, handling his crutches with expert ease, and arm in arm Catherine and Father followed behind with Peter and Vivien bringing up the rear.

They had all agreed that after their ordeal this would be therapeutic, both Peter and Vivien were as excited as everyone else. They were all attired in quilted parkas, with fur lined hoods, gloves and scarves.

The helicopter loomed large and substantial, as they all gathered at the side of it. There was seating for six, with plenty of storage space at the rear. Chris helped Vincent into the front passenger seat where there was ample leg room and his crutches were stowed away.

Catherine sat behind him with Father, and Peter and Vivien behind them. Everyone was smiling and excited, it was almost like a school outing, only better.

Chris had been out earlier to do a full cockpit check and his mechanic had made sure everything was in order the day before. He settled himself into the pilot seat, turning to grin at them all. "Okay, everyone?"

There was a unanimous **"Yes,"** and they all looked on while he switched on various knobs and dials before the great engines burst into life. Chris had to shout above the noise. **"Seat belts fastened, everyone?"**

**"YES!"** they all shouted back, grinning from ear to ear.

"Okay.....hold on to your stomachs folks.....here we go for the '*Christopher Hamilton Magical Mystery Tour*'. The massive rotor blades began to pick up speed above their heads and the helicopter lifted up off the ground and up into the sky.

Chris flew due east, coming out over the sea, just south of New York as the sun was rising over the ocean, flooding the earth with light. It was just nature doing her best to make it more spectacular than any of them could have wished-----for Vincent.

Chris swung around in a wide arc to approach New York harbour head on, giving Vincent and everyone else, a bird's eye panoramic view of the city's skyline, the Statue of Liberty, Manhattan's bridges and Central Park.

As they flew over the city, which was now bathed in the early morning sunlight, Catherine and Father were pointing out landmarks and places of interest to Vincent. All were animated, laughing and almost bursting with pleasure.

Chris continued due west, but veering slightly northwards, over the Appalachian Mountains, towards Buffalo and the Niagara Falls.

The scenery was breathtaking below them once the confines of the city were left behind. Vincent was intoxicated with the sheer beauty of it and most of all the colours.

After a couple of hours, Chris announced, "I don't know about you lot, but I'm ready to stretch my legs, and get some air.

They all looked at each other expectantly-----there was nothing out there, but a vista of tree covered, and snow capped mountains, valleys with a lake, sparkling in the distance, and all seemed carpeted in the myriad of late autumn colours.

**"Do I have a 'YES'?"** Chris shouted, thoroughly enjoying himself.

**"YES."** they all yelled back at him, full of excitement, and Vincent turned around to clasp Catherine's and Father's hands. His face seeming to glow like a child on Christmas morning.

Chris knew what he was looking for, his own special place---- a mountain high enough to take in the view, but flat enough to land on with space to walk about and plenty of cover to accommodate *'emergency calls of nature'*. Within minutes he had found it, and lowered his craft expertly to the ground, cutting the engines and telling everyone to sit tight until the rotar blades had stopped.

They stayed at this beautiful spot for over an hour, drinking hot chocolate from the thermos flasks which Chris had included in a hamper packed full of food, so that no one would go hungry during the day.

Vincent wished he could gather it all up, the picturesque location, the bright sunshine, the love that surrounded him, and take it home to share with everyone Below. He was spellbound-----the colours, he had never imagined such colours and he filled his lungs with the clean cold air, while he stood with Catherine and Father just drinking it all in.

The fulfillment of this long held dream was something that touched them all, and gave each and everyone of them pleasure to show this unique man, a corner of their beautiful world. There were no words, but it was something that would be remembered and remain in their hearts for the rest of their days.

Chris flew them out over the breathtaking Niagara Falls, familiar to them all, but not to Vincent-----his blue eyes were like saucers, mesmerized with the immensity and power of the surging water-----his face rapt in wonder, as he committed it all to memory as tears of overwhelming joy spilled unheeded down his cheeks.

Reluctantly, they turned back inland to refuel at a small private airfield. They all clambered out to stretch their legs and take advantage of the facilities.

On the open airfield it was bitingly cold, so, even Vincent was not going to be excluded from this short break. With his hood up, his scarf around the lower half of his face and gloves covering his hands, he could move around as freely as the others, albeit on his crutches. Father quite openly admitted that his son look no different from anyone else, and quietly smiling, he acknowledged to himself. *'Well, he is after all, only a man.'*

Chris had taken many scenic photographs on route for Vincent to keep, and now seeing him with Catherine, held close in his arms

in the middle of the airfield against the backdrop of mountains and blue sky, Chris took another photograph-----for them to keep. No one could make out who they were-----but they would know.

On the return journey, Catherine asked Chris, if he would fly them over a lake in Connecticut; a special place from her childhood-----a place she had wished to share with Vincent. A dream they could never have-----until now.

Chris smiled, and passed her the map. "You find it, Cathy .....and we'll go.....today is a day when all wishes and dreams are granted."

Unfortunately, as they flew over the lake, even Catherine had to admit that there was no clear open space on which they could land, that would not involve a long walk, but now, it seemed only a small disappointment in their otherwise unbelievable day-----a day that was not yet over.



Chris invited them all to dine in the main house that evening. He reassured Father that the meal would be served hot from a hostess trolley, and the rest laid out on the sideboard. They could look after themselves, and he had instructed his staff that the dining room and sitting room would be off limits for the whole evening. Chris was well aware that his entire household was buzzing with curiosity and live with rumours-----and he too-----wished.....

The problem was, how to get Vincent from the hospital wing to the dining room in the main house at a time in the evening when everyone was up and about.

Chris, resourceful as ever, had the problem well under control. He presented Vincent with a arab style costume, a rather grand white full length wrap around dressing gown, with arab head dress, complete with yashmak(veil that conceals the face). "From one of our masquerade parties," he explained.

Vincent was cheerfully game for it, full of confidence after his successful day of freedom, and even Father chuckled and relaxed seeing his son standing tall and proud in the full regalia of an arab prince-----his hypnotic blue eyes shining out, filled with humour, above the white concealing veil.

Catherine wrapped her arms around him and with her head on his chest, she purred seductively. "My very own Lawrence of Arabia....."

They all gathered in Chris' sitting room for pre-dinner drinks. By necessity, as most of them were attired in borrowed casual wear, the evening had an informal atmosphere. A welcoming log fire blazed in the grate drawing them all to its warmth. Peter and Vivien sat in fireside chairs, but the rest of them remained standing around the fireplace, drinks in their hand, and Vincent propped up on his crutches with a chair at hand to rest his injured limb against.

Catherine smiled to herself. Here they all were at a dinner party in a grand house dressed in jeans and jogging suits, instead of fine dresses and tuxedos and it did not matter at all. She had long since lost her fixation with high fashion, designer labels, exclusive creations and shopping at Bloomingdales. As more of her time was spent Below, her wardrobe had altered accordingly, with the accent on comfort and ease of laundering, leaving her fine clothes for special occasions.



Chris, had fulfilled one impossible dream that day and he knew that Jacob, was about to fulfill another with a couple of minor dreams along the way.

Vincent was the first to sense something was afoot, and he narrowed his eyes, frowning slightly, "Father.....what are you up to?" He glanced at Chris. "Both of you.....you are in league somehow.....what is it?" He unconsciously gripped Catherine's hand, waiting with baited breath. Catherine could not imagine what was going down there.

Father smiled, and looked down at his feet. He was in fact bursting to share his discovery with them. Both Chris and Peter had known what he had been up to over the past few days, but they had been sworn to secrecy in the event of the outcome not being as Father hoped. He looked up, and met Vincent's eyes, then smiled at Catherine. She noticed how young Father looked, as if some great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

Father drew in breath, "Vincent, before I begin.....do you agree, that we have no secrets from anyone here?"

Vincent glanced around at Vivien, Peter, Chris, and his hand slipped around Catherine's shoulders. For some unaccountable reason he felt a great sense of occasion.

He inclined his head, "I agree, Father," and drew Catherine closer.

"Good," Father smiled at them both before continuing. "The truth of the matter is.....when Peter confirmed your pregnancy, Catherine, and you, Vincent, quite justifiably, I might add, thought the risks were too great for the pregnancy to continue," he paused. "I was quite unprepared for all the pain, and the sheer sense of loss that I felt at the prospect of the pregnancy being

terminated.....because you see, I had allowed myself to dream....." Father shook his head, "I can't imagine what Catherine's feelings were....." he paused, meeting the sadness in Catherine's eyes, knowing she still battled with her feelings to stand by the decision she had made and continue with her pregnancy, even though it was against Vincent's wishes.

"Anyway.....for the past few days I have not been idle. Chris offered me the use of his fully equipped laboratory, in the basement.....he showed me how everything worked, and Peter, thankfully, has kept me up to date and well informed on most things over the years." He once again gazed at his son, and the woman who was willing to take the risk of bearing his son's child. "Vincent.....Catherine..... I took this opportunity to do what I did best in my other life, before I came to the tunnels. Medical research was my field .....and I have been able to discover, with the aid of modern technology and blood and bone samples taken from you when I set your ankle. I have been able to discover, Vincent.....why you are the way you are." He smiled lovingly at the expectant look on all their faces before explaining further. "I am not going to blind you with science, Vincent. It will suffice to say that your differences are irrefutably all down to genetic engineering, which must have been very skillfully executed, and no mistake.....quite apart from being years ahead of its time." Father paused to sit himself down on the arm of Vivien's chair. "Of course it's pretty obvious where the added gene came from.....and this is all it amounts to.....but it must have been introduced by someone with a large imagination.....mind you," he grinned again, as he was about to deliver the greatest gift he could give his son. "Whoever accomplished this miracle..... for a miracle it surely was, and he may or may not have been aware that the foreign gene cannot be

inherited. **You** cannot pass it on, Vincent."

Vincent and Catherine stood together in stunned silence for a moment, their faces suddenly became incredulous, as the implications of Father's words began to sink in. Father limped over to them, and Vincent, using only one crutch, and leaning heavily onto it, clasped Father with his free hand, knowing this man had always loved him, whatever he was. They parted and Father could not keep the tears from shining in his eyes. "Vincent.....**you** are human, and your children will inherit **nothing** of your physical differences. They will be born entirely human....." He squeezed his son's hand, "Vincent, never forget or doubt for one moment how proud and honoured I am to have been chosen to raise you as my son."

Father was enveloped into Vincent's arms, as emotion overcame them both, and Catherine too was gathered into their embrace. Vincent's eyes were swimming with tears as he looked up and reached out to Vivien, who stood with tears streaming, unashamed, down her face, but smiling. She took his offered hand to be drawn into the circle of love which they had formed. Father's arm went around her shoulders, and with tremulous lips he kissed her temple.

"I promise you this, Vivien.....being part of this family, you certainly won't get bored."

She grinned tearfully at them all before replying, "I am very proud to be part of this family," she hesitated before adding, "And I personally feel it will be a sad loss never to see Vincent's likeness again."

Father and Catherine were nodding their heads in total agreement while gazing adoringly up at Vincent. He shook his head

despairingly but his eyes were bright with tears as he acknowledged their views. "I think.....you have very strange tastes."

Peter and Chris joined the close knit group to shake hands with Vincent, hug Catherine, and slap Father on the back, congratulating them all.

The telephone rang and Chris moved to pick it up. A grin spreading across his face as he nodded towards Father. "Okay, thank you.....we'll be there in a minute." He replaced the receiver. "Jacob, shall we go? Our other guests have arrived."

"They're both here?" asked Father, his excitement mounting, as he limped towards the door leaving several very puzzled faces behind him.

"Yes.....and they're waiting in the main hall," Chris informed him as he stood waiting beside the open door.

Father beamed and winked mysteriously at his family, as he followed Chris out of the room.

"Now, what do you suppose they are up to now?" asked Catherine as soon as the door clicked too.

It was plainly obvious to them all that Peter knew something by the look of innocence he was attempting to show, but he refused point blank to spoil Father's surprise, so Vincent, Catherine and Vivien stood waiting with their eyes glued to the door. Catherine tried to persuade Vincent to sit down, but he refused, promising he would sit down later.

Eventually the door opened and Devin breezed in. He took one look at Vincent and burst out laughing, as only Devin would,

bringing smiles to everyone's faces. "Well, look at you, little brother. "A dead ringer for Long John Silver..... the only thing missing is the parrot." Devin was your regular tall, dark and handsome lovable rogue, and he swaggered across the room attired in jeans and leather jacket to greet this special man.

The two brothers hugged each other, then pulling back they gripped each others arms.

Vincent was the first to speak. "It's good to see you, Devin. You look fit and well."

"Yeah," he grinned. "It's on account of the life I lead." He turned to Catherine at Vincent's side. "And how's my favourite lady DA?" Catherine, too, was drawn into his bear hug, her arms enveloping him in response before pulling away.

"I'm well, Devin, and better for seeing you."

"Do you know why you are here?" asked Vincent, his face quizzical.

"Search me," he grinned cheekily, "probably to see you with your wings clipped." He turned to Peter reaching for his proffered hand. "How you doing, Peter?.....I hear you've had a rough ride?"

Peter smiled warmly. "That's very true.....but I'm fine now."

Vincent smiled. "It would seem that for once in your life, Devin, it is I, who have the surprise this time."

Devin raised his eyebrows questioningly as Vincent reached for Vivien's hand and drew her to his side. Devin's gaze swept the length of her body appreciatively, and he smiled his most winning smile. "And, **who** is this very lovely lady?"

Vincent smiled, as did they all. "***This***..... lovely lady, is our sister."

Devin's mouth dropped open and he couldn't help thinking that the old man was certainly full of surprises.

Vincent chuckled at the stunned expression on his brother's face. "Devin.....close your mouth and say hello to your ***big*** sister. Vivien, this is Devin."

Devin had been only momentarily taken off guard with this revelation and soon bounced back with an appropriate line. "And here I was, trying to conjugate all my best chat up lines." He reached out his hand for a very proper handshake, then changed his mind and pulled her into a hug instead, which was more Devin's style.

Peter shook his head smiling, Devin never had been slow in coming forward.

"Welcome to the family, Vivien," said Devin as he grinned at Vincent over her shoulder and commented, "The old man's a bit of a dark horse, isn't he? I'll be he's tickled pink, but tell how....."

Devin did not hear Father enter the room behind him and approach on silent feet. "Yes.....the old man ***is*** tickled pink, Devin," Father echoed, causing his eldest son to blush, and everyone else to laugh. "And, as to how.....I suggest you and Vivien take yourselves off into a quiet corner and I'm sure Vivien will be only too pleased to explain everything to you, besides that, I still have another surprise."

"Yeah....." agreed Devin, "But who's going to be most surprised?" he remarked, his face a picture of innocence.

"Dear God," said Father in mock exasperation. "Take him away, Vivien.....and keep him entertained for a few minutes, will you."

Vivien smiled delighted with her new brother, even though he did seem to be a bit of a rogue. "Come on, Devin, let's talk," she invited as she led him over to the other side of the room.

Father limped back to the door and ushered another man into the room.

"Joe!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Hey Cathy, am I glad to see you." The two friends hugged each other, then pulling apart she could see the relief written on his face. "Hey Kiddo, I'm glad you're safe, you had me worried there for a while." Joe was doing his best to keep his eyes on Catherine's face, and not to stare at the-----he didn't know how to describe, the person before him who was the shape and size of a man, and yet, looked like no man he had ever seen before-----or even imagined.

Catherine was openly watching his face, looking for signs of revulsion-----and fear, but seeing none she smiled warmly at him, "Joe.....I'd like you to meet.....Vincent."

Initially, Joe could not deny that he was somewhat in awe of Vincent-----at the aura of his powerful, yet quiet presence, that surrounded the man that he was and his injured ankle and the crutches, did nothing to detract from this impact in Joe's first impression-----and the fact that Catherine loved him.

Joe decided he had better give in gracefully. He could both see and appreciate that with this man there was no contact -----against this man, even the mighty Elliot Burch, would be a noncontender for Catherine's hand. He wondered if Elliot had ever even met

him, and as Joe's mind went into sudden overdrive with a whirl of questions, Catherine was introducing them, suddenly noticing Joe's smooth baby faced features in contrast to Vincent's more rugged visage.....

"Vincent.....this is Joe. My boss, my friend, and my chief tormentor," she smiled.

Joe's eyes popped out like organ stops as he saw for the first time, the large clawed hairy hand that enveloped his in a firm handshake. Catherine giggled, she couldn't help it, the look in Joe's face was priceless.

Father had been watching the exchange as had everyone else, and he came to stand at Joe's side. "Maybe, Vincent, you and Joe should go to the other corner and get to know one another?"

Vincent nodded. "Maybe we should," his eyes smiling at Catherine's friend. "Come, Joe.....I think that may well be the best idea.....and I can answer all the questions that I can almost hear rattling around inside your head." Whilst he had been talking, Vincent smiled adoringly at Catherine before putting his faithful sturdy crutch into gear and giving Joe his full attention.

Joe replied. "You're not wrong there, Vincent," surprised at the sound of his voice-----it was like nothing he would have expected at all. Joe's eyes met Catherine's, in respect and understanding, as many previously unexplained situations now began to make a great deal of sense, and a few other incidents, he thought better not to dwell on too closely.

They moved away to settle themselves in the corner of the room. Joe was the first to speak. "I hope you realize, Vincent, that you have one hell of a special lady there....." he nodded his head to



where Catherine now stood with Father.

Vincent gazed lovingly across the room at the woman he loved more than life and answered without hesitation, "I know."



The evening was professed to be an unqualified success, and Joe had relaxed completely feeling privileged to witness the love, affection and the respect that Vincent so very obviously engendered in people who took the time to see the man that he was.

By nine o'clock Father noticed how tired Peter and Vivien looked after their eventful day, and prescribed an early night for them. They were grateful for Father's concern, and neither offered any resistance to his suggestion and bid everyone good night, with promises of seeing them all again soon. Chris showed them back to their rooms.

On his return it was plain to see that a deep discussion had been in progress over something and Chris had a pretty shrewd idea what it was. He stood, arms extended, leaning on the back of his chair. "Well, did I miss something?" He asked, looking around pointedly at each and everyone of them with mock severity.

With a look of slight embarrassment evident in Father's face he answered, "Chris.....the truth is.....we would like to go home.....Vincent, Catherine and myself. Joe has offered to take us.....and there is enough room for Devin."

Chris' large bulk seemed to dominate the table, and he held his hands up, his genial face breaking into a smile of understanding. "It's all right, Jacob. I'm the last person you need to explain all that to.....and it's not as if you are going to outer Mongolia.....but

I would like to feel, that my home, is somewhere you can come to and feel safe..... especially you, Vincent. Whenever you feel the need to witness the changing seasons.....and to look out at the sky....." He did not elaborate further, sensing that the wealth of friendship around the table was almost tangible.

Vincent cleared his throat. "Thank you.....I cannot put into words the difference such a gift will mean to my life..... something that I never even dared to dream....." he gazed at Catherine beside him and drew her small hand to his mouth, kissing her fingers, their eyes meeting with such an intensity of unspoken passion, that Joe audibly gasped, then coughed to cover the sound.

The next few minutes were filled with goodbyes and an invitation for Chris to come Below the following weekend, and to Winterfest, in a few weeks time. Vincent donned his arab head dress, allowing him to pass through the house incognito.

They all settled themselves into Joe's car with Father sitting in the front with Joe, Vincent sitting at an angle, with his back to the window and his plastered leg stretched out over Catherine and Devin's laps. Chris leaned through the open window, his head close to Vincent's inside the intimate interior, and confided a dream of his own.

"Someday, Vincent.....I would like to see you and your family," his eyes smiled into Catherine's. "Able to come here and move around freely, as if it was your second home..... because I feel as if i have found.....a second family."

His words touched them all deeply and no one spoke. Vincent's throat had constricted making it difficult for him to answer, but he managed a gravelly, "Someday, Chris..... someday.....we

will hold onto that dream....."



There was no possibility that Catherine would be sleeping anywhere, but in Vincent's chamber that night. As they wended their way through the comfortingly familiar tunnels of home, even the air surrounding them was charged with an electricity that had begun to make its presence felt in the close proximity of Joe's car.

Vincent and Catherine were both having enormous difficulty keeping their rampant needs and emotions under control, knowing full well, that had Father not been accompanying them as unwitting chaperone. they would most certainly have made their second very desperate physical encounter, like the first-----right there on the dirt covered tunnel floor.

So they suffered their exquisite torture, when even a light touch was like a high powered electrical charge through their nervous system, made even more frustrating because they were unable to be close, due to Vincent's crutches and the sight of his strong hands and muscular shoulders rhythmically taking his weight was driving Catherine crazy with desire.

As they neared the inhabited section of their world, Catherine whispered to him with sweet maidenly innocence, "Is your ankle painful, Vincent?"

He fixed her with such a hungry stare that even Father was not immune to the implications of his son's reply. "No, Catherine.....it is not my ankle.....that is painful....."

Father could not keep the smile from his lips even though he felt the colour rising to his cheeks, he kept his eyes glued firmly to the floor.



At last they were alone, and Father surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, had left strict instructions that Vincent and Catherine were not to be disturbed under any circumstances, before he himself turned in for the night.

Vincent stood lightly resting on his crutches at the side of his bed. Catherine stood close in front of him, but she did not touch him. Their eyes never leaving the other's face. Catherine could feel a tingle of anticipation run through her at the thought of the night they were about to spend together.

Reluctantly Vincent dragged his eyes away from Catherine's and sat down on the bed to stow his crutches beneath the bed, knowing he would be clumsy trying to hold Catherine in his arms and steady himself at the same time.

Catherine sank to her knees smiling up at him as she reached for and removed his boot. She gazed up at him when she had finished her task, they said nothing, the air around them seemed charged. As Catherine stood up, Vincent reached out to her placing his large clawed hands onto her demin covered hips and pulled her between his open legs. The movement was slow and he nuzzled his face lightly into the soft wool of her sweater, just above the curve of her breast. He groaned and enveloped her to him, his eyes closed and breathing in the scent of her, feeling her mould her soft pliant body to him.

Catherine sensed his nervousness, knowing he would be acutely aware of his inexperience as a lover and afraid he would disappoint her. Gently, she grasped his hair in her hands and tilted his head back so she could see his face and kissed him softly, starting with his eyebrows, then his eyelids, then his nose,

stopping only inches from his mouth she whispered, "I love you, Vincent and all that you are..... together we will set out upon our journey and explore our love. We will learn from each other." She smiled reassuringly, "Just open your heart, Vincent. There are so many gifts waiting for you. All you have to do is open your arms and let your feelings and your love guide you." She lowered her head slowly and kissed his mouth, his beautifully defined, unique kissable mouth.

The kiss deepened and the need bubbled up inside them both erupting into devouring hungry kisses. Cathernine's hands impatiently tugged at his borrowed sweater, breaking their kiss for just a moment as she successfully pulled it over his head and tossed it carelessly to the floor. The need to touch his body was so urgent it was almost physically painful.

Vincent was experiencing a myriad of sensations that resounded throughout his body and he abandoned himself to his needs and to hers, allowing his love to guide him. He pulled up her sweater and T-shirt, removing them both in one fluid movement and tossing them to the floor.

Vincent gazed upon her beauty as she stood before him, naked to the waist and watched as she stepped back slightly to remove the rest of her clothes. Catherine moved to stand between his thighs again, to feel the soft abundance of curling golden hair covering his chest, deliciously tickling her naked stomach as she seductively rubbed herself against him, groaning with pleasure, as Vincent's mouth sought and softly kissed her breasts.

Vincent turned on the bed, taking her with him as he lay her down and kissed her fiercely, suddenly wanting more. He divested himself of his remaining clothes and they joined the untidy heap

already on the chamber floor.

Catherine gazed at him hungrily as he returned to her side on the bed.

"Vincent....." she whispered searching his face. "I have wanted you forever," she pulled his head down and they kissed almost savagely, allowing their love to take control of their bodies.

Her words seemed to intoxicate him, his desire and passion rose to match her own as they kissed and touched, sensually exploring each others bodies. Their need for each other growing second by second until with infinite gentleness Vincent moved above her, neither could wait another moment for their ultimate fulfilment. Catherine lovingly guided him to her, offering herself to the one man she wanted in all the world, feeling not only her need but his as well as their bodies finally met partaking of each other in total intimacy. Their passion was heightened by their shared bond, both breathless and unable to control their love any longer they rolled over on the bed in a tight embrace, clutching, folding, all curves filled, as waves of desire coursed through their bond. Catherine's cries, soft at first, then mounting in endless spirals, widening, expanding, both of them flying, as they experienced the ultimate pleasure of their joining and like fireworks exploding all around them, a shower of white hot ecstasy exploded inside her body and she felt Vincent shudder violently against her and heard him cry out her name as wave after wave of pure pleasure spread through his body.

For a long time they lay quietly together, her face nuzzled into his neck, breathing in the scent of him, while watching the blur of candles flickering over the rise and fall of his chest.

Catherine had never known such peaceful contentment. She had

come home-----to Vincent.

He was feeling all that she was feeling. He nuzzled the top of her head, glorying in the same inner peace. It was an all enveloping tranquility that he had never known before in his lifetime. His hands that had so lovingly caressed her body now told him she was chilled.

"You are cold, my love. Come, we will put the quilts over us and sleep for a while." He smiled with the pleasure of it all. "There is no rush.....not now." He kissed her mouth, again a feather light kiss and smiled unable to contain his feelings of happiness as it bubbled up within. He held her close, drawing on a deep breath through his nose and letting it rush out again.

"Catherine.....how can this be? That we are setting out on that journey, a journey that none have ever taken.....and even though we must still go with courage, and go with care, our time together need no longer be measured and limited.....now, we have a lifetime."

Catherine answered him with a kiss and a smile, then snuggled up into the warmth of his body and the familiar softness of woollen blankets and patchwork quilts. She let out a groan of contented satisfaction and Vincent smiled again, holding her more closely; but amid this new found peace and intimacy there was still something that troubled him, something that need to be aired and laid to rest before recent events could be put firmly behind them. He kissed the top of her head. "Catherine?"

"Hmmmmmmm," she answered dreamily.

"I am sorry for the way I behaved.....when you told me about the baby. It was unforgivable of me.....I had no right to make that kind of demand of you."

Vincent's feelings of guilt swept through to Catherine's brain, still befuddled by love. She opened her eyes and eased herself up onto one elbow to gaze into his beloved face, lit by the amber glow from the half moon window.

"Vincent my love," she leaned forward to kiss his mouth before reassuring him. "It is I, who should apologize for springing something like that on you right out of the blue the way I did. I should have known better, because I understand all your fears, probably better than anyone.....and I sympathize with them too." She kissed his mouth again and smiled into his eyes. "Aren't I the one who had to wade through all your anxieties and doubts about.....who you are and what you are?"

He acknowledged her in silence again, staring unseeing at some point on the far wall of his chamber.

"Vincent, I have had to hold so much of myself back in case you took flight.....even when I was hard pressed not to ravish you on the spot." She smiled at the look of astonishment that flitted across his face. "You know it's true, don't you?"

He nodded imperceptibly, lowering his eyes shyly, but unable to suppress the smile. Catherine touched his face lightly, "Vincent, I should have known how you would react. Even Peter tried to warn me. But.....I was so full of myself I didn't want to listen, and my only excuse is that pregnant ladies are entitled to be a little crazy." She smiled at this man of hers, his face so filled with love it made her gasp. "Oh Vincent," she moved her body against him, "I want to give you everything.....you deserve, everything."

"Shhhhhh....." he whispered. The time for talking was over, now even his inner soul was at peace and he drew her face down to within an inch of his own. The candles beside the bed



spluttered silently, giving off their gentle light, even the tapping on the pipes had ceased for the night. In their cocoon of warmth in Vincent's chamber, miles below the streets of New York, Vincent watched as Catherine moistened her lips in an open invitation that he could no longer resist. All thought of sleep forgotten as his mouth claimed hers again-----to begin their journey towards -----Tomorrow's Dreams.....



Devin was staying with Joe for the night. Both of them had figured that they would be superfluous to requirements Below. Father was tired and would be taking straight to his bed and Vincent, well, he had Catherine and other things on their minds.

Devin had promised Joe that he would take him on the official tour of the tunnels in the morning when all concerned would give their undivided attention.

Devin smiled to himself, glad that his adored brother was finally part of someone else's dream.

It was the early hours of Sunday morning that the telephone rang, startling Joe out of a deep sleep.

"Huh.....Yeah," he mumbled sleepily.

"Joe.....Greg Hughes.....you'd better get yourself down here. Someone planted an explosive device in John Moreno's car while it was parked outside a bar.....he's dead, Joe.....blown to bits."

**"Jesus,"** Joe croaked, feeling as if he had just run into a wall and acknowledging the fact that whatever, or whoever was out there, was still out there-----watching.

***TO BE CONTINUED IN TOMORROW'S DREAMS***