

Beauty and the Beast

Love's Journey to Awakening

Beauty and the Beast



LOVE'S JOURNEY TO AWAKENING BEAUTY AND THE BEAST HAPPILY EVER AFTER

**By
Laurel Cain Haws**



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**This story is based on the characters created by
Ron Koslow, Paul Junger Witt, and Tony Thomas
in the late 1980s television series:
Beauty and the Beast**



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KAREN LAUREL CAIN HAWS
BIOGRAPHY

Born: June 25, 1956

To: Dr. Paul S. and Dr. Rolene B. “Bunny” Cain

Birthplace: Pontiac, Michigan

Married to: Dr. Gary Lewis Haws

Marriage date: January 1, 1983

Widowed: November 13, 2002



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INTRODUCTION

This story was born of grief, my inconsolable grief over the death of my extraordinary husband, Gary. My relationship with him closely parallels Catherine Chandler's relationship with Vincent Wells, the "Beast." I have never been able to properly grieve over my husband. I can't face the pain it would cause, so I've kept it carefully locked away inside of me, and I am as yet unwilling to open that door, partly to protect my very empathic children. They love each other and me so much, and they have inherited strong empathic gifts, which happens to be one of the key elements in this amazing television series. The pain of my grief, if I allowed myself to experience it, would distract and distress them, so I'm keeping it locked up for now.

At the time that the television series, Beauty and the Beast, was airing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was busy with two health food stores I owned in two cities for twenty years, while my husband was a professor at our local university. Because I was so busy, I only caught two episodes of the series, the pilot and the last episode of the first season. I never thought anything more about it until one of my sons brought home the first season of Beauty and the Beast on DVD in April of 2007. I was totally captivated by the story. I had been a widow for four-and-a-half years at that point, and the relationship that unfolded in the series was so close to my heart, because of my passionate love affair with my late husband, that I wanted to see the other two seasons.

I went online to look for the other two seasons to purchase, and I ran across a description which stated bluntly that Catherine was killed during the second season. That stark news caused my buried grief over losing my husband to spill out over fictional characters. In spite of that I did buy the other two seasons. Then, I was in terror every time I watched a new episode, fearing that this was the one in which Catherine would die. When she finally was killed, early in the third season, not the second season as the review had stated, and Vincent was agonizing in grief over losing her, an emotion masterfully portrayed by Ron Perlman, I couldn't bear it. Then, suddenly, I got up one morning with a joyous thought!

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I couldn't bring my husband back, but I could surely save Catherine and restore her to Vincent! I managed to get my emotions under control again, and then I went to work. Early in July of 2007, I began studying the episodes, developing the main plot and subplots, and working with the timeline in order to weave together a new ending for this fairytale, and perhaps the beginning of a whole new series of stories about these beloved characters.

Fairytales are never supposed to end with the heroine being killed and the hero suffering in agony over the loss of the love of his life! They are supposed to end with everyone getting married and living happily ever after. This series is, after all, a modern-day fairytale. It starts out, "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York." If this book never sees the light of day, and I am the only one on the planet who knows that Catherine is not dead, and that everyone does eventually live happily ever after, I will be able to live with that and feel really good about it! In fact, since I no longer have Gary to shield me with my hypersensitive empathic radar, I have been an isolated recluse for the past three years. So, the thought that others might find this book appealing is actually a little frightening to me. It would be nice, though, if fans who love this television series and its characters could be comforted as well.

Writers are wise to stick to what they know, and I know romance, because I basked in its warmth for the twenty years I was privileged to be rescued, adored, and pampered by my late husband. The lovely theme song for Beauty and the Beast, *The First Time I Loved Forever*, reminds me so much of my relationship with Gary. That melody haunted me until I finally had to buy the sheet music for myself, so I could play it on the piano. It has been a real comfort to me.

The other aspect of Beauty and the Beast with which I am well acquainted is empathic connections between loved ones. I come from a family of empaths on both sides. I also have been blessed and sometimes cursed with the gift of empathy. Occasionally, the cacophony of feelings emanating from others would be so overwhelming I would end up like a rabbit in the headlights, almost paralyzed by anxiety. Then

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my dear husband would put one of his big warm hands on me, and all of the tension would drain out of my body, and I would stop shaking. I felt everything he felt, from the sublime to the terrifying, but his love for me always remained constant and ever growing. I can feel it still, even beyond the veil of death.

In the series, when Vincent suffered a mental breakdown brought on by the psychological cruelty of Paracelsus, which caused him to wage a raging battle against the Beast within him, a poetry quote became increasingly important to him. This important quote was taken from the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas' poem entitled, *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*. It became even more significant when he finally found Catherine dying and thought that she was forever lost to him in this life. The quote, "Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion," gave him great comfort during those heartbreaking times. I can tell you with great conviction, that these words are so very true of an eternal relationship. (If you would like a free copy of this complete poem for yourself, it can be found online at: www.famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/dylan_thomas/poems/11394)

These experiences have contributed to the development of my story, and I hope that you will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it. This type of relationship is not just for fictional characters. It can happen for anyone willing to put some effort into their relationship. For me, it is very real. It truly is possible to have Satan open the gates of hell and throw every conceivable catastrophe in your path, and come through it all still in love. The mortal part of our journey has ended. Our eternal journey has only just begun. I'm in love, and always will be.

You really must watch the entire series before you read this book in order for it to make complete sense. The series is such a wonderful study in how to develop a lasting relationship. Its theme is "Don't be selfish!" Don't demand that your partner be responsible for your happiness. Do make every effort to make him or her happy even if you need to make sacrifices to do so. Don't think of your partner as a

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project which needs constant improvement. I know I am not the only person out there who is sick to death of “one night stands” and “casual sex” being passed off as genuine love and satisfying passion. Those are very poor counterfeits for the real thing, and this poignant series portrays the real thing in such romantic majesty.

I seriously doubt that the team that created Beauty and the Beast wanted it to end this way. From the blogs I've seen posted on the Internet, if interest in the series at the time it was airing had waned by the beginning of the third season, it is now taking on a life of its own as a new audience is discovering it, and the loyal fans from the original airing are demanding to have it. From another report I read, a very untimely strike by the Writer's Guild also may have contributed to its premature demise. I've managed to bring Catherine back from the dead. Perhaps the series can be resurrected as well.

I have written a short synopsis of each of the characters which I used in this story who are original characters from the series. New characters I have added are not included in these descriptions. This will be a review for those who have watched the television series in its entirety, but it will spoil the plots by giving information away for those who haven't watched it, so please don't read them until you have watched all three seasons. I have treated these wonderful characters very carefully. I can hear their voices in my head. They have been the friends and family of my imagination.

This story begins where the television series ends—and it continues.

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**This book is dedicated
to my late husband:
Dr. Gary L. Haws
April 12, 1935-November 13, 2002
my "Vincent"
who rescued me with great love in so many ways....**

**I wish to also thank my son
Paul A. Haws
for taking time from his booming
Haws Construction Company
to find three perfect roses for me and then shooting the
artistic photograph of them which
appears on my back cover.**

**I also must express appreciation to some of my children
living nearby, Katherine Haws, Paul with his wife, Tiffany
Haws, and David Haws, for taking time out of their busy
schedules to be couriers for their reclusive mother,
transporting my manuscript
between myself and Dr. Anderson.**

**Special thanks to:
Dr. Thayle K. Anderson
English Professor-Emeritus from
Murray State University, Murray, Ky.
Thank you for your kindness in taking the time to edit
this book for me, for asking the thought provoking
questions that helped me to write a better story,
and for helping me to brush up on my writing skills.
This book would be incomplete without
your careful attention to the details of my story,
your astute observations,
and your marvelous suggestions
that opened new doorways in my imagination.**

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CAST OF CHARACTERS FROM THE T.V. SERIES

These characters are listed in order of appearance or reference in this book:

Vincent Wells (the Beast): Vincent was the central character in the television series. He was a very large and powerful man with feline facial features, gentle by nature, but capable of deadly force in the protection of those he loved. All that the people in his world knew about his origin was that he was found abandoned as a baby outside of St. Vincent's Hospital.

Diana Bennett: Diana came into Vincent's life at the end of the television series in the third season. She was a special crimes investigator brought in to solve Catherine (Beauty) Chandler's murder.

Baby Jacob Wells: He was Vincent's and Catherine's child whom Diana helped Vincent to rescue from the clutches of the evil crime boss, Gabriel. Gabriel had stolen the baby from Catherine and had her murdered with morphine just after she gave birth to him.

Catherine Chandler (Beauty): She was the love of Vincent's life. Born into a wealthy family, she had lived a life of privileged luxury. After Vincent saved her life, her priorities changed dramatically. Vincent rescued her at the beginning of the first season, when her face was slashed, and her ribs were broken by assailants who dumped her in Central Park to die. After ten days in Vincent's care, she returned to her world, underwent plastic surgery to repair the damage to her face, quit her job as a lawyer in her father's law firm, dumped her fiancé, and became an investigative lawyer for the Manhattan District Attorney's office in New York City.

Gabriel: He was the evil drug lord and organized crime boss who killed Catherine and stole Vincent's baby after she gave birth to him.

Father: Dr. Jacob Wells was a research physician for the Chittenden Institute when he lived above, doing research for the *Atomic Energy Commission's* nuclear fallout studies. He

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told them that his findings were being misrepresented and was subsequently blacklisted during the government's *Un-American Activities Committee's* witch hunt for "Communists." This was because he warned the military that they were poisoning their own troops with radiation from nuclear testing, which the *Committee* didn't want to hear. The explanation of how he ended up founding the world below is found in the episode "Song of Orpheus." Below, he was the community's medical physician. He adopted Vincent as his own son when Anna Pater, Paracelsus' wife, died. (See the descriptions for these characters below.)

Helpers: These were people from the world above in New York City who were friends and supporters of Father's world below. Father's community even had an annual holiday, unique to their world alone, called Winter Fest, which was held partly in honor of the Helpers from above who helped bring light symbolically to the world below. This holiday involved sending special handmade candles to the Helpers and then leading them with their candles down below to the Great Hall, a massive cavern hung with beautiful tapestries. They would begin the celebration in darkness which was how the tunnels were before they created their community in them. Father would take his lit candle, light someone else's, and then they would each light the candle of whoever was beside them, symbolizing the lighting up of the tunnels. They then celebrated with a feast, dancing, and games.

John Pater "Paracelsus" (The Alchemist): He was an unstable and ultimately evil co-founder of the world below, at one time a friend of Father's. He had a wife, Anna, who was childless. Anna then conceived and lost her baby at the end of her first trimester. Vincent was then brought to Anna as a baby when he was found abandoned in an alley behind St. Vincent's Hospital. Paracelsus became obsessed with Vincent, convinced he was his son. It was then that Father took over Vincent's care after Anna brought him to Father, because she was fearful of Paracelsus' unnatural attachment to him. Paracelsus was so angry with both Father and Anna that he put poison into a glass of wine and killed his wife. Father's community had no choice but to exile Paracelsus.

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Paracelsus attempted every device to turn Vincent evil after that. In the episode, "The Alchemist," Paracelsus developed and marketed a very toxic hallucinogen, which ended up killing fifty of New York's population and turning a larger number of his consumers insane. He made a vicious attack on Vincent with this chemical when Vincent tried to stop him from going above with it, which caused Vincent to become a danger to himself and to others from its effect. Catherine was able to pull Vincent back to sanity, and he recovered.

Paracelsus finally kidnapped and then impersonated Father with a vinyl face mask and his skill at voice impressions, told Vincent cruel lies about his origin, and provoked Vincent into killing him. As Paracelsus was dying, he revealed himself to Vincent. He told Vincent that it was all right; killing him in the guise of Father truly made Vincent his own son. Afterwards, Vincent suffered a mental breakdown, and he fled to the lower chambers. A few members of the community followed him, in order to keep track of where he was, while Father sent for Catherine. Catherine finally managed to pull him back from the brink of madness as he battled the demon within himself, caused by Paracelsus' cruelty, for the second time. However, Vincent's empathic connection to Catherine was severed this time, and many of his precious memories were lost.

Cullen: This man, featured in the episode "Fever," was a very talented carver, sculptor, and wood-worker, and enjoyed creating artistic gifts for members of the community below. He came below after his wife died of a catastrophic illness which left him bankrupt. When eighteenth century gold antiquities were found in a buried ship in one of the lower passageways, Cullen succumbed to "gold fever" and ended up stabbing another community member with one of his carving tools. Father performed surgery and the community member was saved. Meanwhile, Cullen's dreams of wealth turned into a nightmare when Vincent's warning that attempting to sell rare items above would draw notice from evil elements was realized. Cullen redeemed himself and was forgiven by everyone when he risked his life to save the community from an armed murderous smuggler who forced Cullen to take him

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below for more treasure.

Pascal: He was in charge of the pipe communication system in the world below which involved tapping on the pipes in a unique code. That knowledge was passed down to him by his father, and he was continually improving upon it and coming up with new ways to streamline and abbreviate it in order to send messages more quickly.

Zach: He was a preteen boy, who was a leader among the children, and was being trained on the pipes by Pascal.

Mouse: He was an homespun engineer, inventor, and metal worker, with poor language skills, whom Vincent managed to capture as a child when he was stealing food from the community. At the time Vincent caught him, Mouse had not learned to speak, only pilfer. Vincent taught him, but Mouse never quite grasped proper English, the concept of time, or the difference between stealing and salvaging. He was, however, brilliant at making things work. He was the one Cullen stabbed in the episode “Fever.” Being a very generous soul, Mouse was happy to forgive him when Cullen finally came to his senses. He had a pet raccoon named Arthur.

Elliott Burch: He was a wealthy architect who was in love with Catherine, but was rejected by her because of the people he did business with, who were unsavory and used strong-arm tactics to further his interests. He evolved into a more complex character as he struggled to overcome his weaknesses and be a better person, largely due to Catherine’s influence. After Catherine’s death, he tried to help Vincent find Catherine’s child. He was later killed by Gabriel, the man responsible for Catherine’s death and for the kidnapping of her newborn son of Vincent’s. Elliott was killed and Vincent was wounded when Gabriel blew up the boat, the *Compass Rose*, where Elliott and Vincent had been meeting to discuss how to find Vincent’s son.

Joseph “Joe” Maxwell: He was an Assistant District Attorney and Catherine’s boss who nicknamed her “Radcliffe.” He and Catherine became very close friends. In fact, at one point Catherine made the comment that Joe had an heart like

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Vincent's. The former District Attorney, John Moreno, turned out to be an inside player for Gabriel and was responsible for Catherine's kidnap by Gabriel. After Gabriel's death and John Moreno's exposure, Joe was made the Acting District Attorney, effective until the next election which had not occurred by the end of the series.

Mary: She was a mature nurse and midwife, about Father's age, who was also in love with Jacob Wells (Father). However, she never made her feelings known to him, thinking that it was somehow selfish to want him for herself alone. She came to the tunnels following the deaths of her child and her husband and had been there almost from the beginning of Father's world.

Rebecca: She was a young adult woman who made candles for Father's world's unique holiday, Winter Fest, featured in the episode, "Dead of Winter," which also honored the Helpers who helped to bring light metaphorically into their world. These beautiful candles were tall yellow-orange tapers with white tips.

William: He was the community cook for Father's world, and he absolutely loved cooking for everyone.

Chinese Clergy Man: This character, never named, was featured in the episode, "China Moon." He performed a marriage ceremony in Father's Council chamber in that episode. I have given him the name Kevin Chin.

Snow: This man was an assassin Gabriel sent to kill Vincent, so he could keep the baby without fear of reprisal by Vincent. Snow was outwitted by Vincent, who led him to the Stalactite/Stalagmite Cave, where Snow fired his weapon, and was crushed to death by stalactites falling because of his own percussive shots.

Peter: He was Catherine's deceased mother's gynecologist, who had delivered Catherine. He had a wife named Susan. Peter had been an Helper to the world below from the beginning, because he went to medical school with Father, and they remained good friends even after Father was

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blacklisted in the world above. In the episode “Ashes, Ashes,” Father’s world was trying to stem an outbreak of pneumonic plague brought into their world by a stowaway Russian immigrant, Dmitri, whom they tried to help. It was then that Catherine and Peter, who had been family friends all of her life, first realized that they shared the knowledge of Father’s world. They collided when Catherine was sent to meet an unknown Helper, who turned out to be Peter, driving a supply van with vaccine and antibiotics against the plague for the sick below. He was never given a last name in the series, so I have given him the last name of Wellington.

Jamie: She was a petite girl in her late teens who was also an archer and best friends with Mouse. She had a cute spitfire personality and was a very hard worker.

Tony Ramos: He was an orphaned Gypsy boy Catherine and Vincent helped to be restored to his family in the episode “Everything is Everything.” Tony’s evil uncle had framed Tony’s father for stealing from the family business, and in a Gypsy trial Tony’s entire family was considered dead by the clan. When Tony’s parents were killed, he made the trip to New York City by himself from Chicago, to try to prove his father’s innocence, and be restored to his grandparents. His grandparents, Milo and Eva Ramos, were devastated over not being able to acknowledge their grandson but feared chaos in the clan if they broke their Gypsy laws. Vincent confronted Milo, who was the king of their clan, and convinced him to hold a new trial for his grandson, Tony. Milo relented and arranged the new trial, at which time Tony’s wits prevailed, and he was able to prove that it was his uncle who was the thief. Tony was restored to his family and felt that he owed a debt to Catherine for taking him into her home and helping him.

Dr. Marx: He was the New York City Coroner who was called in to collect Catherine’s body. He played a game of cat-and-mouse with Joe Maxwell, trying to avoid his questions about Catherine’s case. He was never given a first name. I have given him the name David.

New York Cabby: This is another Helper who was never given

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a name. He surveilled and gave rides to people needed by Father's world in times of crisis. He was the one who corralled Diana, and at one time he also shanghaied Joe when Father was trying to find Vincent after the *Compass Rose* incident. I have given him the name Chuck Johnson.

Sarah: She was a middle-aged woman in the world below who aided with special tasks like practical nursing. She took a special interest in the eccentric members of Father's community.

Jenny Aronson: She was Catherine's close friend who owned a publishing company specializing in books on art which she edited. She helped to book art exhibits at local galleries because of her influence with the gallery owners.

Kipper: He was one of the children in Father's world. He loved running errands for everyone.

Dr. Wong: He was an herbal doctor in Chinatown who was featured in the episode "China Moon." He had been prescribing and providing herbal medicine for Father's condition as well as other community members' ailments for over twenty years.

Mong and his young son, Edward: Mong was a Vietnamese grocer who was taught English by Father's family below. Mong helped them with groceries for William's kitchen.

Rolley: This young black man, featured in the episode, "Chamber Music," was brought to the tunnels by one of the Helpers from above as a boy. He was a savant pianist, who could play any classical piano piece he heard by ear perfectly. When Ms. Kendrick, his piano teacher below, was killed by acquaintances of his trouble-making older brother, Rolley blamed himself. As a result, he battled with heroin addiction on the streets as a young adult, until Vincent found him again and told him that everyone still wanted and loved him below. He rejected that first overture, because he couldn't forgive himself yet. When he was finally shot in a failed robbery attempt in the episode "In the Forests of the Night," he took refuge in the tunnels, where Vincent found him critically

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wounded. Father performed surgery and removed the bullets, and Rolley finally overcame his addiction and stayed home below.

Brooke: She was a young girl in her late teens. Her boyfriend, Steven, was a teenage boy who was killed by the assassin, Snow, when he went into the tunnels hunting for Vincent in the episode “Snow.” Brooke was devastated by this loss.

Eric Peterson & his sister, Ellie: These were children who were rescued by Catherine and Vincent from a bad foster home in the episode “A Children’s Story.” Kipper reported talking to an abused child from that home to Vincent. Vincent then told Catherine, and she was able to take action to have the home closed down. Eric and Ellie were in imminent danger, though, because the corrupt director of the foster home was selling the children in his care to a “Fagan.” Eric and Ellie were hidden and then adopted by Vincent’s community. Ellie died of the plague in the episode “Ashes, Ashes.”

Kristopher Gentian: He was a deceased painter whose ghost visited Catherine and Vincent in the episode “When the Bluebird Sings.” He interacted with them in corporeal form, so they could discover his paintings which were hidden in a forgotten warehouse. Catherine, being a logical-minded lawyer, had a really difficult time believing that he was actually dead. She thought that his death must have been staged in order to increase the value of his paintings. However, among the paintings found in that warehouse was a spectacular huge portrait of Catherine and Vincent carefully wrapped with her name on it. When she and Vincent uncovered it in Vincent’s chamber, she assumed that Kristopher had painted it after meeting them. Vincent pointed out to her, though, that Kristopher’s paintings were all oil paintings, including this one, which would take many months to properly dry. She had to accept the obvious fact that this was a prophetic painting done long before he ever set eyes on either one of them and painted before his death.

Jonathan Smythe: He was the antique book store owner

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who was Kristopher's friend from the time the artist was a child. He had identified Kristopher's body after he froze to death one winter outside on the streets. When Catherine and Vincent found the paintings Kristopher led them to, she had them shown and sold at a local gallery with the help of her friend, Jenny Aronson, and then she gave the generated funds to Mr. Smythe. He used the funds for cemetery upkeep of Kristopher's grave.

Jonathan Pope: He was Gabriel's henchman who performed a number of errands for Gabriel. This included bailing Elliott Burch out of jail after Gabriel had framed him for murder in the episode "Beggar's Comet," so Gabriel could then manipulate Elliott into betraying Vincent. Jonathan Pope also coordinated the kidnapping of Diana Bennett to take her to Gabriel to see Vincent's sick baby, so she would pass that information to Vincent in the episode "The Chimes at Midnight."

Kanin and Olivia Evans with baby Luke: This family living in Father's World was featured in the episode "A Gentle Rain." Kanin was an architect and stone cutter who had accidentally killed a child while driving drunk in the world above when he was twenty. He then jumped bail and escaped to the world below, but no one there knew about his past. His life below was exemplary, and he cut and constructed beautiful chambers in the tunnels and caves for all of the community members. He never took another drink after the accident which killed the child, but he also never faced his mistake until Catherine was given his file and told to find him. By that time, sixteen years later, he had married Olivia, who had been born below, and they had a baby son, Luke. Catherine helped Kanin to turn himself in and face the consequences of his actions, so both he and the mother of the boy who was killed could heal.

Samantha and Geoffrey: These two orphans were not brother and sister, but they were constant companions and competed with each other in everything. They were both quite brilliant and had even begun beating Father at chess.

Oriental woman: This woman, never named, was a surgical

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nurse who assisted Father in treating seriously injured community members. She assisted Father when he performed surgery on Rolley after he was shot in the episode “In the Forests of the Night.” I have given her the name Angela with a Japanese surname of Choshi.

Lana: She was a girl child who caught sight of the *Subway Slasher*, Jason Walker, in the tunnels in the episode “Terrible Savior.” She sounded the alarm to the community. Jason Walker was a vigilante Catherine had been investigating, and Vincent helped her try to catch him and stop his killings.

Narcissa: She was a very superstitious elderly black woman who chose to live apart from the others. She knew the tunnels probably better than anyone. Vincent loved to visit her because she had an uncanny ability to read people and their intentions with a kind of sixth sense, and she was very sensitive to spiritual and supernatural phenomenon.

Bennie: He was a very cheerful young man who was a bicycle messenger in the world above. He was also an Helper who delivered messages for the people of Father’s world.

Nathan and son Gregory Coil: Nathan Coil was a community member who was killed in a cave-in in the tunnels when they were looking for a gas leak around twenty years earlier. He had a son, Gregory, who witnessed his father’s death when he was seven years old and became mentally unstable as a result. He was institutionalized, but then budget cuts caused him to be released from the mental hospital. In the episode “The Reckoning,” he ended up killing everyone who survived that tragedy, painting their faces with his father’s ashes, and then finished by burying Father alive. He had blamed Father for his own father’s death, because he had seen his buried father’s hand move post-mortem. In his seven-year-old mind that meant that Father had left him to die without helping him. He then committed suicide by leaping off the Serpentine Stairwell into The Abyss. Diana solved this case so Father was found and saved by Vincent.

Elizabeth: She was an elderly painter, featured in the episode “Ozymandias,” who had taken it upon herself to be the

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community's historian through her murals on manmade tunnel walls, where the surface was smoother. She was one of the community's recluses, who chose to live apart from the others. The tunnels she painted were in a level above Father's community. Mouse would bring her paints that he found discarded above, and Mary and Sarah would check on Elizabeth to be sure that she was safe and healthy.

Jason “Jase” Walker: This man owned a self-defense school called “The White Hats” and became a vigilante known as the *Subway Slasher*. He stayed anonymous by dressing in a costume with deadly claws, based on the stories he had heard about Vincent from transients and the homeless who had been rescued by Vincent. Jase died falling off the Catwalk Bridge when Vincent tried to catch him for trying to hurt Catherine, and then he became a legend because of his unexplained disappearance.

Devin Wells: He was Father's natural son featured in the episode “Promises of Someday.” Devin's mother was Grace, the woman who found Father almost frozen to death a year after he lost everything in the world above. Grace had taken Father below to the tunnels. Father lost Grace when she died in childbirth with Devin. Father raised Devin with the other children in the tunnels, and Devin was very close to Vincent, but Father never told Devin that he was his own biological son, because he didn't want to make the mistake of setting him apart from the other children with special treatment.

When Devin was fourteen, and Vincent was twelve, Devin decided that he wanted a pocket knife. He had always been headstrong and somewhat irresponsible, and he and Father had always had struggles with each other as a result of that. Father told Devin that knives were dangerous and that he couldn't have one. Devin collected bottles and picked up every piece of change he found lying on the ground above, until he had enough money for the pocket knife, and then he bought one anyway. Someone tattled on Devin to Father, and Devin assumed it was Vincent. Vincent was innocent and denied it, and they got into a tussle with one another. Devin bloodied Vincent's nose, and Vincent raked Devin across the left cheek with his claws. Devin carried three deep scars into

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adulthood from that fight. When Devin found out that it wasn't Vincent who had told on him to Father, he felt terrible and wanted to do something special for Vincent. Vincent had never been on a merry-go-round, because he couldn't go above ground. So, Devin collected a group of the children, and they took Vincent and broke into the merry-go-round in Central Park one night and rode it. They were nearly caught by a mounted policeman, and Father hit the roof. Father accused Devin of deliberately putting Vincent in danger, and Devin didn't defend himself. Instead, Devin ran away, leaving everyone frantic thinking that he had been lost in a section of the tunnels called The Maze and had died.

In fact, Devin became a "pretender," traveling around the world, assuming multiple identities, and quickly learning just as many trades. When he turned up in the Manhattan District Attorney's office as a Deputy District Attorney, and Catherine learned who he really was, and that he was totally without a legitimate law degree, she gave him the option of resigning rather than exposing him, which would have devastated both Vincent and Father. When Catherine told Vincent that she agreed with Father, that Devin was irresponsible, Vincent responded by telling her that Devin had been the only one "irresponsible" enough to dream dreams that included him.

When Devin was first reunited with Vincent after coming back to New York City, he said, "I've been everywhere south of Oz and north of Shangri-La, but what I dream about is an hole-in-the-ground—weird, huh?"

Vincent replied, "Not so weird, when that hole-in-the-ground is home!"

Father finally revealed to Vincent that Devin was his own natural son. So, before Devin took off again, Vincent and Catherine conspired to get Devin and Father together at the carousel in Central Park, so Father could overhear Devin explaining to Catherine what had really happened at the carousel and why. Father then told Devin that he was his actual father, and they were reconciled.

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Patrick Hanlin: He was Gabriel's lawyer from the law firm of *Malloy, Davidson, and Hanover Norton Trust*. Patrick was a law school acquaintance of Joe's, who was killed by Gabriel in a car explosion, because he went to Joe with a small black notebook of information on Gabriel's organization which was written in code. Joe was also seriously injured, because he was close to the explosion when it happened. Joe gave the notebook to Catherine while he was recovering in the hospital. That little-black-book became the instigating reason Catherine was kidnapped by Gabriel's people in the first place, before Gabriel discovered she was carrying Vincent's child

Charles the "Dragon Man": In the episode "Brothers," Devin found this man being abused in a carnival and rescued him with Catherine's help. Charles had the disfiguring disease, neurofibromatosis, with multiple soft and connective tissue fibromas. His own brother, Eddie, had kept him in a cage, billed as "The Hideous Dragon Man," his entire life. When Devin rescued him, Charles was covered with wounds and bruises from being beaten by his brother. Charles was enormous in size and didn't know his own strength. When Devin took him into the tunnels for sanctuary, Charles was very frightened, because he had never been out of his cage or around other people. He ended up accidentally breaking Father's wrist when he attempted to treat Charles' wounds, and he injured Mouse when he startled Charles. Because Vincent was also different, Charles allowed Vincent to treat his wounds, and Vincent convinced Charles that there was no need for him to continue wearing his hood to hide his face while he was below with their community. Devin then took Charles from the tunnels to a secluded cabin in the mountains to help him learn how to socialize with others safely. He was never given a last name in the series. I have given him the last name of Mason.

Laura Williams and Detective Jerry: Laura was a deaf young woman, first featured in the episode "An Impossible Silence," whom an Helper found as a small child abandoned in Central Park. Vincent suspected that she had been left there by parents who couldn't deal with her inability to hear. After the Helper brought Laura below to Father's world,

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Vincent taught her sign language, how to read lips, and how to read and write. In this episode, Laura witnessed a dirty cop murder another cop, and she went above with Catherine to testify against him when he attempted to frame an innocent man for the cop killing.

Laura is featured again in the episode “Sticks and Stones” when she gets swept up in the illegal activities of a deaf gang above. An undercover detective named Jerry, who was working with Catherine’s team to try to stop this gang, fell in love with Laura. Jerry was able to infiltrate the gang, because both of his parents were deaf, and sign was his first language. Catherine didn’t realize when she started the investigation that Laura was involved, and Laura didn’t know that the leader of the gang was a killer. Catherine went to Vincent as soon as she became aware of Laura’s involvement, but meanwhile, the leader of the gang found out who Jerry was. Vincent and Catherine were barely able to rescue Laura and Jerry before they would have been stoned to death by the gang. The detective, Jerry, was never given a last name in the series. I have given him the last name of Bookman.

Isaac Stubbs: This black man, in his mid-forties, was Catherine’s self-defense instructor. She hired him in the first episode “Once Upon a Time in the City of New York,” after she came back above to her world following her attack. He also aided her in her investigation of the Subway Slasher in the episode “Terrible Savior.” In the episode “No Way Down,” Isaac assisted Catherine in finding Vincent, who had been injured during an attack by a gang that called themselves “The Silks.” Following that attack, Vincent and Catherine became separated. Vincent had been blinded by the bomb The Silks threw into a building Vincent was in. The Silks captured Vincent, but then he escaped from them. He couldn’t see where he was going to get back into the tunnels, and The Silks were hunting for him to try to recapture him. Isaac and Catherine finally found Vincent, and Catherine took him home. She asked Isaac not to ask any questions and not to say anything about what he had seen.

Detective Greg Hughes: He was a police detective, trusted by Joe, who tried to help Catherine in the episode “The

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Watcher.” In that episode, a stalker nearly killed Catherine by locking her in the trunk of his car and then rolling it into a lake. Vincent barely got to Catherine in time, tore the trunk lid off the car, and then managed to pull her back from the brink of death as she was drowning. Greg also aided Diana and Joe in the episode “Invictus” by locating Gabriel’s mansion from the Italian tile pattern which Diana had drawn a picture of when she was kidnapped and taken to Gabriel’s mansion blindfolded.

Detective James Faber: He was a police detective who worked on the Gregory Coil case in the episode “The Reckoning.” James found Diana’s profiling methods perplexing. He didn’t consider that to be “real” police work.

Detective Nick: This detective was never given a last name in the series. Joe consulted him right after Catherine’s body was found in her apartment in the episode “Walk Slowly.” Nick told Joe that Catherine’s case had too many unknown variables in it. He said that he knew his limitations as a detective, and he suggested that Joe needed to consult with Unit 210 Detective Diana Bennett. That was how Diana came to be involved in Catherine’s case. I have given Nick the last name of Dunlap.

Cameron Benson and friend, Dale Mercer: These cold-blooded murderers were featured in the episode “Hollow Men.” They were young men from wealthy families who targeted teenage prostitutes and slashed their throats. Vincent witnessed them killing their fourth victim when he was above one night in Central Park. It happened so quickly, without warning, that he was helpless to stop them. Vincent was devastated over the girl’s death and horrified by the pleasure these young men took in killing her. He went to Catherine immediately. She phoned in the anonymous tip on the killing and told Vincent that they had killed three other young girls before this one. When Catherine tried to bring them to justice, their wealthy families paid a slick lawyer to get them released. So, Vincent started patrolling their hunting ground above at night to try to prevent them from killing any more girls. This caused them to go after Catherine in retribution, and Vincent ended up having to kill them to save Catherine

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from being shot to death by them.

Lisa Campbell: She was a world-famous ballerina who grew up in the tunnels. Vincent was in love with Lisa as a teenager, and he accidentally injured her with his claws when confusing adolescent hormones overwhelmed him. Lisa saw Vincent as a playmate and was totally unaware of the effect she was having on him when she danced for him in the Great Hall. One day when she danced to him and kissed him on the cheeks, he embraced her. She became alarmed by his desire for her and pulled away. Vincent didn't let go of her in time, and he accidentally clawed her back. Soon after that incident, Lisa left the tunnels to pursue her career as a ballerina. Vincent felt that it was his fault that Lisa left the tunnels, and he never forgave himself for injuring her.

In the episode "Arabesque," Lisa ended up in trouble and took refuge in the tunnels. Her presence brought up this incident in Vincent's mind, and Lisa dismissed it altogether as being simply "child's play" and unimportant. Catherine came to realize that Lisa had been the source of some deep pain for Vincent which she couldn't reach. Vincent finally went to Catherine and told her about what had happened. He told her that his hands were destructive and were not made for love. Catherine countered by telling Vincent that his hands were her hands, and that they were beautiful to her. She finally helped Vincent to work through that crisis and overcome the pain it had caused.

Bernie Spirko: He was a reporter Paracelsus manipulated and used to take pictures of Vincent defending Catherine from attacks that Paracelsus had arranged. Paracelsus used the pictures that Bernie Spirko took to lure Father to him with threats of publishing the pictures. He then kidnapped Father to impersonate him and deceive Vincent. Paracelsus' evil plan was to provoke the Beast within Vincent to the surface, so he could try to manipulate Vincent into killing an innocent person. His goal was to destroy Vincent and Father's world, and he nearly succeeded.

Margaret Chase: She was Father's first wife. Her father had their marriage annulled when Father was labeled a

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“Communist” and blacklisted in the medical community above, and he lost everything. In the episode “Song of Orpheus,” Margaret looked for Father when she learned that she was dying from pancreatic cancer, and they spent the last seven days of her life together below. Father had been devastated by the annulment of their marriage, and he was grief stricken when she died after such a short reunion, but he was able to resolve that unfinished chapter of his life.

Jessica: She was a world-famous photographer who was very close friends with Father when she had lived below many years earlier. Father had not seen her since Winter Fest five years earlier, and they had discontinued corresponding by letter for more than a year. Jessica came to Little Jacob's Naming Ceremony when one of the Helpers told her about Vincent's tragic loss of Catherine and about the rescue of Vincent's baby. Father felt that he was falling in love with Jessica, and he even considered leaving the tunnels to pursue his relationship with her. Mary was heartbroken that she hadn't spoken up about her feelings for Father before Jessica turned up again, and Mary went to Vincent and told him of her fear of losing Father. She told Vincent that she had made a “terrible mistake.”

Tom Gunther: He was the real estate developer to whom Catherine was engaged in the first episode of the series “Once Upon a Time in the City of New York.” His real estate company was a client of Catherine's father's law firm. He was very uncharitable in his attitude toward anyone less fortunate than himself, and this attitude caused Catherine to abruptly leave him at a party he hosted to “wine and dine” the City Planning Commission, during which he promoted an architectural project he was working on. He dragged her away from a friend who needed her listening ear, and he told Catherine to use better judgment deciding whom to talk to. It was when Catherine left that party without him that she was abducted by the criminals who slashed her face, broke her ribs, and then dumped her in Central Park to die, where Vincent found her and saved her. When she left Vincent's care and returned to the world above, she broke off her engagement to Tom Gunther.

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Steven Bass: He was a dying ex-fiancé of Catherine's, who had a brain tumor. Before his illness, Catherine had broken off their engagement when his controlling personality began crushing her freedom. In the episode "Down to a Sunless Sea," he came back into Catherine's life after five years without contact with her, and he asked for her friendship during the final months of his life. After imprisoning her in a mansion he purchased, he tried to force her to live with him. When she attempted to flee, he knocked her out and tied her to a dining room chair. She finally managed to escape from the chair and then had to run through a glass door, cutting herself in the process, to escape from the house and from him. Driven to obsessed madness by his brain cancer, he chased Catherine through the woods, caught her, and was strangling the life out of her when Vincent finally got there and saved her. Steven Bass was then committed to an insane asylum with abdominal scarring from Vincent's attack.

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Chapter I

“When That Hole-in-the-Ground is Home”

It was mid-winter in the City of New York, but here, far below her streets, in a secret world long forgotten by the citizens living above, the weather outside didn't matter. Here, it was safe and warm. In this large cavern, furnished in rustic masculine style, a man and a woman from these two different worlds stood by a bassinet. A three month old infant boy was in the woman's arms.

Diana Bennett didn't look like a special crimes investigator any more than Vincent Wells looked like a poet, philosopher, and scholar. In fact at first glance, with her long auburn tresses pulled back in a loose feminine ponytail, Diana looked to be hardly more than a teenager. But, if you looked more closely, the careworn lines around her soft green eyes revealed years of struggle to protect the world from the dangerous predators she hunted. She was so good at her job that she was designated a member of the New York Police Department's Unit 210, a lone

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investigator with her pick of violent crimes to solve.

One of the most recent cases Diana had chosen to work on was the murder of the mother of the baby she now held in her arms, Catherine Chandler. The father of this baby boy, Vincent Wells, stood behind her right shoulder, gazing on both of them. That investigation was what had brought her into Vincent's world, when she found Vincent seriously injured on Catherine's grave on December 10th. As a result of that discovery, she was now charged with the obligation and privilege of keeping this world of tunnels and caverns below the streets of New York City safe and hidden from the world above.

If Diana's appearance was misleading, Vincent's was even more perplexing. He didn't look like a soft-spoken gentleman in his mid-thirties. In fact, he didn't even look human. He was well over six feet tall, with a wild golden mane of hair falling past his shoulders. Piercing blue eyes looked out of a feline-featured face covered, except for the center of his forehead and his cheekbones, with a fine coating of golden fur. His hands were also fur-covered, with nails much harder and darker than a normal human's, extending beyond his fingertips with tapered points, giving them the appearance of claws. When he smiled, elongated sharp canines in both his upper and lower jaws showed, and they could only be described as fangs. What he did look like was a magnificent mythological lion-faced god, at once terrible and wonderful. Their clothing was also stark evidence that

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these two people came from different worlds. Diana's outfit was very stylish, although comfortable, while Vincent's was reminiscent of an eighteenth century frontiersman who made do with the materials at hand and dressed far more for practicality and comfort than for style.

Vincent's gentle expression of love for his tiny three-month-old son, who was perfect in every aspect of his very human appearance, was completely at odds with his own frightening features. If Diana's eyes were careworn, Vincent's revealed the unfathomable depths of pain and grief he was suffering over the loss of his beloved Catherine, taken from him by the violent cruelty of an human monster. That monster had stolen Vincent's baby from the arms of his mother as she bore him, and then had her killed with a fatal shot of morphine. With Diana's help, Vincent was able to rescue his child. Diana then shot Gabriel, the man responsible, straight through the heart with Catherine's own gun, a fitting end to an evil tyrant responsible for a reign of terror.

Gazing around Vincent's spacious cavern chamber, even the most casual observer would have noted that books were very important to him. They were piled on every rough-hewn shelf and table there. It was also apparent that he enjoyed artwork of all types, as his room displayed many lovely pieces. The beautiful round stained-glass wall on the opposite side of his huge bed diffused the torch light from the tunnel beyond, and that

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light together with the soft candle lamps in his room gave a very homey feel to his chamber.

Everyone eventually made it to Vincent's chamber. Aside from Father's Council chamber and the kitchen chamber, his was probably the next most frequented chamber in the community, like a touchstone for them. The children often gathered there, cross-legged on the floor, and listened while Vincent sat on his bed and read to them or taught some of their school classes.

Theirs was an unusual world, where everyone shared their talents and possessions with one another. Between what the world above threw away, what their trusted Helpers in the world above provided, and what they could produce below with their own skills and hard work, they felt richly blessed and were a very happy people. They felt safe largely because of Vincent. He was their champion, their defender, their knight-in-shining-armor, and a shield against any evil threat. He quietly made the rounds every night, checking on everyone, being sure his beloved family and friends were all secure.

He usually spent more time during those rounds in the children's sleeping chambers to be sure they were all resting peacefully. If a child was restless, he would tuck that one back in, and sit on the edge of the bed, speaking softly until sound sleep was restored. Many of these children had not been born below. They had been lost by the world above, orphaned or abandoned, and neglected. Here below, they found instant love and guidance from

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many willing surrogate parents, and a feeling of security from Vincent. He not only watched over them but listened attentively to anything they had to say.

They were better educated than many of the children topside who had access to public and private schools. Here, education was important to the whole community. They all made sure it was enjoyable for the children. Each child's individual needs were carefully assessed and met. Their classes included all of the sciences, mathematics, English, literature, and the fine arts. Nearly every adult member of the community taught one or more classes for the children, and the older children usually became teachers themselves. They had an accomplished children's choir as well as an orchestra. No child's natural talent, either artistic or intellectual, was overlooked.

How did this remarkable world come to be? Close to forty years earlier Dr. Jacob Wells, a research physician for the Chittenden Institute, had been blacklisted and wrongfully labeled a "Communist" for telling the truth about nuclear testing harming U.S. troops. He lost everything. Jacob's father-in-law even had his marriage to his beloved wife annulled, and Jacob ended up penniless on the streets. He would have frozen to death one winter if it had not been for the kindness of a woman dwelling in these tunnels. She took him below and nursed him until he was well again.

When Jacob was strong enough to take stock of his surroundings, he found the tunnels to be a refuge for a lot

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of lost and disillusioned people who had either rejected the world above themselves or had been rejected by it, and they were without either a physician or a leader. He became both to them, and they called him “Father.” Gradually, he organized them into a community. Everyone’s talents and training were assessed, and they were all given jobs which made them feel useful and needed. All of the people in this unique community agreed on one very important point: The world above was a dangerous place, and they wanted to live separate and apart from the crime, violence, avarice, apathy, and even the chaotic lifestyle of that world. They wanted their world to be kept secret and thereby safe. Gradually, as a result of both their own generosity with their time, talents, and limited possessions, and Father’s previous affiliations with those above who still respected him, they built a network of Helpers from the world above who assisted them with supplies and services they needed. Who could be accepted from the world above into their community, and for what reason, was carefully decided by the Council of eight members Father organized, comprised of four men and four women.

New Yorkers were so busy with their frenetic lives; they didn’t notice or care to know what was going on beneath their feet. For the most part, the only people from above who posed a serious threat were the occasional criminals who would also take refuge in the tunnels to try to escape justice. In order to handle this type of rare

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danger, Father helped the community to set up a system of lookout points manned by shifts of sentries. From the beginning, Father had begun mapping the tunnels they were occupying, and as they explored further or dug and cut out new chambers, they updated those maps. If a criminal element posed a threat, the engineers in their community would put up new walls and change the tunnel entryways to keep intruders out of their home, and the maps would be changed accordingly.

Father also had maps not only of the tunnels themselves, but also of every access point in the city they might need in order to go above safely when necessary. They had access points through manhole covers, grates, culverts, storm drains, and the basements of abandoned buildings, as well as the buildings where their Helpers either lived or worked. They even had access to a few freight elevators from the surface to the subterranean levels which allowed the transport of larger, heavier equipment and furnishings.

The origins of the tunnels were numerous. In the beginning there had been natural caves and passageways. Around one-hundred years before Father founded his community, the Chinese immigrants had honeycombed this cave network with hundreds of miles of additional tunnels Father's people were now occupying. The Chinese had done this to escape the hatred and intolerance of their new foreign home. They abandoned the tunnels they had built, after they had established a strong community in

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Manhattan's Chinatown. Many of the adjoining tunnels and passageways were left over from abandoned storm drains, subway stations, steam conduits, and other subterranean tunnels resulting from changes in the city planning. When Diana first began looking for Vincent during her investigation into Catherine's death, she had even gone to the New York City Hall of Records to try to find maps of the tunnels under Catherine's building. She had been told about the many hundreds of miles of unmapped tunnels resulting from such changes in the city's plans and in the subway system in particular.

Father's community had taken advantage of every natural resource they had discovered. They had located underground rivers, waterfalls, springs, and even hot springs for bathing chambers. They took advantage of all of the electrical lights abandoned by the city, and they carefully maintained the electrical lines, water pipes, sewer lines, and gas mains running through their community for the world above, so no workers would need to be sent down for repairs. That way they stayed hidden, and they performed a vital service for the city which unknowingly housed them. To complete their lighting needs, they supplemented the limited electrical lighting with candles they made and with oil lamps and torches. Their engineers had seen to it that there were ventilation shafts for sufficient air circulation to safely burn the lamps and candles.

Since a good number of Father's community members

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were elderly, death was inevitable. The tunnels were mainly rock, so traditional burial below was impossible. Fortunately, Father still had friends in the medical community above, and they understood the desire these people had for privacy and secrecy. With the help of the community engineers, tunnel access to the city morgue was built in order to transport the dead covertly above for whatever was desired in the way of autopsies, death certificates, cremation, or embalming before being returned below for funeral services. Father's community had discovered a series of small caverns far below their community in which they constructed burial catacombs.

About five years after Father founded this community below, a new reason for secrecy came into their lives. Vincent was found abandoned as a tiny infant in the bitter cold of winter. Father knew that if anyone in the world above ever saw him, he would be hunted and caged, made an object to study, and would die in captivity, or he would be killed outright as a result of ignorance and fear. Father adopted Vincent as his own son. Vincent's joyful acceptance of everything life had to offer, even though he had every reason to curse fate, became a symbol of hope for Father's community. Vincent drew them closer together as they protected him, and he eventually protected them.

The dire danger that the world above posed for Vincent was tragically realized when he was captured, while he was above one night, by a biologist and his graduate

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student assistant from a local university. They caged Vincent to study him, and they were about to reveal him to the world. Catherine managed to track Vincent down from the serial numbers on the tranquilizer darts she found outside the drainage tunnel in Central Park. She appealed to the biologist's humanity, warning him that Vincent was dying in captivity. When the biologist resolved to release Vincent, his assistant stabbed him to death in his greed for acclaim, and then Vincent had to kill the assistant to protect Catherine. Their secret was still safe, but it was at a terrible price.

The only other dark cloud hanging over this nearly perfect world had been a brilliant chemist named John Pater. At first he seemed to share Father's high ideals and was a strong supporter in helping to build their community. He even invented their communication system which involved tapping on the underground pipes in a unique variation of Morse code. Gradually though, John's true agenda became apparent, and he evolved into a sinister threat to the community. He referred to himself as "Paracelsus, The Alchemist." His desire was not to lead and guide, like Father, but rather to conquer and rule over those he viewed as lesser beings: the uneducated, the disillusioned, and the emotionally vulnerable who were desperately seeking leadership. Father successfully thwarted every attempt Paracelsus made to take advantage of weakness, and he grew to hate Father. After Paracelsus murdered his own wife with poison, and the

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community was forced to exile him, his evil actions continued to cause great harm to Father's world and to Vincent in particular, until his death at Vincent's hands.

The first time Diana had been brought to Vincent's chamber, she had recognized the two books, Great Expectations by Charles Dickens and The Poems of Dylan Thomas, on Vincent's night stand. They were displayed together with a conk sea shell, from which was hanging Catherine's crystal necklace. Great Expectations had been the first book Vincent had read to Catherine, after he found her with her face slashed, left for dead in Central Park. Father had treated her injuries, which also included broken ribs, and Vincent had spent ten days nursing her and reading to her until she was strong enough to go home and undergo plastic surgery to repair the damage to her face. The poem by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, "And Death Shall Have No Dominion," had become significant during Vincent's mental illness brought on by Paracelsus' deception and again later when Catherine had been killed. Diana knew about these things from Catherine's journals, which she had studied in minute detail when she was first profiling Catherine to try to solve her murder. Catherine had sent the conk shell to Vincent from a California beach when she had to leave him to work there for a few days. Diana had realized at once that the night stand was a shrine to Catherine, the first thing Vincent saw upon arising, and the last thing he looked at before retiring.

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Diana had been welcomed warmly by the community below when Vincent brought her here for the baby's Naming Ceremony, at which time Vincent announced that he had decided to name his child for Father, whose real name was Jacob Wells. "It is comforting to know that I do have a place down here, Vincent, in your world. I wish that I could have had you for my big brother when I was growing up."

"Were you lonely as a child, Diana?" Vincent asked her.

"I guess I shouldn't have been. I have a great family, and my sister and I are quite close, but I was lonely. No one in my family thought the way I did. I annoyed everyone with my constant analyzing and profiling."

Diana replied.

Vincent smiled, "You do have a unique mind."

Diana smiled back at him. "That's the difference. To you it is unique. To my family, it was obnoxious. I feel so much more comfortable here."

"Without your unique mind, my son might have been lost to us forever." Vincent told her with an expression of gratitude.

Just then, Cullen and Pascal appeared in the doorway carrying a very large and heavy rocking chair. It was almost comical to watch them, because they were such different sized men. Cullen looked like the classic artist. He was tall, and very good looking, with finely chiseled features. He had a relaxed, thoughtful approach to

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everything. Pascal, on the other hand, was small, although handsomely proportioned, and very energetic. He had to be to keep their pipe-tapping system of communication running smoothly.

"Where would you like for us to put this?" asked Cullen.

"Oh, Cullen that is gorgeous! Did you make it?" Diana's eyes became huge.

"I did. It is my gift for the little one." Cullen replied.

Vincent stepped forward to help Cullen and Pascal with the rocker, and they set it down by Little Jacob's bassinet. "You are so talented, Cullen. Thank you! Let us take a good look at this! Look, Diana, the likenesses are perfect!"

"Oh, how beautiful it is!" She stared in disbelief at the exquisite craftsmanship. The high quality style of the brilliantly polished cherry-wood chair itself was unique, with its smooth curves and intricately turned legs. However, what Diana and Vincent were in awe of was the carving at the top of the back of the chair. Cullen had carved in relief a perfect likeness of Vincent, with his arms protectively around Catherine in front of him, holding Little Jacob in her arms. As if that poignant scene wasn't enough, he had also carved a perfect likeness of Diana in the background, holding a sword and shield, looking like a warrior princess. "Is that really me?" Diana asked.

"That's the way I see you, little Avenging Angel," Cullen answered.

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“I don’t know what to say! I guess the only thing I can do to thank you for including me is to sit in it.” Diana immediately sat down in the rocker with the baby and began rocking and humming a lullaby to Little Jacob.

“Well, I guess we timed that just right!” Cullen laughed.

Vincent smiled warmly. “You did, Cullen. They make a pretty picture, don’t they?”

“They certainly do. Well, I’ll leave you now, so she can put him to sleep.” Cullen walked toward the doorway.

“Good-bye Cullen, and thank you again.” Vincent walked with him to the doorway.

“You are very welcome!” Cullen looked pleased over their admiration of his work.

Pascal stayed behind with Vincent and Diana. He smiled as he watched Diana with the baby. With his finely tuned hearing, Pascal was the hub of this world’s communication system. Born below, and trained by his father on the pipes, he could distinguish precisely where tapping originated, what type of pipe was being used, and then separate and relay simultaneous messages coming in, so they all reached their intended destination. It was hard, demanding work, and he loved it. He was close to the same age as Vincent, and the two had grown up together like siblings.

“Pascal, it is so rarely that we see you anywhere but in the pipe-monitoring chamber! Who is manning the pipes now?” Vincent asked.

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"I left Zach in charge. He has learned the code very quickly, and I think he enjoys it almost as much as I do. I just couldn't resist seeing you get this. Cullen had been working on it ever since we learned that you had a baby with Catherine and were searching for him. Well, this is about as long as I can stand being away from those pipes, so I'm going to head back there now." Pascal strode toward the door.

"Good-bye, Pascal," Vincent and Diana spoke simultaneously and laughed. "Thank you for helping Cullen to bring this to us," Vincent said as he walked with Pascal to the doorway.

After Pascal disappeared down the passageway, Vincent returned and sat on his bed, lying back against his pillows. Diana watched him take a beautiful white ceramic rose out of the suede pouch around his neck. She stopped humming. "Vincent that is lovely. Where did you get it?"

"Catherine gave this to me when we celebrated the first anniversary of when I found her. She told me that it had been given to her by her mother when she was little to comfort her whenever she was sad or afraid. She made this pouch necklace herself for it, so I could wear it and have something of hers always near me."

He picked up Catherine's crystal necklace from around the conk shell and handed it to Diana to see. It was a two-inch long pillar-shaped crystal with unique angles, coming to a point on the lower end, securely held at the

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upper end by a finely crafted gold ring with teeth, attached to a delicate gold chain. “I brought the crystal back from the Crystal Cavern far below here, and Mouse shaped it, set it, and made the gold chain for it. That was my anniversary gift to Catherine. I wanted her to have something from our world, and she never took it off. I found it after her death, in the cave where she pulled me back from madness, after Paracelsus kidnapped Father and deceived me. She must have lost it in the struggle with me.” Vincent took the necklace back from Diana, putting it back around the conk shell, and lay back again on his bed as Diana resumed humming. He fell asleep to her humming and the steady soft tapping on the pipes of community members talking with one another in other parts of the tunnels, with the rose still in his hand.

As she hummed to Little Jacob in her arms, Diana’s mind went back over the recent terrifying events, events which nearly claimed the life of Vincent’s child. With one emphatic word, “**VINCENT!**” she had managed to stop him from tearing limb-from-limb the man, Gabriel, who was responsible for Catherine’s death, and who was about to snuff the life out of his baby as well. Vincent had been vastly relieved to see that Diana was alive, because Gabriel had lied and had told him she had been killed on his orders by his men. She had wanted to spare Vincent further psychological devastation which killing Gabriel would have caused.

Gabriel was a master manipulator, and had managed

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to goad Elliott Burch, a wealthy architect and real estate developer, into betraying Vincent. Elliott had been in love with Catherine from the moment he first laid eyes on her. Vincent had revealed himself to Elliott after Catherine's death, in a desperate attempt to find his baby, and Elliott had agreed to help him. In a moment of jealousy over Catherine's love for Vincent, and in his own greedy desire to have his empire restored by the very man who had destroyed it, Elliott had succumbed to his human weaknesses. He had led Gabriel to Vincent on the boat, the *Compass Rose*, where he had arranged to meet Vincent with a promise of information about where Gabriel was holding his infant. In the end, though, when Elliott finally understood the depths of Vincent's love for Catherine and her child, he threw himself in front of a bullet to save Vincent. Then Gabriel blew the boat up. Elliott didn't survive, but Vincent managed to make it to Catherine's grave before collapsing, which was where Diana was waiting, knowing he would eventually come there. She knew this because of her careful profiling of Catherine. Catherine had many books given to her by Vincent, with love notes signed by him inside the covers, and references to him were all over her journals. When Diana had found the book of poetry with *And Death Shall Have no Dominion* by Dylan Thomas marked, she knew Vincent would end up at her grave.

Allowing his inner Demon, which Vincent normally kept securely leashed, to surface in the protection of his

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family and friends always hurt him. Diana desperately wanted to protect him from that harm. She had seen first hand the damage it did to Vincent, to be forced to return violence for violence in the defense of those he cared about. When he had abruptly left her loft after only three days of recovery from nearly being killed by Gabriel, when he blew up the boat, Diana had come to the tunnels looking for him. She knew that he needed help hunting for his child in a world where he couldn't show his face, and she wanted to convince him to let her help him. Vincent had saved Diana from a cruel violation and death at the hands of three assailants who were in the drainage tunnel when she arrived, and the visible effect it had on him to have to kill those men, even though they were armed and bent on killing others, was heartbreaking.

When Gabriel had used his corrupt policemen within the police force to abduct Diana, had informed her that Vincent's child was dying, and then had instructed her to tell Vincent, she knew it was a trap. However, the child's plight was real, and Gabriel was convinced that only Vincent could save him. What Gabriel didn't understand was that it was Vincent's empathic attachment the baby needed, and not his blood. Diana warned Vincent that he would be captured if he went to Gabriel, but Vincent had been experiencing visions of his child's illness, and he already knew the baby would die if he didn't go.

As expected, Gabriel imprisoned Vincent in an electrified cage, extracting blood from him which was

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incompatible with the baby's. Gabriel finally had sense enough to allow Vincent to hold his baby for several hours. As soon as their empathic bond was established, the child recovered.

Gabriel had taken Diana's weapon from her, and because Gabriel's people had her apartment under surveillance, Diana was not only unarmed, but she couldn't even get to her police badge to go rescue Vincent and the baby. Meanwhile, Father's community was in a panic, because Vincent was missing, so Father arranged to have a couple of their Helpers from above snatch Diana, to see if she had information on Vincent's location. That was the first time Diana had met any of Vincent's family and friends. They had apologized for frightening her, but explained that the last time they had seen Vincent was when he received her message.

She had explained the danger Vincent was in, and how she was cut off both from her badge, and from Acting District Attorney Joe Maxwell, because of the unknown criminal elements controlled by Gabriel in the legal system. Thanks to Gabriel she was also unarmed. At a time when Father's world was in danger, Catherine had given him her pistol for protection. When Father understood that Diana needed a weapon to rescue Vincent, he sent for and then gave Diana Catherine's gun. Then Father, himself, went to Joe Maxwell to tell him where he could meet with Diana in safety to plan storming Gabriel's mansion.

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When Joe met with Diana at the Dinosaur Museum, they were nearly abducted by one of Gabriel's henchmen, but a cabby, a food vendor, and a maintenance worker, all Helpers, managed to take the criminal into custody and then turned him over to Joe and the museum security guards. Joe was completely bewildered by Diana's civilian bodyguards, but fortunately, there was no time for him to ask questions about them. While Joe and the police force were planning their attack on Gabriel's mansion, Diana went back to Father, and they went underground through the tunnels to rescue Vincent and the baby before the police could get there and find them too.

Gabriel, knowing that the police were on their way, was ready to smother the baby with a pillow, all the while telling him in his maniacal insanity, that he loved him. Vincent had felt the danger, had broken out of the electrified cage he was in, and had raced through the mansion to stop Gabriel. That was when Diana got there, just in time to prevent Vincent from killing Gabriel.

After she sent Vincent with his rescued baby to Father in the tunnels below the mansion, Diana confronted Gabriel with the gun Father had given her. He proceeded to thank her for rescuing him from Vincent and then informed her that he probably wouldn't be convicted, and if he was, he could rule his evil empire from prison and would soon have Vincent's child back under his control again. Diana had calmly said, "Not this time, Gabriel. This is Catherine Chandler's gun." That was the end of

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Gabriel.

Diana's decision to end Gabriel's miserable existence had not been without psychological consequences. Now, she had a much better understanding of how it hurt Vincent to unleash the avenging Demon within him. What Diana couldn't have known at that time was that an even greater evil was lurking in the shadows ready to threaten Vincent's world once again.

Diana looked over at Vincent, who had fallen sound asleep while she was humming, probably the first good sleep he had experienced in the last nine months—the six months that Catherine was missing, and the three since her death on October 13th. Little Jacob was asleep in her arms as well. Diana laid the baby in his bassinet with a kiss. Then she went to Vincent's bedside and gently picked his hand up. She carefully opened it, extracted the ceramic rose, and then laid his hand back on his chest. She put the rose back in its pouch and leaned over, giving Vincent a kiss on his forehead, before walking softly out of his chamber to go find Father.

On the way, she ran into Mary in the passageway. Diana couldn't help but smile whenever she saw Mary with her light, youthful step belying her age. She was about the same age as Father, but there was nothing matronly about her. Tall and slender, she was a truly beautiful woman with a refined air about her. Her fine features were set off by long, soft, light brown hair,

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carefully wound on top of her head in a very becoming style. She was the community's head nurse and their midwife, and she took her responsibilities very seriously.

"Hello, Mary." Diana greeted her.

"Are you leaving us then, Diana?" Mary asked.

Diana replied. "Not yet. I'm going to see Father. You don't need to worry right now about Vincent and Little Jacob. They are both sound asleep."

"You're sure Vincent's asleep?" Mary asked incredulously.

"He is really asleep!" Diana assured her.

Mary shook her head in amazement. "Then, you've managed to accomplish what none of us have been able to do in the nine months since Catherine first disappeared, get him to relax enough to sleep. He spent six of those months scouring the city looking for Catherine, and then the next more than two months scouring the city looking for his baby. Even though Little Jacob has been safe down here for a couple of weeks now, Vincent still hasn't relaxed. We were beginning to wonder if he would ever sleep peacefully again."

Diana smiled, "I'm glad I could help."

"You've helped more than you can possibly know. I'll go watch over them, so the baby won't wake Vincent."

Diana watched Mary disappear around the corner headed for Vincent's chamber. Then she resumed her trek back to Father's chamber.

When Diana finally arrived in Father's chamber, she

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found him sitting at his table, just thinking. It was easy for Diana to think of Jacob Wells as “Father.” With his cultured demeanor and his carefully trimmed brown beard and mustache, with just a distinguished touch of silver, he looked very patriarchal. His confidence made people forget his disabling limp, and hardly notice the cane he needed to get around the tunnels. He was the community’s physician, and a brilliant surgeon, as well as the original founder of their world. Between his skill and Mary’s attentive nursing, these people had the very best in medical care.

He looked up and said, “Do you know that today is January 12th? This is the 35th anniversary of the day that Vincent came into our lives.”

Diana smiled, “You were blessed that he did.”

Father went on, “We should be preparing for our Winter Fest celebration about now. We usually have it the first week in February, and it takes some time to get ready for it. No one is in the mood to celebrate, though, with Vincent in mourning, and without Catherine with us.”

Diana was intrigued. “Winter Fest?”

Father explained, “We celebrate all of the holidays you do in the world above down here, but Winter Fest is our own. It is a special holiday we created to celebrate the beginning of our world here, bringing light into this labyrinth of dark tunnels, and making it our home. Our newest candle maker, who has been Rebecca for a couple of years now, makes lovely long yellow-orange tapered

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candles with white tips. We then send the children above with these candles, to give one to each of our Helpers. This celebration is as much to honor them for the light they bring to our world, as it is to celebrate the creation of our world. They are then led down here, and we all travel to one of our lower caverns, which we call the Great Hall. It is hung with beautiful tapestries, and is furnished with candle chandeliers, very large banquet tables, and smaller tables around the outer walls, along with plenty of chairs. We then have a ceremony which begins in total darkness to symbolize the way the tunnels were once dark. I light my candle and then light the candles of those on either side of me. Then everyone lights each other's candles as well as the chandeliers, and the whole room is then full of light. After that, we enjoy the feast that William loves preparing for us, and there is dancing to music played by our talented musicians. We finish by playing games and just having a lot of fun socializing with one another."

Diana was fascinated. "What a lovely holiday! I'll help you pray it is only postponed, not completely missed this year." She then changed the subject. "I wish Vincent had been my big brother too, as he is to all of the children here. I can't help but love him like they do."

Father studied her thoughtfully for a moment, "If you really feel that way about my son, then there is something I think you need to know in order to assist us in helping him. It is a secret about Catherine, and he mustn't know yet."

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Diana was filled with concern. "Tell me, Father!"

Father got up from the table and walked toward his sleeping chamber. "Let me show you something which Vincent still doesn't remember." He walked to a drawer in his bedroom chamber and took out a piece of paper and a gold ring, studded all around with tiny heart shaped crystals, and showed them to Diana.

Diana took the paper from him and examined it. "They were married! This is a legal document. How is this possible?"

Father explained, "We have Helpers in many places, including the Department of Vital Statistics. They help us with marriage and death certificates, even Social Security numbers for those of our children who grow up and decide to leave our world here for college or work in the world above."

Diana was struggling to wrap her mind around what Father was telling her. "Was there a marriage ceremony for Vincent and Catherine?"

Father smiled softly, "Yes, it was a lovely ceremony, performed by our Chinese helper, Kevin Chin, who has performed all of the marriages in our world. They were married more than a year ago, the last Saturday in September."

Diana took the ring from him. "This ring is beautiful, Father! It is way too big to be Catherine's. Is it Vincent's?"

Father answered, "Yes. Catherine's rings are on her."

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Diana pursed her lips. "I see. You buried her with them."

Father tipped his head sideways and raised his eyebrows, "No, but she is wearing them." Diana looked at Father in stunned silence, as the meaning of his words began to sink in. Father continued, "Catherine is alive!"

Diana's jaw dropped. "And Vincent doesn't know? Father, he is in such pain!"

Father said very emphatically, "He mustn't know! The entire community knows and is shielding Vincent. When we found that she was still alive, her condition was precarious, and we were not sure we could save her. Losing her again would probably have destroyed him. The other problem I worried about was the fact that his empathic links were just beginning to be repaired. While Vincent was in his self-imposed exile, trying to protect us from Gabriel, I gathered everyone together. They had all been coming to me individually, finding out like close communities always do, that Catherine was not dead. I sat them all down, while Vincent was gone, and explained why it was imperative to keep this secret from him. I told them that they mustn't tell Vincent about Catherine, no matter how hard that became, or heartbreaking it seemed. I explained to them that if he knew before he was fully well, with his empathic link to her reestablished, his desperation to save her would surely impair the complete restoration of that link."

Diana nodded as understanding dawned on her, "I can

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see that. Please don't worry, Father. 'Need to know' is a part of my job description. Vincent won't find out from me."

Father told Diana about the struggles he had been having with Vincent, especially before he found his child, trying to keep him from taking reckless chances. He told her that he had been compelled to tell him, when he went after Gabriel's murderous assassin, Snow, "You won't find Catherine again by embracing death!" Diana agreed that she had also been having similar conversations with him, when she was trying to convince him to let her help him.

Father continued, with pain in his voice, "I can't tell you how hard it was, in that moment, not to tell him that Catherine was still alive. I knew, though, that it would destroy what we were trying to accomplish in helping him to heal his link, and the distraction of that knowledge would probably have gotten him killed in going after Snow. Vincent certainly wasn't going to allow Snow to continue his killing rampage down here. Before Vincent could get to Snow, he killed two of our community members. One of his victims was just a teenage boy."

Diana told Father about one of her first conversations with Vincent, after she found him on Catherine's grave, badly wounded. "While Vincent was recovering those three days in my loft, after Gabriel blew up the *Compass* Rose with Vincent and Elliott Burch on it, he told me about his connection to Catherine and how it had been broken. I told him I was sure that ability would return to

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him. It had already begun to be mended when he felt Little Jacob's heartbeat as Catherine was bearing him. That was how he found her after Gabriel stole her child." Diana shook her head slowly. "So, you are all just watching and waiting for his empathic link with her to be completely healed. I sure wouldn't want to be in his way when that happens!"

Father quickly added, "That is why Pascal has established a new code on the pipes specifically for letting all of us know where Vincent is at all times. His sadness over Catherine and his preoccupation with Little Jacob have kept him distracted, so he hasn't even noticed."

Diana finally asked, "Where is Catherine?"

Father answered, "Actually, she is being cared for by the very doctor who helped bring her into this world, and is now doing his best to keep her in it, Dr. Peter Wellington."

Diana was surprised. "I've heard of him. Isn't he a very well known gynecologist?" Father nodded, and Diana continued, "I'm amazed by the number of people in high places who are Helpers to your world."

"We truly are blessed by association with some of your world's finest people," Father smiled.

"I feel like I already know Catherine, because I studied her life so intensely. It would make me really happy to actually see her alive. Would you take me there?" Diana pleaded.

Father assured her, "That is exactly what I intended to

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do. I was hoping that was what you wanted.” He took Vincent’s wedding ring and the marriage certificate, and put them back in his dresser drawer.

As they left Father’s chamber together, Diana turned to him and said, “Before you take me to Catherine, let me take you to my loft. There is something there you need to see.”

As they walked down the passageway, they ran into Jamie. If she had been born with wings and pointed ears, one would expect to see her sprinkling fairy dust everywhere. Her petite stature and lovely delicate features, framed by long silky-brown hair, made her look pixie-like. However, contrary to her dainty appearance, nineteen-year-old Jamie was a fierce warrior in the protection of her community. A skilled archer, she was adept with both a traditional bow and arrows and crossbow weapons. When she wasn’t on sentry duty, she was often exploring the lower caves, where she could safely hone her targeting skills. As usual, she had a bow and a quiver of arrows slung over her shoulder. She asked them, “Have you seen Mouse?”

Diana shook her head, and Father answered, “No, not for several hours now. I’m taking Diana back topside. If we run into him, we will tell him you are looking for him.”

“Thanks, Father,” Jamie said as she hurried on in the other direction.

Father looked at Diana and chuckled. He offered her his arm. “Well, shall we continue?”

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Diana took his proffered arm and smiled back,
“Certainly!”

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Chapter II

Lost and Found

When they arrived at Diana's building by way of the manhole in the alley behind her building, which was the route Vincent had shown her, Diana guided Father into the back door of the ground floor. After they stepped out of the freight elevator into her loft, Diana seated Father on her sofa, and then she showed him Catherine's rosebush in the large pot at the end of the sofa. "When I was in Catherine's apartment, studying her things and profiling her, I found this rosebush on her balcony. It looked completely dead, but somehow, I could feel that it still had life in it. I brought it here and spent weeks trying to resurrect the poor thing. All of the hard work finally paid off. I couldn't believe it when it bloomed with both red and white roses! I found

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out from my florist that this is a very rare graft. In the language of flowers the red rose symbolizes love, and the white rose symbolizes eternity, which is perfect symbolism for Vincent's and Catherine's relationship. I need to take this to Catherine since she is alive."

Father smiled softly, "It is really interesting that you found her rosebush looking like it was dead just like we found her. You were able to resurrect the rosebush. Let's pray we have the same result with Catherine. You know, if you take this bush out of here now, and Vincent should come to visit you, he will surely wonder where it is."

Diana widened her eyes in realization, "You're right of course, Father! I hadn't thought of that. It just seems wrong for me to have it when Catherine is still alive, but you're right. It must wait until Vincent is reconnected to her and finds her. Father, I have an uneasy feeling that the danger to Cathy and Vincent is not yet over."

Father frowned, "What makes you say that, Diana? Gabriel is dead."

Diana paused for a moment and pursed her lips before answering. "I'm not really sure. There are just a lot of unanswered questions in my mind. I really want to get back into Gabriel's mansion. I want to know why he was so obsessed with Vincent's child. It seems to me that it was more than just an accident that he happened to kidnap the mother of Vincent's baby. His obvious reason was that she had information about his organization in the small notebook she recovered and refused to turn over

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to him, but I think there was a lot more to it than that. I need to find out what else was going on in his head, just to ease my mind if nothing else. Perhaps Gabriel was just a madman, but there truly is a fine line between madness and genius, and I don't think Gabriel could have been as powerful as he was if he didn't have some of both. It's as if he knew about Vincent's existence before he ever got his hands on Cathy."

Father studied the worry on her face. "I really hope you are wrong, Diana, but it would be far better to know than to be caught unaware of the danger."

Diana responded, "I hope I'm wrong, too, Father."

After they left Diana's loft and went back into the tunnels through her manhole, Father began the tale of what had occurred on the morning of October 14th, after Vincent found Catherine poisoned with an overdose of morphine following the birth of Little Jacob on the night of the 13th. He continued the story as they walked through passageways Diana had never seen before on their way to Dr. Peter Wellington's home.



Three months earlier, on October 14th....

When Tony Ramos ran into Father's chamber

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completely out of breath and very obviously distressed with a note in his hand, Father caught the thirteen-year-old in his arms and asked, "Tony, whatever is the matter?"

It took Tony a few minutes to catch his breath before he could answer. "Father, it's about Catherine! I was told by Dr. Marx to give this note only to you, and to be sure that you understood not to say anything to Vincent about what he's asking you to bring to her building. I don't know why. I guess it's in the note. Everyone at Catherine's building is saying that she's dead. I've got to go back there!" With that, he ran out of Father's chamber before Father could even express his shock over what Tony had said.

Father opened the note in his hand and tried to comprehend what he was reading. It didn't make any sense. It read, "Vincent found Catherine and called me to come to her apartment and collect her body. Bring your medical bag with epinephrine and penicillin, and bring a thermal blanket. Don't tell Vincent what you are bringing! Meet me at the coroner's van in back of her building, and wear your doctor's lab coat. David Marx."

Only moments ago another child had brought a note from one of the sentries telling Father that Vincent had been seen in great distress on the Catwalk Bridge over the Whispering Gallery. That was where he had started to go before Tony ran in with this note from Dr. Marx. Father quickly collected the requested items and laid out street clothes and his lab coat with his name badge on it. Then

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he hurried as fast as his damaged leg and cane would allow him to down the tunnels in search of his poor son, Vincent. He finally found him sitting at the table in his chamber alone. Vincent was obviously in shock. He told Father that he had found Catherine too late. He had carried her back to her apartment, had stayed with her body until the dawn threatened to expose him, and then he had returned to the tunnels.

It was with a very heavy heart that Father left Vincent alone with his grief to go answer Dr. Marx's urgent summons. When he got back to his chamber, he quickly dressed, put on his lab coat, and grabbed the blanket and his medical bag with the requested medicines in it. He started to leave but then went quickly to his dresser, opened one of the drawers, took Catherine's crystal wedding rings out, and put them into his pocket.

When Father finally arrived at the coroner's van, he found one of their Helpers, a cabby named Chuck Johnson, in the driver's seat. Chuck was stocky with a round very friendly face. Chuck could be quite formidable, though, with a no-nonsense attitude when it was necessary. He looked relieved when he saw Father and said, "I am so glad to see you, Father. I'm not sure what's going on here. All I know is that I got a frantic call from Dr. Marx telling me that I needed to come here immediately to drive his coroner's van, that I was to keep it running and not ask any questions. Here I am, and the motor is running. All hell is breaking loose in that

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building! There are police, reporters, medical people, and tenants, all running around like chickens with their heads off!”

Father got into the passenger seat with his bag and the blanket on his lap. “I guess all we can do is wait until David can explain what he needs from us. His note said that Vincent had called him to collect Catherine’s body. Vincent told me himself that he found her last night, but that it had been too late. I’m a little confused by what David asked me to bring.”

Chuck stared at Father in shock with tears welling in his eyes. “Are you telling me that Cathy is dead?”

Just then the back door of the van swung open, and they heard David Marx’s voice in an urgent tone, “She is not! We just have to make sure that no one else knows she’s not, because the murdering animal that did this to her is still at large, and no one knows who it is. Chuck, come around here quickly, and help me get her into the van. You wouldn’t believe what I had to do to ditch those two assistants of mine! They mustn’t show up and find us still here.” Dr. David Marx was solidly built, with thinning hair, and an imposing bearing. He wasn’t accustomed to socializing with the living and was usually rather testy with them. Father’s people were easier for him to relate to, and his guard always came down when he was with them. Father hurried to the back of the van to help pull the gurney in. The body bag she was in was zipped closed, and he felt a pang of anxiety over what he would

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see when they opened it. As soon as she was in, Dr. Marx turned to Chuck. "Make like a New York cabby, and get us out of here quick!" Then he climbed into the back of the van.

Chuck exclaimed, "Yes Sir!" and slammed the back door closed. He raced around to the front, jumped in, put the van in gear, and took off out of the alley. "Where are we headed?"

Dr. Marx answered as he was unzipping Catherine's body bag, and covering her with the thermal blanket Father had brought. "I called Peter Wellington and told him to meet Father in the tunnels, at the back of the City Morgue refrigerated body unit that we always use. I told him that Catherine was in critical condition, and that he needed to bring an heated saline I.V. bag, with glucose and vitamins in it. We need to stop at the manhole cover in the alley two blocks from the hospital to send Father down to meet him. You know the one, don't you, Chuck?"

Chuck answered, "Yes, I do. Usually, we are sending deceased members of Father's world the other direction through the morgue body refrigerator from the tunnels, to be embalmed or cremated, before being buried in the deep catacombs. This is a first, to send a living person through the morgue to the tunnels to keep her safe. I sure hope we can pull this off without someone catching on."

Father already had his stethoscope out of his bag, and was listening to Catherine's chest. She had an heart beat, extremely slow, but steady, and he breathed a sigh of

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relief. Her respiration was so slow as to be undetectable. “She really does appear dead. How on earth did you realize she was still alive, David?”

Dr. Marx frowned. “Corpses don’t sweat! I saw the sweat at her hairline, and realized that in spite of all appearances to the contrary, she was still alive. Unfortunately, I had called in the troops when Vincent called me, because I had no reason to believe he could be mistaken about her condition. I told my assistants to bag her hands to collect evidence, and while they were busy doing that, I ran out to nab Tony, because I had seen him hanging around the hallway. I sent a note with him to you through Catherine’s tunnel access in the basement. That poor boy was devastated over the report that she was dead, and I didn’t have time to explain to him that she wasn’t. It probably wouldn’t have been wise to tell him anyway. He took off like a shot, and obviously you got the message. We’ve got to do what essentially amounts to a living autopsy on Catherine right now, as fast as possible, so I’ve got the evidence the DA needs to try and find the murderer who did this to her. Father, grab an evidence collection kit from the cabinet right behind you there.”

Father got up and went to the cabinet. When he opened it to get the kit, he found Tony crunched up on the bottom shelf with tears streaming down his face. “Is Cathy going to be all right?” He sobbed.

The boy was so stricken Father couldn’t bring himself to scold him for stowing away in the van. “We are going to

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do everything we can to save her. For now, you just stay right where you are while we work on her, OK?" Tony nodded and stayed quiet after that.

Father found the kit and went back to Catherine with it. "What do you need for me to do, David?"

"Before we give her any shots to stabilize her, we need a blood sample, so I can determine what she was given to put her in this condition. I have a good idea what I'm going to find, but I need to be sure. Take the blood sample and bag it. Then, I need for you to swab under her fingernails for any evidence there, and bag the swabs while I do a thorough examination. We'll give her the shots before we drop you off in the manhole."

Father went to work on the blood sample and her bagged hands. As Dr. Marx examined her from head to toe with a magnifying glass, he paused at her upper left arm. "Look here, Father, there is a needle puncture." Father looked, and nodded his head. Dr. Marx went on with his examination and finished with a pelvic exam. His face fell as he looked at Father and said, "Catherine has given birth within the last twenty-four hours. Whoever tried to kill her must have given her what they thought was a fatal dose of morphine. That is the only thing that makes any sense."

Father looked at him in horror. "Oh, David, poor Catherine had a baby?" Dr. Marx nodded. Father spoke vehemently, "Some unspeakable devil must have violated her!" After recovering his composure somewhat he said, "I

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had better give her just a small dose of epinephrine. We don't want to shock her system, but we do need to stimulate her heart and respiration until we can do a brain scan to determine just how deep this coma is. Catherine is sweating because they tried to kill her rather than properly caring for her after the birth. I'll give her a full dose of the penicillin to stem infection."

Dr. Marx spoke while Father was administering the shots, "I'm sorry I had to have you bring your precious supplies of those things, Father. When I figured out that she was alive, I couldn't very well send for the medicines without everyone wondering why, and we don't keep anything for the living in the coroner's van."

After giving Catherine the shots, Father went to the supply cabinet and pulled Tony out of it. Tony had typical Gypsy good looks, with dark hair and eyes. Father sat down facing Tony, and asked, "Now, son, why don't you explain what you were doing here."

Tony exclaimed emphatically, "Repaying a debt! Vincent and Catherine gave me back my life when they helped me prove that it was my uncle and not my father who stole from our clan. By Gypsy law, I must repay that debt! I owe them my life, and I must help save Cathy's."

Father responded gently, "Tony, you must understand that this is as important a secret as the tunnels are. This one will be even harder to keep, though, because you mustn't tell even Vincent that Catherine is alive. Chuck, can you hear me? I need for you to understand this too."

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Chuck spoke up, "I hear you, Father. I can keep any secret you tell me to."

Tony also spoke up, "Father, Gypsies always keep their word, and we know how to keep secrets. If you say that staying silent is the best thing for Cathy and Vincent, I won't say anything to anyone about this. You have to let me help!"

Father then continued, "As David was telling us, our primary reason to keep Cathy's location and condition a secret from the world above is because the assailant who did this to her is unknown and still at large. Vincent can't protect her in his current state, but we can. She has no living family now who need to know where she is, so this secret will not hurt anyone above."

"Aside from that, I know what Cathy's wishes were. She was in the process of wrapping up her life up top after she and Vincent were married. She had even written her letter of resignation to her boss in the District Attorney's office, but she postponed tendering her resignation when Vincent became ill. She wanted to give Vincent time for his memories to return and his connection to her to be restored. She had discussed all of these things with me when she brought me their marriage certificate and their wedding rings to keep until that time."

"There is another problem I have been thinking about since we picked Cathy up which makes it essential that Vincent not know right now that she is alive. Not only would it devastate him to lose her again if we can't save

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her, but his own desperation to save her would even more severely impair his ability to become reconnected with her empathically. If we can stabilize her, and if he can work through this loss, then there is a much better chance that his link with her will be reestablished naturally. I am her father-in-law and Vincent is her husband. She also has a large extended family below, so I think it is pretty clear what we need to do for both Vincent and Catherine. Tony, do your grandparents know where you are?"

Tony answered, "They know I am in your world, Father, so they aren't worried about me. Before Cathy disappeared, she was teaching me to read when she got off work. You know that I've been coming below to go to school with the other children, and Vincent has been giving me reading lessons since Cathy was lost."

Father looked sternly at Tony and said, "And you put those reading lessons to good use when you read that note Dr. Marx gave you, didn't you?"

Tony gave him a sheepish grin. "How else was I going to know where to find Cathy?"

Father took the boy by the shoulders, and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Then I have the perfect job for a Gypsy boy! You can keep track of Vincent for me, so I always know where he is while we are going through this crisis. That way, he won't accidentally find out about Catherine before he figures it out on his own. Do you think you can handle that responsibility?"

"I'm your Gypsy, Father!" Tony was beaming, his tears

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completely dried.

Then Chuck spoke up, "We're at the manhole cover. I'm going to stop over it while you climb down, Father."

Dr. Marx pulled up the trap door in the bottom of the van and then reached down and pulled open the manhole cover. He helped Father to start climbing down and handed him his medical bag. "Tony, you should come with me," Father said.

Dr. Marx grabbed Tony before he could start down. "Actually, I've got a job for him here. He'll make an excellent hot water bottle to send Catherine through the refrigerated unit with," and he smiled at Tony.

Father called up, "I should have thought of that! I'll see Tony and Catherine in a little while then." He disappeared down into the tunnel.

Dr. Marx called forward to Chuck, "When we stop, I've got a New York City Morgue jacket for you to put on, so you can help me take Cathy through the hospital to the morgue in the basement. We have so many turnovers of employees no one will give you a second look. Tony, I guess you don't get claustrophobic do you?" The boy looked puzzled. "You aren't afraid of tight places that are dark are you?"

Tony laughed, "Are you kidding? Those are the best kind of places to hide in! They don't scare me."

Dr. Marx chuckled as he looked at the van's supply cabinet where Tony had stowed away and nodded, "That's good, because I need for you to climb into this bag with

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Catherine and stay very still. We are supposed to be wheeling one dead body through the hospital, not a bag full of living ones. Do you understand? I need for you to keep her warm but be very quiet and still.”

Tony was sober, “Just put me in there, Doc. I’ll take good care of her.” He climbed into the bag with Catherine, put his arm over her, and Dr. Marx zipped it up.

By that time Chuck had backed up to the emergency room door. He put on the jacket Dr. Marx had laid on the passenger seat and got out to go around back and help Dr. Marx get the gurney out of the van. He left Dr. Marx with Tony and Catherine on the sidewalk and quickly parked the van. Then he ran back to them, and they began wheeling their “corpse” through the hospital. When they finally reached the morgue in the basement, Dr. Marx looked around to be sure no one else was there. His assistants hadn’t made it back yet, and he knew he was going to have some explaining to do when they did.

He said to Chuck, “No one is here yet, so let’s hurry!” They quickly wheeled the gurney to the back of the morgue and into the room with the refrigerated body compartments and then went to the very last one in the corner. Dr. Marx pounded three times on the door and then opened it.

Peter was looking through at him. “We are all ready on this end. Send them through!” Dr. Marx and Chuck lifted Tony and Catherine carefully and slid them through to Peter and Father, who had another gurney equipped

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with the I.V. waiting.

Before they closed their respective doors Dr. Marx told them, "I'm going to test her blood to be sure it was morphine right now, and I'll call you with the results. I'll talk to your Helper at the Pine Hill Funeral Home, Marcus Brenner, and see if he can figure out a way to set up a funeral without a body. I know her family is dead, so I don't know who is going to want to claim her body and make those arrangements. She is wealthy, though, so I know someone will."

Father stuck his head in the opening. "I really appreciate everything you are doing here, David. Thank you so much for saving her life!" Dr. Marx nodded, and then they shut their doors.

Peter unzipped the bag, and Tony started to climb out, but Father stopped him. "No, Tony, these tunnels are quite cool. It would be better for Cathy if you just stayed where you are." Tony smiled and stayed put.

Then Peter and Father quickly started the I.V. Peter had kept it warm, in a small cooler with an hot water bottle in it under the gurney, while he was waiting for them to arrive. They hurried wordlessly up the tunnel to the access doorway into Peter's basement of his home. They had installed that doorway many years ago, so that Father's people could be hospitalized in Peter's home, if they needed more care than the hospital chamber below could be equipped to provide. Peter had built an hospital wing onto his home for that purpose, and he was so very

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thankful now that he had it to provide care for his poor little Catherine. She was the only one of the babies he had delivered that he had always stayed close to, and he was heartbroken that she had been brutalized this way.

They put her into the elevator in Peter's basement which took them to the third floor of his palatial home. Then they went down the hall and into an huge beautifully furnished room, which was appointed with all of the latest hospital equipment, and a very large adjustable bed. There was even a massive skylight which was pouring sunlight into the room. Tony's eyes were huge with wonder, but he stayed quiet as they helped him out of the bag. Then between the three of them, with Tony holding her I.V. bag, they got Catherine into bed.

Just then, Sarah and Peter's wife, Susan, stepped into the room. Peter and Susan made a really handsome couple. Peter was Father's age, but all of his hair was still brown. He was tall and very handsome, with a relaxed confidence about him. Susan was also tall and beautiful, with short, wavy dark hair. She was obviously in love with her husband and very happy. "Have you got her stabilized yet?" Susan asked.

Peter answered, "We do for the moment. We need to do some tests and run a brain scan, but right now she would benefit more from a warm bath."

Sarah spoke up, "You men just leave her to us! We'll get her bathed and dressed in a clean gown, and then you can run your tests."

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Sarah's most common function below was as a practical nurse, but she also took a keen interest in checking on some of the eccentric members of the community who chose to live apart from the others in more remote chambers. In her early forties, Sarah was also tall, with long brown hair and very pretty. She was in excellent shape, with good muscle tone, so she had the physical strength to handle sick people.

Father asked Sarah, "Who sent for you?"

Peter answered, "I sent a note below asking that Sarah come and help Susan with a project she was working on."

Father continued, "Do you know that this must be kept absolutely secret, especially from Vincent?"

Sarah told him, "I figured that since Vincent wasn't with you, you must have some really good reason why you don't want him to know about this. You know I won't tell him, Father, if you say I shouldn't."

Father then explained to Sarah, Peter, and Susan what he had said earlier in the van to Tony, David, and Chuck. They all nodded in understanding and agreement. Before leaving Catherine with the women, Father took her rings out of his pocket and put them on her left ring finger.



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By this time in the story, Father and Diana had arrived in Catherine's room. Diana interrupted his narrative. "It never occurred to you that the baby was Vincent's, Father?"

Father shook his head. "It never occurred to me that Vincent's DNA and blood chemistry would be compatible enough with Catherine's to produce a child. Over the years, we have had more than one occasion when Vincent suffered serious blood loss from injuries sustained while protecting us, but we couldn't give him a blood transfusion, because his blood chemistry was so unique. Medicines I tried to treat him with during illnesses he had as he was growing up almost always had a far different effect on him than on a normal human. When he suffered his mental breakdown after Paracelsus' deception, that illness was compounded by an high fever, and he showed up at Catherine's apartment totally delirious. Catherine took care of him there for a week, but she feared for his very life. She finally insisted that Peter send a blood sample to a medical lab to try to determine the source of his illness. They refused to process it, because they informed Peter that what he had sent them was animal blood. They assumed he had mixed it up with his patient's blood.

"A day or two after we rescued Catherine, Vincent came to me and told me that Catherine had told him herself that the baby was his before she lost consciousness. I know my shock at that news must have

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dismayed him. It was just such an unexpected miracle. I was sure they would be childless. I immediately sent word to Peter that her child was Vincent's, and he had been stolen from her. He gave Catherine a shot to stimulate her milk production, and we started pumping and freezing her breast milk until Little Jacob was recovered from Gabriel. Since the baby has been with us, we have been feeding him his own mother's milk. I was hoping that handling that milk might help Vincent recover his connection with Catherine, but so far that hasn't happened. Anyway, it is a lot better for Little Jacob than formula."

Diana walked to Catherine's bedside and sat in the rocking chair there. She picked up Catherine's hand and held it while she talked to Father. "I attended her funeral myself, and I had my photographer take pictures of it. How on earth did you manage that without anyone discovering that she wasn't in her coffin?"

Father chuckled, "Marcus Brenner came up with the brilliant idea to suggest a closed coffin to Catherine's friends, your District Attorney, Joe Maxwell, and Jenny Aronson, who showed up to make the arrangements. He told them that the abuse Cathy had suffered at the hands of her assailants had ruined her appearance, and suggested that no one would want to have that as their last memory of her. They were very happy to take his advice. Then he loaded the coffin with a flour sack containing one-hundred-five pounds of sand. Joe Maxwell was one of the pall bearers, and he didn't notice anything

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out of the ordinary.”

Peter came into the room at that point accompanied by Rebecca, who was taking a shift caring for Catherine. Rebecca was a pretty young woman with curly long blond hair and blue eyes. She turned on a brilliant smile, “We thought we heard voices in here!”

Father introduced Diana to Peter, and then Peter gave them some wonderful news. “A couple of hours ago I was able to take Catherine off her I.V. and remove the feeding tube. The latest brain scan shows that she is out of her coma, but she is still deeply asleep. She can swallow, though, and we managed to feed her some Jell-O. There really is no physical reason why she shouldn’t be awake. I’m thinking the reason may be the same one that has Vincent still severed from her empathically, deep psychological trauma. Only time will heal that. I sent Kipper down to William in your kitchen chamber to fetch some of the soup he makes for anyone who is ill. The healing Chinese herbs he puts in it from Dr. Wong’s shop in Chinatown and the vegetables from Mong’s Vietnamese grocery store are the best medicines she could have.”

Diana had been so overwhelmed emotionally to actually see one of her crime victims living and well cared for, that she had failed to notice the lovely classical piano music drifting in from another part of Peter’s home. “Is that an actual person playing that beautiful music?” She asked.

Father added his own query, “Peter, is that Rolley?”

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Peter answered both of them, "It is! He comes here every evening and plays for a couple of hours on my grand piano in the drawing room on the second floor. He said that he needed to play for Cathy, because he knew how much she enjoyed the concerts in Central Park with Vincent, in the tunnel under the platform where they could hear them through the storm grate. He talked about how Cathy helped Vincent to rescue him from the streets when he was addicted to heroin, and how he owed it to her to help her get better."

Father smiled, "Cathy has been such a blessing for all of us ever since Vincent first found her. Everyone loves her dearly. I'm glad that they are all able to participate in helping her and Vincent to recover. It has been very therapeutic for the whole community to be involved during this crisis."

Moments later Rolley showed up in the doorway. Rolley was a very handsome young African-American man, although aged a little beyond his years from the time wasted as an heroin addict. However, he now looked like he was at peace and happy. Father introduced him to Diana, and he took her outstretched hand shyly. She quickly put him at ease, though, by asking him about the piece he had been playing on the piano. "That was Bach's "Ave Maria," wasn't it?" she asked.

Rolley smiled and answered, "Yes, Johann Sebastian Bach. He's dead now. Vincent said that all of the dead composers would like knowing that I play their music."

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Diana smiled at his enthusiasm. “Yes, they would like it very much, Rolley. It is a way for them and their works to live on.”

Rolley continued, “If it hadn’t been for Ms. Kendrick teaching me how to read music in the tunnels when I was brought to her as a boy, I wouldn’t have known what I was playing. At that time, I could only play pieces I had heard before, and I had no idea what they were called or who had written them. She opened a much larger world for me, so I could play anything, whether I had heard it before or not, and understand what I was playing.” He looked at Peter. “Is Cathy any better?”

Father answered for him. “Peter was just telling us that Cathy is now off her I.V. and feeding tube, so she is much better. Your music is powerful medicine for her, Rolley.”

Rolley beamed, and said, “I’m headed back home now.”

Father quickly responded, “Wait a minute, Rolley, and we’ll go with you. Are you ready to go, Diana?”

Diana shook her head. “I’m going to stay with Cathy for a little while longer, Father.”

Rebecca chimed in, “I can lead her back when Sarah comes in to relieve me in a couple of hours.”

Peter added, “Or I can drive her home.”

Diana objected to that suggestion. “Thank you, Peter, but no one who isn’t a regular member of your household should come or go by the street entrance.”

Peter looked quizzically at Father, and Father

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explained, "Diana wants to be absolutely certain that there is no further threat from Gabriel's organization."

Diana clarified, "Yes, precisely! Until I'm certain, we should only use the tunnel access to your home."

Peter took Father's arm and asked Rolley, "Do you mind waiting for a few minutes before you go back, Rolley? I need to talk to Father about something."

Rolley replied, "Not at all! I'll just sit here with Diana, Cathy, and Rebecca until Father is ready to go."

Peter took Father down the hallway to his office, seated him, and closed the door. He began, "I had an interesting visit today from Elliott Burch's executor. He contacted me because I am Cathy's executor. The way Cathy set it up, she also gave me her power-of-attorney in the event that she was incapacitated, so we are covered whether she lives or dies. Anyway, Elliott Burch was bankrupted by Gabriel, but he left a five-million-dollar insurance policy with Catherine's child as the beneficiary. The only stipulation was that I produce a birth certificate for Little Jacob. I've got your Helper in the Department of Vital Statistics working on that right now."

Father was shocked by the news. "I wonder what possessed Elliott Burch to do something that generous!"

Peter added, "I don't know, but that isn't all. As the executor of Catherine's will, and as her attorney-in-fact, since she is actually still alive, I was sent the paperwork on all of her holdings some time ago. Her own estate, between her investments and what her father left to her, is

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in excess of eleven-million-dollars. She stipulated in both her will and the power-of-attorney that those funds were to be used for the benefit of your community at the discretion of myself, you, and Vincent. It is apparent that her priorities had changed radically over the past few years, because her investments were in a shambles. I took the liberty of having my investment broker, Sandra Goldman, go over all of Cathy's holdings. She has reinvested almost everything in a new portfolio which is now producing healthy returns. Anyway, there is no reason for anyone in your world to ever want for anything again, and you will be able to pay your Helpers."

Father shook his head. "I'm overwhelmed! Please be sure to set up accounts with everyone who has been providing supplies to us, Peter.

Peter smiled, "Already done, Father."



As Vincent slept, he dreamed.

He found himself in a white mist with a small figure coming through the mist toward him. It was Catherine, dressed in a delicate white wedding gown beaded with natural pearls, trimmed at the neckline and at the ends of the long elegant sleeves, with intricate white lace. Her

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light brown hair was swept up and adorned with one each of the white and red roses from the bush on her balcony. She reached for him, and he took her small hands in his huge ones and saw that he was wearing a white ruffled formal shirt and a black velvet vest over black formal dress pants and black boots. On her left ring finger was the most beautiful set of crystal wedding rings he could ever have imagined, and his left ring finger also wore a much larger masculine crystal ring. He recognized that the crystals were from the Crystal Cavern. He looked into Catherine's blue-green eyes, bent over to kiss her, and awakened with a start.

Vincent sat up on the edge of his bed, closed his eyes, and put his head in his hands. When he could bring himself to look up, he saw that Mary had fallen asleep in the new rocker, and Little Jacob was sound asleep in his bassinet. Pretty eighteen-year-old Brooke, with her wavy shoulder-length brown hair, was standing in the doorway with a baby bottle of milk. "Am I disturbing you, Vincent?"

Vincent answered, "Not at all, Brooke. Come on in."

Brooke went on, "Peter sent another bottle of breast milk for Little Jacob's feeding, and I was hoping to give it to him." Almost on cue, as if he knew, even in his sleep, that it was feeding time, Little Jacob stirred and then fussed.

Vincent smiled, "That would be wonderful, Brooke. It

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was such a blessing that Peter found a woman who had lost her baby and was generous enough to donate her milk to Little Jacob. Perhaps you could feed him and then watch over him for a little while, so I can take Mary to her chamber and put her to bed. She has worn herself out fretting over me.”

Brooke lit up with a smile, “Sure! I’m going to change him first, though, before I feed him.” She reached for the pile of diapers under the bassinet.

Vincent was momentarily alarmed when it occurred to him that Catherine’s rose was no longer in his hand. When he found it safe in its pouch, he realized Diana must have put it away after he fell asleep, and he smiled. Then he stood up and stepped over to the bassinet. He took the bottle of milk from Brooke, so she could change the baby. Suddenly, Catherine’s face, eyes closed in death, was clear in his mind, and he heard her voice distinctly, “Vincent! Where are you?” He closed his eyes in pain and laid the bottle on the table.

Brooke looked at him in alarm. “Vincent, are you all right?”

Vincent smiled softly at her concern. “I’m all right, Brooke. Don’t worry.”

As Vincent stepped over to the rocker and picked Mary up in his arms, Brooke stopped what she was doing and stared in disbelief at the beautiful rocking chair. “Is that the rocking chair Cullen made?”

Vincent chuckled at the same look he and Diana had

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shared over that chair, "It sure is."

Brooke was mesmerized by it, "I had heard that he was working on one, but I didn't go look. How does he do that?"

Vincent laughed softly as he walked with Mary in his arms toward the doorway, "I think he must use magic. I'll be right back."

Brooke called after him, "Don't hurry!"

Vincent turned around and looked at her. "Well, if you are fine here for awhile, I'll go talk to Father after I put Mary into bed."

Brooke beamed at the opportunity to spend more time with Little Jacob, "Please do."

When Vincent finally got to Father's chamber, no one was there. Moments later Jamie came in and asked, "Vincent, have you seen Mouse?"

Vincent answered, "No, Jamie, I'm sorry. Have you seen Father?"

Jamie told him, "He and Diana talked here for quite a while, and then he took her back to the tunnels under her apartment building. I can't believe he'll be too much longer there. Would you like for me to stay with you while you wait?"

Vincent smiled at her. "That isn't necessary, Jamie. I'll just do some reading while I'm waiting."

Jamie turned to go. "OK, if you see Mouse, will you tell him that I'm in my chamber, and to please come find

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me? Samantha told me that he was working on a new crossbow for me, and I'm anxious to see it."

Vincent promised, "I'll be sure to tell him if I do see him." Jamie left, and Vincent settled in the big arm chair with a volume of poetry he had picked up off Father's large table.

When Father returned to his chambers, he found Vincent waiting for him. "Have you been here long, Vincent?"

Vincent closed the book, reached over and laid it back on the table, and then assured him, "No, Father. I came only moments ago. Jamie told me that you had taken Diana out to her access tunnel."

Father told him, "Yes, actually, she took me to her loft, and I got to see Catherine's beautiful rosebush with the red and white roses. It is a miracle that Diana was able to save it from what she said about its condition when she found it. Did you need to talk to me?"

Vincent spoke carefully, "Yes, I wanted to ask you something. Catherine and I were married, weren't we?"

Father's face lit up, "You remembered that?"

Vincent gave him a look of dismay. "I wish that I did! Catherine said we had loved, and a son was born. How could I lose a memory that beautiful? I only know that I can't imagine that we would conceive a child together without completing our dream of being married first. My heart tells me that we were married."

Father was quick to comfort him, "Vincent, you were

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married.” He went to the drawer in his sleeping chamber and brought Vincent the ring and marriage certificate.

Vincent picked up the certificate and looked at the names on it, *Vincent Wells* and *Catherine Chandler*. A look of peace and relief passed over his face. “Thank goodness! I was half afraid that I had lost control of myself and might have done something terrible, even though she told me that we had loved with such tenderness in her voice.”

Father said very emphatically, “Vincent, Catherine was blissfully happy with you. You never did anything to hurt her, ever!”

Vincent laid the certificate down and picked up the ring. “This ring is mine?”

Father nodded, “Yes. Catherine brought these things to me when you became ill; to keep until your memory was restored.”

Vincent shook his head sadly, “Catherine wasn’t wearing any rings when I found her. Gabriel must have taken hers from her.”

Father corrected him, “No, Vincent. She brought me her rings as well, because she didn’t want you to experience any anxiety over things you couldn’t remember. After you found her, I put her rings on her finger myself. Dr. Marx sent me a message to come and assist him with Catherine’s body after you called him from her apartment.”

Vincent was again relieved, “I’m glad she is wearing hers.” Vincent put his ring on. “I’m really glad, Father,

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that you did that for her.” He got up and gave Father an hug and a kiss. “It says on the marriage certificate that we were married by Kevin Chin. Was it a beautiful ceremony?”

Father smiled as he remembered, “I think it was the most beautiful ceremony we’ve ever had. Everyone was shedding tears of joy, because we had all wanted this for you and Catherine for so long. You wouldn’t believe the happy chaos that ensued when you came to me and told me that the two of you wanted to be married!”

Vincent sat back down in one armchair, and Father settled in the other one, “Tell me about it, Father.”

Father told him the story. “You came to me on a Wednesday late in the September before this past one and asked to be married in a simple no-fuss ceremony on the last Saturday in September, just three days away. Well, the whole community was up-in-arms over that and wouldn’t hear of a simple anything! It was complete mayhem for those three days while they converted this Council chamber into a gorgeous wedding chapel. There were flowers and fancy candles everywhere, and everyone dressed in their finest. You looked magnificent in your ruffled shirt—”

Vincent finished, “and black velvet vest.”

Father looked at him in surprise, “You do remember!”

Vincent shook his head. “No, Father, I dreamed about what we were wearing just before I came here. That was why I asked you about whether we were married. The

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dream was so real.”

Father went on, “Catherine wore her mother’s wedding gown, and it was truly lovely.”

Vincent asked, “Did it have natural pearls sewn onto it?”

Father raised his eyebrows, “It did, indeed!”

Suddenly, Mouse ran in the door and swung with both hands on the opposite handrails down the entry stairs all out of breath. He paused for a second until his breathing slowed. Mouse always looked like a wild man with his disheveled light-brown hair and his ungainly gait. No one, including Mouse, knew exactly how old he was, because he couldn’t speak when Vincent captured him pilfering food as a child. Their best guess was that he was now in his early twenties. He employed only the simplest of speech to communicate even after growing up in the tunnels and being tutored by Vincent. All of this together, to an outsider, would have given him the appearance of not being very bright. Only his adoptive family below was aware of the brilliant engineer’s mind hiding under that very unlikely exterior.

“Looking for Jamie!” Mouse exclaimed unceremoniously.

Vincent smiled at him. “She has been looking for you, too! She said to tell you that she has gone down to her chamber, and she wants you to come and see her. She says that she is anxious to see the new crossbow Samantha told her you were making.”

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Mouse looked crestfallen, “Supposed to be a surprise! OK good! OK fine! Take the express chute down!” He turned around to go, and then turned back around and gave them a silly grin, “Faster!” Then he was running out the door.

Father looked quizzically at Vincent and chuckled, “The express chute?”

Vincent explained, “Catherine told me about Mouse’s express chute after she accidentally discovered it. Remember when you and I were trapped in the cave that collapsed, when we went to retrieve Eric after he sprained his ankle when the children were exploring The Maze?”

Father nodded, “How can I forget? We nearly died in that cave. We should have sealed off The Maze long before that. The children didn’t realize that the ground water had weakened the walls. I was so thankful we managed to send the children out before the rockslide occurred and trapped us.”

Vincent went on, “Well, Catherine’s empathic connection to me worked in reverse that time. She felt the danger I was in and came to the Central Park secret door. She tapped on the pipes, but no one came, because everyone was in that lower passageway trying to dig us out. So, she braved trying to find me without an escort. She got lost and then came across the gated entry where Mouse had installed his express chute to his chamber, which as you know, is below all of the rest of our sleeping chambers. She thought the lion’s-head lever was to open

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the gate, but when she pulled it, she dropped through the tunnel floor right onto Mouse's bed. That was how she first met Mouse and Jamie. Remember, we had imposed the month of silence as punishment for Mouse, because we couldn't get him to understand that simply because the world above has more than one of something, it can't be taken to use down here?"

Father grimaced, "I do remember. We were all heartbroken to do that, you most of all, but that was far better than what Mouse would have suffered had he been caught in that warehouse where he tripped the alarm."

Vincent went on with the story. "You are right. Anyway, when we were trapped in the cave-in with limited oxygen, Jamie had taken it upon herself to break the silence and went to find Mouse to help get us out. When Catherine dropped through the ceiling onto Mouse's bed, and then demanded that they take her to me, the two of them brought her to the collapsed cave. That was the first time we received help from Elliott Burch. He didn't know who it was that Catherine was so desperate to help, but he accepted her insistence that she couldn't tell him, and he didn't put a price tag on the aid he gave her. Catherine gave Elliott Mouse's list, and he gave her the drill bits and explosives that Mouse needed to rescue us."

Father spoke up at that point. "Speaking of Elliott Burch, Peter contacted me, and told me that Elliott Burch left Little Jacob a five-million-dollar insurance policy. Did Elliott say anything to you about that?"

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Vincent settled back into his chair, and shook his head as the memory came back. “I had completely forgotten about that conversation! I stayed with Elliott until he died, after Gabriel blew up the *Compass Rose* with the two of us on it. I managed to pull Elliott out of the water and up onto the bank, and as he was dying, he told me about that policy. He said that he had originally set it up with his father as the beneficiary, but when his father was killed, he changed the beneficiary to Catherine. After she was killed, and I told him about her child, he changed it again for the baby. I was so badly injured myself, I guess it just left my mind. Money is so unimportant to us down here. Elliott really redeemed himself in the end.”

Father added, “Well, Peter is Catherine’s executor of her will, and between that five-million-dollar policy, and the over-eleven-million-dollar estate she left us, no one down here or our Helpers above will ever have to do without anything ever again!”

Vincent stared at him. “I knew Catherine’s family was wealthy, but I had no idea Catherine’s estate was worth that much! She certainly didn’t live like it was.”

Father relayed what Peter had said, “Judging by the state of her financial affairs, it was obvious that wasn’t important to her anymore. Peter had his own financial advisor clean up her portfolio, so it is now producing healthy returns again.”

Vincent smiled sadly, “Catherine always wanted to do

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more for us, and I always told her that giving of herself was more than enough. I guess she found a way to be sure we would always be well cared for." Vincent stood up. "I had better let you get to bed now. Good night, Father."

"Good night, Vincent." Vincent leaned over and gave Father a kiss, picked up the marriage certificate, and left for his own chamber.

When Vincent arrived in his chamber, Brooke was still happily rocking Little Jacob, who was now fed and content. "Thank you, Brooke. He looks completely spoiled!"

Brooke knew he was teasing, but she just had to scold him, "Vincent, you know that you can't spoil a baby with too much love!"

Vincent chuckled, "I'm relieved to hear it! Let me take him now, and you go on to bed." She got up, and he took his child from her.

She gave the baby a kiss. "Good night, Vincent."

"Good night, Brooke," Vincent replied.

After Brooke left, Vincent picked up a volume of Kipling's Jungle Book from a shelf and settled comfortably on the rocking chair. He read to Little Jacob until the baby had fallen asleep, and then he rose, kissed him, and laid him in his bassinet.

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When Vincent settled onto his bed, a powerful vision overtook him.

He was in the white mist again, but this time he heard Catherine crying. He walked through the thick mist toward the sound until he broke out of it and saw her chained to a large oak tree in a clearing. She was sitting under the tree, with one wrist chained to the tree, and she was sobbing. She looked up as he ran toward her, and she appeared as surprised to see him as he was to find her. “Oh, Vincent, I thought I would never see you again!”

Vincent dropped to his knees beside her and took her in his arms. “I’m here now, sweet Catherine!” With brute strength he broke the chain around her wrist, stood up, and picked her up in his arms.

Catherine wrapped her arms around Vincent’s neck and buried her face in his mane of hair. “I thought I had to be chained here forever, because I didn’t tell you that I was pregnant before I was kidnapped, and our baby was stolen.”

Vincent comforted her. “Never mind that now. Our son is safe. I’m taking you home.” He walked away from the tree through the mist and saw light beginning to appear in front of him.

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Catherine sounded drowsy. "Vincent, I'm so tired. I can't stay awake! I love you."

Suddenly, Vincent was alone as Catherine evaporated from his arms. He let out a roar of heartbreaking frustration which Father heard all the way over in his chamber. Miraculously, the baby slept through it.

Vincent was now wide awake again. He got up and went to a remote corner of his chamber. From behind a large cabinet he pulled out an huge painting and took the cover off it. It was a spectacular portrait of him and Catherine. He sat on the end of his bed and stared at it for quite some time.

After a while, Father appeared in Vincent's doorway looking very worried. "Vincent, are you all right?"

Vincent looked up, startled out of his reverie. "Father, I am so sorry! I didn't mean to wake you."

Father came in and sat down on the rocking chair. "Everyone has been telling me about this rocker. It truly is wonderful, isn't it?" Vincent was staring at the portrait again and didn't hear what Father said. Father watched him for a few minutes and then asked, "Tell me what has you so absorbed and distracted, Vincent."

Vincent finally looked at him and said, "I'm sorry, Father. I'm just trying to figure out what Catherine needs for me to find or do. Ever since her death, I've heard her voice everywhere I go. I have visions and dreams about her, and it is very confusing. I often see her face very

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clearly, with her eyes closed in death, which is the way I had to leave her in her apartment.”

Suddenly, Father realized what was happening to Vincent, and he barely managed to hide his surprise as well as his relief that Catherine’s breast milk was having the effect they had hoped for. Peter had been sending a bottle of Catherine’s pumped breast milk for Little Jacob, down into the tunnels every couple of hours, with the changing shifts of women in the community who had been caring for Catherine. What Vincent was seeing was Catherine with her eyes closed in deep sleep, not death. All Vincent needed was more time. “That is the portrait that Kristopher Gentian painted, isn’t it?” Father asked Vincent.

Vincent looked back at the painting. “Yes, it is. These visions and dreams I’ve been having about Catherine, and also hearing her voice, made me think of the time when Kristopher’s ghost visited Catherine and me. He needed for us to find his paintings in that remote warehouse, where they were hidden away, so others could enjoy them. He also left this portrait for Catherine, painted long before he died. He had never even met us while he was alive.

“Catherine had gone into the antique book store of Kristopher’s friend, Jonathan Smythe, to look for a gift for me. She was trying to find a first edition book of poetry. Kristopher handed her a first edition book of poetry by Tennyson from his own library with his name on the plate inside the cover. She wouldn’t believe Jonathan Smythe

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when he answered her inquiries about Kristopher, and he told her that he had identified Kristopher's body himself when the artist froze to death two years earlier. She thought it was just a ploy to make Kristopher's paintings more valuable.

"When we finally did find all of his paintings in an abandoned warehouse, this one was among them, carefully wrapped, with Catherine's name attached to it. We were both led to that warehouse by Kristopher. He led Catherine in person, and he led me through a powerful dream I had about him. Catherine and I ended up there together. This was a prophetic painting, as he imagined us while he was alive, and Catherine had an hard time grasping that possibility. She had to accept it when I pointed out that it was an oil portrait that would have taken months or even years to dry completely, so that it could not have been painted during the mere days Kristopher had known us. Catherine has to be reaching out to me from beyond the grave like Kristopher did. I just wish I could figure out what she needs."

Father thought silently to himself, "She just needs for love to awaken you, so you can awaken her."

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Chapter III

Satan's Minions

When Diana walked through the door of the District Attorney's main office, she observed the usual chaos going on. There were numerous desks of both attorneys and paralegals, all piled with paperwork. Some of those desks even had attorneys and paralegals seated on top of them as they talked with their colleagues. The sound of printers and copiers was noisy enough, but the din of everyone talking into phones, to each other, or to victims as they took depositions made Diana wonder how anyone could think clearly here. Visits to this office to talk to Joe always made her grateful that she was allowed to work at her loft. She picked her way around everyone and headed for the office in the back corner. It was painted with the words, "District Attorney Joseph Maxwell." She opened the door,

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stepped inside, closed the door, and then leaned with her back against it. She was thankful that Joe's office was sound-proof.

Joe was on the phone. "I need two of your officers at Gabriel's mansion tomorrow morning, not next week! Call me as soon as you can tell me who you are sending. They will be escorting Unit 210 Investigator, Diana Bennett, and don't give me any excuses!"

Even when he was annoyed Joe Maxwell was strikingly handsome. He was tall and very well-built with dark hair and eyes. Right now those eyes were shooting fire. Diana raised her eyebrows as he hung up the phone. "Which side of the bed did you get up on this morning?" She asked him.

Joe responded, "The grumpy side! We are just about to clean all of Gabriel's dirty cops out of our system, and now the police force is dragging its feet giving me the extra help we need to finish this up."

Diana nodded her head and did her best not to look as enthusiastic as she felt about the chance to get back into Gabriel's mansion again. "I guess that was why you summoned me here this morning? What exactly would you like for me to do at the mansion?"

Joe explained. "Dirty cops are like cockroaches. We clean out a nest of them, and there always seem to be more to take their places. We have been through that place with a fine-tooth comb, but I wanted you to take a look for yourself. You always see things no one else does.

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I want to make sure we haven't overlooked anything pertaining to Gabriel's organization. I don't want any nasty surprises later. I'll call your loft this afternoon and let you know who your police escorts will be."

Diana frowned at him. "You know, you could have called me to tell me this."

Joe opened a drawer in his desk and pulled out a large envelope. "Then I couldn't have given you this." He handed it to her.

Diana took it from him. "What's this?"

Joe answered, "That has everything you need to get into the mansion, the key-code for the gated driveway entry and the keys."

"That sounds like a plan to me." Diana turned to go, and then she turned back around and said, "Congratulations on winning the election, Joe. You are definitely the best person for the job. The city is lucky to have you cleaning it up."

Joe smiled, "Thanks, Diana."

Diana did some shopping while she was out and then took a cab back to her loft. When she stepped off the elevator into her living room, she dumped her packages on the floor and took her coat off, hanging it on the rack by the elevator. She picked up her watering can and watered all of her plants. Then she settled down on the sofa by Catherine's rosebush. She fingered one of the white blooms and started talking to it. "Well, Cathy, now I just

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have to figure out whether to let Vincent know I'm going back into Gabriel's Staten Island mansion again. My feeling is that he needs to know. Keeping him in the loop on this will save time later explaining any danger that might become evident. Besides, if he has his mind on that problem, he won't notice the strategic game of chess we are playing with him to give him time for his connection to you to be healed. I guess I need to go see Father and him, and tell them what I'm doing."

At that point the phone rang, and Joe was on the other end. "Your police escorts will be Steve Palmer and Ron Myers. They will be at the mansion at 9:00 tomorrow morning." She thanked Joe and hung up the phone. Then she put her purchases away and dressed in comfortable clothes to go walking through the tunnels to talk to Father and Vincent.

When Diana arrived in Father's chambers, she found him playing chess with Vincent. Diana looked over Father's shoulder, and as he started to make a move, she put her hand over his and moved the piece with him. Then she whispered into his ear, "Checkmate in five moves."

Father chuckled, "So it is!"

Vincent looked up at her with a grin, and exclaimed, "You little Brat! You never said you played chess."

Diana retorted, "You never asked, you big Monster!" She pointed at her head, "Annoying mind, remember? I'm

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sorry to spoil your game, but I wanted to let you both know that Joe Maxwell is sending me back into Gabriel's mansion to see if there is any more information there on his crime organization."

Vincent's expression suddenly became serious.

"Maybe I should go with you, Diana. Gabriel had very dangerous associates, and they may still be around there."

Diana reassured him. "That isn't necessary, Vincent. Joe is sending me in with an armed police escort. I won't be in any danger, I promise. I just wanted to let you know I was going, and I'll come and tell you about whatever I find. Hopefully his empire has crashed and burned. We've managed to uncover many of the dirty cops he had on his payroll. Joe just wants me to go through the mansion, and see if there is anything in there that has been overlooked by the other investigators."

Father and Vincent still looked worried, and Vincent was very firm. "Diana, please be careful. Promise us you won't take any unnecessary chances."

Diana smiled at them. "I promise! Now stop worrying, both of you! I'm heading home now to get some paperwork done and to get a good night's sleep before going in the morning. The police officers are meeting me there at 9:00 a.m."

When she arrived by cab at Gabriel's mansion a few minutes ahead of time the next morning, Steve Palmer and Ron Myers were already there waiting for her in their

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squad car. She greeted them and then used the key-code Joe had given her to open the gate. She climbed into the back seat of their car, and they drove her up the long driveway to the front door.

“Gentlemen, I need to work by myself on this so I’m not distracted. Steve, please stay outside here and keep watch. Ron, please stay just inside so you can hear me if I call you. I just want to walk through the house alone, and see if I notice anything that needs further investigation.” They didn’t argue with her and posted themselves where she had instructed them to be after she unlocked the house.

Diana’s attention to detail was what had led to her discovery of Gabriel’s Staten Island mansion in the first place. When Gabriel had her abducted by his henchmen, blindfolded, and then taken there to show her Vincent’s sick baby, she had noticed the unique pattern of the tiles on the floor. She gave a drawing she had made of that pattern to Father to take to Joe, so he could find out where the mansion was located. It had turned out to be an imported Italian-style tile used in only a few very expensive homes in the New York area. It wasn’t difficult to narrow it down to the one on Staten Island after that.

Diana began to walk through the mansion now, noticing every detail. She not only wanted to find any pertinent clues Joe needed to make sure Gabriel’s empire had been permanently taken down, but she also wanted to see if there were any clues that would help her to

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understand Gabriel's obsession with Vincent and his child. She walked into every room on every floor of the huge house and found absolutely nothing.

Then Diana went into the basement where the electrified cage that Gabriel had held Vincent in was located. It was there that she found what she was looking for. Under the stairway leading to the basement she found a door hidden in the shadows. When she opened it, she stepped into an huge beautiful wood-paneled office with wooden beams overhead. She studied the room for a minute and then smiled. Diana turned around, left the room, shut the door behind her, and then she went upstairs to the front door.

"Ron, there isn't anything here that will help Mr. Maxwell with his investigation. We might as well go," Diana said to the officer.

Ron looked happy to be leaving, "All right Ms. Bennett." He escorted her out, and they got into the squad car.

Steve asked, "Did you find anything?"

Diana answered, "Nothing that will help Joe Maxwell with his investigation. I didn't eat any breakfast this morning. Would you guys drop me off at the diner I passed a few blocks over when I was coming this morning? I'll catch a cab from there back home."

They dropped her off at the diner, and she went in and watched them drive away. As soon as they were out of sight, she left the diner and went around the corner into

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the alley. She found the manhole where Chuck Johnson had dropped her and Father off when they went underground to save Vincent and Little Jacob. Diana lifted the cover and climbed down, replacing the cover above her. She took a small flashlight out of her coat pocket and then climbed down to the tunnel to go back to the mansion. Diana went through the hidden basement tunnel entrance she had used to rescue Vincent, and then she headed for the office under the stairs. She walked into it and turned the light on. She was thankful that the city had left the electricity on to continue the investigation.

The huge room was shaped very much like a ship, and the ceiling beams came to a point to her right. She noted that the lighting left the point of the beams in shadow. "A couple of people could hide in that corner on top of that platform on the beams," she thought.

What had drawn her attention earlier was the fact that the room was not symmetrical. It was apparent that the wall behind the large desk in front of her was closer to her than it should be, and she knew there had to be an hidden room behind it. She just needed to find the door and figure out how to open it. The walls of the office were lined with bookshelves full of books everywhere except behind the desk. The only thing on that wall was a picture of Alice with the white rabbit. She looked at the hundreds of books on the shelves and thought to herself, "I sure hope the trip-lever for the secret panel is not

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hidden in a book!”

Diana went behind the desk, sat down in the plush leather chair, and studied everything on the desk. There was a pair of gold bookends with a single book between them along with a desk pad and a pen holder containing some pens and pencils. She started to open one of the drawers and then suddenly swung her attention back to the book between the gold bookends. It was Alice Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll. She shook her head and smiled. The original title of Lewis Carroll’s book was Through the Looking Glass. Modern adaptations were entitled Alice in Wonderland. “Is that a remote clue?” She thought. She took the book out from between the bookends and opened it. Inside the false book she found an electronic remote control, and she laughed, “Remote clue, indeed!”

Diana pointed the remote control at every spot on the wall behind the desk with no results. She grimaced, “I guess it was too much to hope for that the batteries wouldn’t be dead.” She opened the back of it and took out the two dead AAA batteries. She began hunting through the desk drawers for more batteries without success. Then she recalled that she had bought a package of four AAA batteries for her television remote and had put the package in her coat pocket and forgotten about them. “Oh, please be there!” She dug through her pocket and found the package. After putting the false book back between its bookends and replacing the batteries in the

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remote control, it occurred to her that if Lewis Carroll's book held the remote control, perhaps the picture of Alice had the remote sensor. Still seated, she pointed the remote control at the picture, pushed the button, and the panel swung open toward her. She scooted the chair quickly toward the desk to avoid being struck by it.

A light inside the room automatically turned on, and she was amazed by what she saw. *Alice in Wonderland* hadn't really seemed like a clue an evil crime lord would use to hide a secret room. Now, she was sure it wasn't. What appeared before her was an huge missing piece of the puzzle—or was it? She got up from the desk and stepped into the room. If she shut the panel, there was only room for herself. She looked around and quickly found the light switch and the button to open and shut the panel from inside the secret room. Then she left the light on in there and went to the light switch for the office and turned it off. She went back into the secret room and shut the panel, keeping the remote control in her coat pocket. Diana didn't want anyone else finding it as she had done. When the panel closed, a quiet fan overhead began circulating fresh air into the room. "Someone thought of everything!" She thought.

Diana now turned her attention to what she had discovered. This was the secret office of a very meticulous person. It was a treasure trove of scientific magazines, books on biology, genetics, and medicine, and personal journals. Everything was in order by subject and dates.

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This person was obviously a scientist and was uncomfortable with technology for recording findings. All of the journals were handwritten. She picked up one of the journals on the desk. Inside the cover were the date it had been started and the name, Dr. Dominik Vlas. She laid the book back down, sat in the cushioned desk chair, and began opening the desk drawers. She found an impressive collection of degrees in medicine and genetics from both the United States and Romania. There was also a large vase on the floor between the desk and the inner wall which contained several document rolls. When she unrolled one, she realized it was a set of blueprints for this mansion.

“What on earth did this obviously good man have to do with Gabriel, and where is he? How does this tie in with Gabriel’s obsession with Vincent and his child?” She thought to herself. “Maybe this is completely unrelated.”

She began opening and flipping through the journals on the desk, because they were apparently the last ones Dr. Vlas had either been reviewing or had made entries in. Her quick perusal didn’t uncover anything extraordinary in the first two she went through. Then in the third one, she came across an entry that nearly made her heart stop. The name, “Vincent,” leaped off the page at her. On the same page were the names, “Adrian,” which she didn’t recognize, and “Gabriel.” She flipped back to the front cover. This journal was started thirty-five years earlier. Diana made a very careful search of this one until she

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found the entries she needed to make sense of everything that had happened and was still happening. Then she began to read.



Dr. Dominik Vlas' journal entries:

My entire professional life has been devoted to the study of the Tandins. They are my dearest and most beloved friends. Even though my findings cannot be revealed at this time to an ignorant destructive world, I am praying that enlightenment will one day dawn, and that my research will be met with appreciation for the good that could be done with it.

My ancestors are from Romania, and my family has a long tradition of studying the sciences. I myself am a medical doctor, but because of my family's relationship with the Tandins, I chose to do genetic research instead of practicing medicine. My family helped to smuggle many of the Tandins living in the tunnels and caves under New York City, from Romania, on ships they booked passage on nearly two hundred years ago. Geologists and archaeologists in my family had discovered the tunnels and caves while exploring here, and they knew they would make a safer home for our Tandin friends still living in

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Romania.

In Romania these people were often mistaken for vampires or werewolves because of their appearance. This made them targets for an unenlightened public bent on their destruction. They did have some human friends, though, and my family was privileged to be among those. In Romania, these people were called “Leo Tandrul Ins,” the Romanian words for “Gentle Lion Man.” They shortened this to “Tandins” when they came to America. In Romania the Tandins would have been hunted to extinction. Since the word “Tandin” has absolutely no meaning in Romanian, they effectively left behind the country that had been more than unkind to them, as well as their language.

My research into their genetic makeup has revealed that the Tandins’ DNA is human with additional markers. They are simply an evolutionary leap forward with enhanced strength, speed, and endurance. They also have an advanced immune system and are rarely ill. These people are highly intelligent with superior mind control. The Tandins employ both telepathic and empathic powers which have developed to an advanced degree over the centuries. They even possess the ability to heal those within their community group with their combined mental strength.

The Tandins are very cultured and gentle but fiercely protective of anyone within their circle of family and friends. When provoked, their vocal cords can emit a terrifying roar that is as fierce sounding as any wild lion. They have often

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found that roar to be enough to frighten enemies away without resorting to violence. Their senses are equally heightened. They possess powerful eyesight, especially in the dark, similar to felines, keen hearing, and a sense of smell equivalent to canines. Unlike wild cats or even normal humans, though, they require very little sleep. Their appearance, including extra body and facial hair on the men, enlarged canine teeth in both the upper and lower jaws of the men, and daintier elongated canine fangs only in the upper jaws of the women, along with majestic lion-like facial features and flowing manes of head hair, makes it impossible for the Tandins to blend in with regular humans.

In order to keep these wonderful people safe from the world above, I had a secret entrance to the tunnels installed by the Tandins in this basement. That has been my doorway to their world. Somehow, though, their world has been breached by great evil, and I am the one responsible for the tragedy that has occurred. It breaks my heart to chronicle these events. Unfortunately, it is all I can do. I cannot bring my sons to justice for what they have done without bringing further danger into the Tandins' world. All I can do to take responsibility for my part in this is to explain what has happened. Maybe someday someone else can help to make things right.

On one of my trips to visit my family in Romania, I found Gabriel and Adrian living in deplorable conditions with a drunken and abusive father. Gabriel was 7 and

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Adrian was 17. I stopped this horrible man in the act of beating the boys right out in the streets. He accepted a large sum of money I paid him to turn the brothers over to me. I then brought them here with me to America, legally adopted them, and took care of and educated them. In spite of all of the love and attention I lavished on them, they both turned out completely evil. I guess they had just been too heavily influenced by their biological father before I found them.

Somehow Adrian became aware of the research I was doing. I still don't know how. He became obsessed with kidnapping the offspring of the Tandins and then controlling these advanced people for his own power-hungry purposes. I kept the location of the Tandins' home a secret, so he had to watch and wait for his opportunity, and somehow he managed to find one. What is even more heartbreaking is that he dragged his little brother, Gabriel, along with him into this diabolical plot.

On January 12th, when Gabriel was ten and Adrian was twenty, events occurred which shook the Tandins' world to the core, and they devastated me. Adrian, even at his young age, had managed to use his generous allowance to build up a criminal empire. He took Gabriel and the thugs he hired and attempted to capture Loren, a normal human who married a Tandin named Gaylin, together with their baby Vincent, at Loren's parents' home in the city above.

The Tandins here in America have a mixed community

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of Tandins and normal humans with whom they live symbiotically. It is quite common for them to intermarry. In this case, Gaylin and his younger brother, Tanimus, both Tandins, married human identical twin sisters, Loren and Letha. At the time this crime occurred, Tanimus and Letha didn't have any children. Gaylin and Loren had fraternal twins, a baby boy named Vincent and a baby girl named Elisia. The babies were about five months old and very tiny but very smart. They had already begun to talk.

Loren had taken Vincent into the home's solarium to look at the flowers, and Gaylin had Vincent's twin sister, Elisia, in another part of the house. Gaylin's telepathic connection to Loren alerted him to the danger she was in when the men broke in and attempted to kidnap her with the baby. Gaylin gave Elisia to his sister-in-law, Letha, and then he ran through the house to save his wife and son. When Gaylin attacked the men, they were momentarily distracted, so Loren escaped from their grasp and ran out into the city with Vincent. Before the men shot and killed Gaylin, he contacted his brother, Tanimus, by telepathy and passed Loren's thoughts to him, so he could look for Loren and Vincent. Tanimus was still in the tunnels on his way to the house.

Tanimus was unable to save either Gaylin or Loren. When he got to his brother, Gaylin was already dead. By the time he found Loren, she had been strangled to death by Adrian, because she wouldn't reveal where she had put Vincent. She had shown Tanimus by telepathy where she

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had left Vincent, and Tanimus assures me that he found someone telepathically to rescue the baby, but Vincent is lost to his family. Tanimus also told me that they don't dare try to retrieve Vincent or it could endanger both the baby and the people who have him. Tanimus is sure that Vincent is safe with the people he is with. The Tandins have since closed down the home where the security breach occurred.

Tanimus did say that he became very concerned about his nephew's welfare when he felt him become sick and he wondered if he would have to risk going to him. Vincent's telepathic link with his parents had been suddenly severed by their violent deaths and the baby became gravely ill as a result of that loss. However, Vincent soon made an empathic connection with his new family and recovered. Tanimus is aware of where he is and that he is safe, so he feels it is better for Vincent and his new family to not interfere, especially with Adrian continuing his maniacal search for Vincent.

I can't understand how an act of kindness could go so terribly wrong. My family had three identical heirloom opal rings, set in twenty-four carat gold, passed down for generations through my family. In fact, they are now five-hundred-fifty years old. They are each inscribed inside with the Latin words, "Verum mos paro vos solvo." The English translation is "The truth will set you free." They were appropriate for a family of scientists and scholars. I wear one, and I gave the other two to my adoptive sons,

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and they have made a mockery of them with their diabolical behavior.

Four years after Vincent was lost and his parents killed, Gabriel followed in his brother's misguided footsteps and became a killer himself. I should have at least tried to interfere when I noticed his obsessive behavior toward my housekeeper's daughter. However, she was sixteen and Gabriel was only fourteen. I thought that she would rebuff him, and it would pass. Once again, I was very naïve in my thinking. I have no doubt that she seduced him, but afterwards he strangled her to death. His excuse was that she was so perfect, that he had to kill her to keep her perfect and to prove how much he loved her. Clearly he is insane. I have had him committed to Summer Meadows Psychiatric Hospital in Queens. I only hope that their treatment program might help him.



Diana rechecked all of the journals on the desk, but it was clear this was the last entry Dr. Vlas ever made to the volumes in this room. Now the other journals she had perused made more sense. They had numerous references to a "Tandin" or the "Tandins," but she had just thought that "Tandin" was a family surname, not a new species of people. "Vincent isn't alone! He needs to know

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this. What happened to you, Dr. Vlas?" She thought.

Diana was jolted out of her thoughts when she heard the floorboards overhead creaking and then the sound of footsteps on the stairs over the office door. She quickly turned out the light and sat in darkness until someone opened the door and turned on the light in the office. Then she realized that the picture of Alice with the white rabbit was more than just the remote sensor holder. It was just a picture to those in the office, but for her it was also a window through which she could see everything going on in the office outside the secret room.

She watched the two men walk toward the desk and her, and she thought, "So, it's one of Joe's cockroaches!" The younger man was Steve Palmer, one of her escorts from that morning. He was the one who had asked her if she had found anything. The other man looked like an older version of Gabriel, with thin angular features and cold dead eyes. He was also wearing one of the opal rings. "This must be Adrian. He looks even more evil than Gabriel did, if that's possible, and a lot more dangerous because he probably isn't insane!" Diana thought.

Adrian spoke in a commanding tone, "Now, give me the report on Diana Bennett."

Steve Palmer answered him. "She told us she didn't find anything, but I don't know where she is now. She isn't at her apartment, and she's not at the diner where we left her. She's not one to give up easily on an assignment. I have a feeling she'll keep snooping around."

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Diana was troubled by what she was hearing and thought, "That means they have my apartment under surveillance. I'm not going to be able to use the manhole entrance to Father's world behind my building until this is all over with."

"Keep your people on her. Let me know as soon as you know where she is, and I want to know about everything she does." Adrian then dismissed Steve Palmer and told him to send Jonathan Pope in to see him. Adrian walked around the desk and sat down in the chair. After a few minutes the man who had kidnapped Diana, blindfolded her, and had then taken her to Gabriel to see Vincent's sick child came into the room. He was quite tall with a burly build, but was also an insipid, soft looking man with dark-brown hair, a carefully trimmed mustache, and manicured hands. Diana couldn't imagine that he had ever done even five minutes worth of manual labor in his life.

Diana thought, "I see Adrian is putting the band back together again."

Jonathan Pope stepped up to the desk and asked, "You wanted to see me, Sir?"

Adrian responded drily, "Sit down, Pope. I want to go over the events the way my brother related them to me, and make sure that is what really happened here. Gabriel was brilliant, but he was also nuts! He was my brother, though."

Jonathan Pope sat down in one of the chairs in front of

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the desk. “What did Gabriel tell you, Sir?”

Adrian began, “He told me that he accidentally stumbled upon a chance to complete a project I started thirty-five years ago. Our old man was a research geneticist who was studying creatures living under New York City. They were advanced humans with incredible abilities, but they didn’t look human. To my father they were family. To me they were an opportunity.

“Gabriel said he had to take steps when an investigative lawyer in the District Attorney’s office in Manhattan managed to gain access to one of his lawyer’s little-black-notebooks which had sensitive information in it. He had control of the former District Attorney and ordered him to have this woman kidnapped, so he could find out what she knew and how far that knowledge had gone. He had a doctor on his payroll shooting her full of truth serum to no avail. She wouldn’t reveal anything.

“Gabriel went on to tell me that it turned out that this woman was pregnant, and the doctor feared that she would lose her baby if he continued shooting her full of drugs. Gabriel didn’t care about that until the baby’s father came and attempted to rescue her. Gabriel told me he couldn’t believe his good fortune in getting his hands on the mate of the very baby we tried to capture thirty-five years ago. After that, he didn’t care at all about what she knew; he just wanted her child. I can’t believe Gabriel was foolish enough to send Snow to try to kill the baby’s father. Frankly, I’m surprised that Snow was willing to try

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that. Snow was always resentful of Gabriel's madness after what happened when I sent him to collect Gabriel from the insane asylum in Queens that my father sent him to."

Pope spoke up at that point. "What happened, Sir?"

Adrian continued his story. "It took me an entire year to figure out who I could bribe at that psychiatric facility, so Gabriel was fifteen when I finally got him out of there and had Snow bring him home. What does Gabriel do as soon as he gets home? He strangles our father to death in his sleep! That made a whole new mess to clean up. I gave Snow our father's opal ring and a large sum of money to help us cover up what happened, but something went wrong with that plan. Snow ended up being charged with our father's murder. He was sentenced and put into prison. Snow was a skilled assassin, and it was really ironic that he ended up being convicted of the one murder he didn't commit! Anyway, it took me more than two years to come up with a technicality to have his conviction overturned, and he never forgave Gabriel for being crazy enough to kill the old man. That is the one murder we have committed that I almost feel sorry about. I wouldn't have hurt the old man. We never could have become this powerful if he hadn't taken us away from that drunken devil in Romania!

"Part of Gabriel's insanity was the fact that he constantly mixed up our drunken biological father with our adoptive father. In his mind they were one and the

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same. Even I had no luck getting him to see them as separate people. He kept accusing our adoptive father of selling him, when it was he who paid that drunken fool a lot of money to have us. When the old man had Gabriel committed, I guess to him it was the same as being sold.

“Now, I can’t believe Gabriel managed to lose that creature again. He lost the creature’s offspring, killed the creature’s mate when she could have born more of them, and then to top it all off, he got himself killed in the process! At least I know the creature is still out there to be found.”

Pope spoke up. “Sir, Vincent is highly intelligent. I don’t think he would have cooperated in any breeding scheme.”

Adrian looked at him and frowned, “Vincent?”

Pope explained. “Yes Sir; that was what Gabriel called the creature.”

Adrian snorted. “Who needs for him to cooperate? Thanks to modern science we can just strap him down to a table and take what we want from him. It’s not just his breeding capability I’m interested in. I also want the secret of his advanced immunity. That alone would be worth millions. My father fell asleep in here once while writing in one of his journals. I picked it up and read it while he was sleeping, and it was a real eye-opener. I put it back under his hand, and he never knew I had been here. That was how I found out about these creatures. It actually gave me a new respect for the old man to know

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that he could keep valuable secrets like that. I just never could convince him to take advantage of the power he could have had with his fortune.”

Diana felt herself becoming physically sick over what she was hearing, it was so horrifying. She had to figure out a way to protect Vincent and Little Jacob from this madman.

Adrian added, “It figures that Gabriel would call the creature by his name. He kept referring to Vincent as both his brother and his enemy whenever he talked to me. I guess he was a brother to both of us, because our father loved Vincent and his family. He was our enemy, because he stood between us and greater power. He still stands in my way, and I am going to figure out how to capture and control him. I want a whole army of super-beings, and he can make that happen.”

Pope spoke up again. “I tried to get Gabriel to leave when we knew that the police were on their way, but he wouldn’t budge. He was glued to the monitor watching Vincent. It finally became too late to save him from being caught and killed by Diana Bennett.”

Adrian spoke bitterly. “I plan to deal with her myself as soon as I can figure out how to do it without ending up like Gabriel.”

Pope added, “Everything you’ve told me that Gabriel said to you is pretty much exactly how it all happened.”

Adrian finished with, “All right then, lets lock this place up for now. I have one more thing Gabriel told me

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to do. He left me a key for a locker that I need to go to, where he left something he wanted me to see. We are going to have to come back here again. I know the old man had a secret room somewhere in this house, but I haven't been able to find it yet. I have had my people scouring every possible location for blueprints of this house with no luck finding any. He must have collected every copy to keep that room hidden. I'll contact you when I need you again."

The two men got up and left the room, turning the light out as they shut the door. Diana sat for a few minutes in darkness as she listened to them going up the stairs. Then she turned the light back on and sat thinking. She needed help, and Father and Vincent might not like the kind of help she knew she needed.

Well, at least the mystery of what had happened to Dr. Dominik Vlas was solved, although tragically. She put his final journal into her inside coat pocket. Then she began collecting all of Dr. Vlas' other journals and putting them into neat piles on the desk, so she could retrieve them later when she had something to carry them in.

She waited for about an hour before attempting to leave the secret room just to be sure the men were really gone. While Diana was waiting, she thought about what she was going to do once she got out of the mansion. She didn't know these tunnels beyond the diner. Even if she could make it up to the diner without being spotted by Adrian's goons, it would not be open this late to call a cab.

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By the time she looked at her watch again, it was well past midnight.

When Diana was safely in the tunnels under the mansion, she went to the nearest pipe and tapped out a message: "Diana stranded in tunnels under Gabriel's mansion. Loft and diner under surveillance. Need escort." She repeated the message until she heard an answering message to wait for an escort. Then she found a set of steps leading up to the doorway of an old service closet and settled down against the door to wait. It wasn't long before she was sound asleep.

Diana stirred awake and found herself wrapped in a cloak and cradled in strong arms like a child being carried by her father. "Vincent?"

Vincent spoke softly. "Go back to sleep little Brat. You have had a very busy day getting yourself into trouble. I'm just thankful you had sense enough to call for help."

Diana's voice sounded drowsy as she answered. "OK Monster," and Vincent chuckled as she drifted back to sleep.

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Chapter IV

That King Piece

The next time Diana awakened, she was tucked into a soft bed. She looked around and realized she was in one of the satellite sleeping chambers the community kept for Helpers who visited or new community members who didn't have their own chambers yet. Her shoes were under and her coat on top of a chair by the doorway. Rebecca was sitting in an armchair near the bed reading a book.

Rebecca looked up from her book and smiled at Diana. "You're awake!"

Diana asked her. "How did I get here?"

Rebecca explained. "Vincent carried you here during the night."

Diana looked confused. "I thought I had dreamed that."

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Rebecca laughed. "Vincent left me in charge of you with strict instructions that I was to go get him as soon as you woke up."

Diana countered with, "Well, I'm rewriting those instructions. Where is Vincent? I'll go to him."

Rebecca laughed again. "Vincent certainly does have you figured out! He thought you would say that, so he told me to drag you, kicking and screaming if I must, to William's kitchen to eat first."

It was Diana's turn to laugh. "I promise I won't throw a tantrum. I'm starving! I didn't end up eating anything at all yesterday, so a trip to William's kitchen would be most welcome."

Diana climbed out of bed and went to the chair by the door. She pulled a comb out of her coat pocket, took her ponytail down, and combed her hair before pulling it back up and putting the comb away. Then she sat down and put her shoes on. She stood up and grabbed her coat. "I'm all yours, Rebecca! Take me to William's kitchen."

When the two women arrived at William's kitchen chamber, Diana looked around in amazement. This chamber was a massive cavern with a very high ceiling. It had numerous long beautifully crafted dining tables and chairs in it like a cafeteria only much more inviting with the pretty candles down the centers of each of them. There were cozy rugs all over the stone floor. Three of the five walls were lined with beautiful marble counters over

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fine wooden cabinets. She could see that they had to be Cullen's handiwork. What she was most amazed by, though, was the array of high-tech electrical kitchen appliances all along the fourth wall at the back of the chamber. This kitchen wasn't lacking anything in the way of the latest food preparation and storage conveniences and equipment.

There was the happy buzz of community members either still eating their breakfast at the tables or just sitting and socializing with one another. Children were everywhere happily playing on the rugs or still eating at the tables. Some of the younger ones were just sitting on the adults' laps getting their daily dose of hugging.

William was beaming with pleasure as he came from his stove to greet her. He looked like an huge fierce Viking with his flaming red hair which was just beginning to turn grey and his full beard and mustache. His temper could be just as fiery as his hair sometimes, when rules were broken or his community threatened, but most of the time he was happy just doing what he loved, feeding people. His food was not only delicious but very healthy, so illness was rare among them.

"William, this is my first visit to your kitchen. How is it that you are able to have all of these electrical appliances down here?" Diana asked him.

William replied, "That is a rather complicated story. I tell you what, let's get you started eating, and I'll tell you all about it. Are you hungry?"

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Diana gave him her hand. "Feed me please! I didn't get anything to eat at all yesterday. I am so ready for a good meal!"

William laughed and led her to a table and seated her. She put her coat on the back of her chair. Then he went to the stove and filled a plate for her, grabbed a glass of juice off the counter, and took it all to her. "We've already asked a blessing on this morning's meal, so dig right in!"

"Thank you so much, William. This looks absolutely delicious!" She began eating with great enthusiasm.

William watched her with delight, and then he began explaining how his kitchen came to be so well equipped. "Remember when Father took you to see Catherine for the first time two weeks ago?" Diana nodded as she continued to eat. "That was when Peter told Father that Catherine had set up a multi-million-dollar trust to take care of us down here. Well, the first thing Father wanted to do was to figure out a way to pay for our power use.

"For the last roughly forty years, we had been using the city's abandoned power lines for our limited needs. The city had electrical lights running all through the tunnels, so maintenance workers could work safely when they needed to make repairs to water and sewer pipes or electrical wiring. Since we maintain all of those things, so they won't come down here and find us, Mouse had just rerouted the electrical wiring to run my appliances for the kitchen. We figured that my kitchen wouldn't use nearly as much electricity as the city would spend paying

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workers to make repairs in the tunnels.

“Since we now have the means to pay for our power, Father didn’t want to be pilfering power from the city any more, even if we were trading work maintaining the city’s service lines down here for it. We will still continue to do that work, but Peter helped Father implement a clever ‘power-laundering’ plan. It routes our power usage through the electric meters of several of our wealthier Helpers’ businesses, which operate in the Chinatown area and other parts of Manhattan that we are under. That way, their electric meters aren’t noticeably spiked by our power usage. Peter has accounts set up with them for other services we use anyway, and he now also pays for our electrical use through the bills from them.

“Mouse thinks he’s in Heaven! He and his team of engineers and electricians have shiny new tools to work with, and they haven’t had to make do with materials thrown away at construction sites. While he was at it, Peter also updated my kitchen, so I’m having even more fun preparing food than I was having before.”

Diana widened her eyes in surprise as she asked, “All of this was done in only two weeks?”

William laughed. “It is amazing how much can happen in a very short period of time when you have money, the right materials, and you are in possession of an highly motivated, happy Mouse!”

Diana laughed too. “I have a good mental picture of that! Well, it is absolutely wonderful. I assume the tables

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and chairs as well as those counters and cabinets are Cullen's work?"

William smiled. "They are."

When she was finished eating, Diana turned to Rebecca. "Now, where is Vincent this morning?"

Rebecca pursed her lips and said, "Well, if we haven't managed to lose track of him again, he's in his chamber sleeping."

Diana raised her eyebrows and was almost afraid to ask. "You lost Vincent? How did that happen? When did that happen?"

Rebecca giggled at her. "It actually happened last night before Vincent came to rescue you." She looked around the kitchen at everyone who was still there. "All of the key players in that little drama are still here. I think between them they should be able to tell you the whole story."

An hush had fallen over the room, and Diana was fascinated to watch what was happening here. Everyone had moved closer to the table where Diana and Rebecca were sitting, obviously thrilled over the prospect of a story, especially one about Vincent, and this one was still new. The smallest children were being picked up and deposited on laps all around. A tiny boy of about three was standing by Diana, and he looked up into her face. She recognized Luke Evans, Olivia's son. She smiled at him and he smiled back. Diana picked him up and put him on her lap. Then they began to tell her about what happened the

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previous evening.



This is the story of how the pipe chess game went awry. Sound the alarm: “King at large!”

Tony, true to his word, had been doing an excellent job of making sure he knew where Vincent was at all times and using Pascal’s new code to let the rest of the community know as well. Pascal’s new code consisted mainly of references to chess pieces with Vincent being referred to as the “King,” so that if he did catch on to any of it, he would just think the kids were playing a new type of chess on the pipes. Tony had just finished letting everyone know that Vincent was with Mary and Little Jacob in his chamber and would soon be going to see Father in the Council chamber. Then Tony went to the kitchen chamber to eat his supper.

Tony, Kipper, and Jamie had finished their supper at about the same time and had been talking together. Kipper was twelve going on forty. He was slender with curly dark brown hair and eyes and a very serious attitude about everything. Kipper was really good at following instructions and loved running errands for everyone. He had taken it upon himself to always take the special soups

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William prepared for Catherine to her at Peter's house, and that was what he was getting ready to do now.

"Well, I'll see you guys later. I'm taking Cathy's soup to her now," Kipper told Tony and Jamie. They both said "good-bye" to him and got up to leave themselves. Then they went out the door as Kipper was getting the covered bowl of soup from William.

Tony and Jamie walked together out of the kitchen doorway and went to the right down the tunnel. When they got to the fork, Jamie went down the right tunnel to find a place to get in some target practice with her new crossbow. Tony started down the left tunnel to go to his chamber and get some sleep.

Suddenly, they both heard the impossible. Kipper had just come out of the kitchen with the soup for Catherine and had started to the left to go to Peter's when he heard Vincent speak behind him. Vincent had come out of the tunnel across from the kitchen, but facing the tunnel from the kitchen, its opening was to the right of the kitchen doorway, so Kipper hadn't seen him coming when he walked out of the kitchen. Tony and Jamie both whirled around and looked at each other in wide-eyed horror.

Vincent spoke to Kipper again, and this time Kipper turned around and then was rooted to the spot completely dumfounded. "Is someone sick, Kipper?" Vincent asked again.

Fortunately, William appeared in the kitchen doorway and took charge of the situation, giving Tony a few

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moments to come up with a plan. Vincent had his back to Tony, and Jamie was down the tunnel fork out of sight.

“Are you still hungry, Vincent? Come in and I’ll fix you something.” William coaxed. William could see Tony behind Vincent.

Vincent smiled at him. “No thank you, William. You fed me plenty earlier. Actually, I’m not sure how I ended up here. I was headed for Father’s chamber, got lost in my thoughts, and wound up here.”

While William and Vincent were talking, a plan popped into Tony’s head. He looked at Jamie, pointed at her, stuck his finger down his throat and acted like he was throwing up, and then laid his head on his hands pressed together. She got the message, spun around, and took off running. Then Tony stepped forward and asked, “Is that the soup for Jamie, Kipper?”

Kipper looked vastly relieved. “Yes! I was just going to take it to her.”

Poor Vincent looked really worried. “Jamie is sick? She’s never sick!”

Tony responded, “She doesn’t feel well at all and went to her chamber to go to bed.” He thought to himself, “She looked pretty sick to me!”

Vincent did just what Tony and Jamie knew he would. He said, “Let me have the soup, Kipper. I’ll take it to her and see what I can do to make her feel better.”

Just then, Tony heard the alarm on the pipes in the new code: “King at large!” He thought to himself. “That

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must be Father just now realizing that Vincent didn't go there. I'll take care of that in a minute."

Vincent stopped with a puzzled look on his face, and Tony held his breath. Then Vincent said, "Pascal must be trying to work out a new code on the pipes, or he has invented some new game of chess to play on them. That king piece is all over the place!"

Fortunately, Vincent was headed on down the tunnel and couldn't see both Tony and William trying to keep straight faces. William called after him. "Well, you know Pascal. If he has come up with a new code, he's probably using the game to test it. Good night, Vincent."

"Good night!" Vincent called back. Then he turned back around and asked Tony, "Tony, would you please let Father and Mary know where I am? Mary is still with Little Jacob."

Tony answered, "Sure, Vincent. While I'm in your chamber, I'll read *The Elephant's Child* to Little Jacob."

Vincent smiled. "Rudyard Kipling's *The Elephant's Child* was the first story Catherine read to you after you came here from Chicago."

Tony looked surprised. "How did you know that, Vincent?"

Vincent replied, "I was on Catherine's balcony listening to her read to you as you went to sleep."

Tony was amazed, "I didn't even know you were there."

Vincent explained, "You had not seen me yet, and I didn't want to frighten you. I guess I had better get this

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soup to Jamie while it is still hot. Good night and thank you for relaying my message.”

“You’re welcome! Good night, Vincent.” Tony answered.

When Vincent was out of sight, William looked at Tony with admiration. “That was some quick thinking, young man.”

Tony grinned. “I’m a Gypsy! That’s what I do!”

Tony went to the nearest pipe and tapped out that Vincent’s next location would be in Jamie’s chamber, and then he headed for Vincent’s chamber to read to Little Jacob. Meanwhile, William took Kipper back into the kitchen for another bowl of soup for Catherine.

Jamie’s and Mouse’s chambers were two of the lowest bedroom chambers in their world. Jamie’s was not far from Mouse’s. Jamie was in a panic because, even running as fast as she could, she would never make it to her chamber going this way before Vincent did. She knew very well that Vincent would come to check on her, and she had to get there first. Then she remembered Mouse’s express chute, which she could reach in seconds. She arrived breathless at the lion’s-head lever for the chute, pulled it, and then dropped like a rock through the trap door in the floor.

She screamed out, “Look out below! I’m coming down!” Mouse rolled off his bed just in time to avoid being smashed as Jamie tumbled onto his bed and then

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bounced off it. "Vincent's coming and I'm going to be sick!" Mouse just stood there and stared at her open-mouthed as if she had lost her mind. "I mean! Oh! Never mind what I mean! Just distract him for a few minutes!"

Mouse looked completely bewildered, "Distract Vincent?"

Jamie nodded her head furiously as she raced out of his chamber towards her own. Suddenly, she turned back around and ran back. The twelve-year-old orphans, Samantha and Geoffrey, were in Mouse's chamber playing with Mouse's pet raccoon, Arthur. "Geoffrey, please come with me. You can watch out for Vincent for me." She looked at both Samantha and Mouse. "Don't tell him I was here!" Then Jamie and Geoffrey ran out the door and down the tunnel toward her chamber.

Mouse shook his head. "OK good! OK fine! Distract Vincent! Distract Vincent! How distract Vincent?" Then an idea hit him. "I know how!"

Mouse stepped out of his chamber and started down the tunnel to meet Vincent. When Vincent turned the corner carrying the soup Mouse stopped him. "Vincent! Good! Coming to get you. Need help!"

Vincent smiled at him. "What do you need help with, Mouse?"

Mouse looked determined, "Need to move a table. Can't do it alone! Can't think with it where it is!"

Vincent chuckled, "Well, we can't have that now, can we? Let me take this soup to Jamie while it is still warm,

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and I will come back and help you.”

Mouse looked confused for a second and then said excitedly, “Samantha can take! Then you help Mouse!”

Samantha was truly an intelligent child and had quickly caught on to what Jamie was trying to do, although she wasn’t sure what had happened to make her strange behavior necessary. She was sure there was a really good reason for it, though. She stepped up to Vincent and held out her hands to take the soup. “I’ll take it to her, Vincent, so you can help Mouse.”

Vincent handed her the soup. “Tell Jamie I’ll be there in a few minutes to check on her, OK?”

“I’ll tell her, Vincent,” and Samantha left with the soup.

When Samantha arrived at Jamie’s chamber, Geoffrey was dutifully standing guard outside her doorway. As Samantha entered the room, she found Jamie frantically shedding her hiking clothes, and they were strewn all over the floor. One shoe was in the middle of her clothes, and the other was nowhere in sight. The only things Jamie had taken off that had managed to end up where they belonged were her crossbow and quiver of arrows. They were hanging on their hooks in the middle of her other weapons. Samantha decided it would be best not to interrupt her by asking questions, so she just stood there quietly. When Jamie was finally down to her undergarments, she ran to her wardrobe, pulled out a

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nightgown, and yanked it over her head. Then she grabbed a canteen off her dresser and poured its contents out into her wash basin. She took the soup Samantha was holding, removed the cover, and poured about three fourths of it into the canteen and handed the now nearly empty bowl back to Samantha.

Samantha finally couldn't keep quiet any longer. "What on earth are you doing and why?" She asked Jamie.

Jamie replied, "Vincent caught Kipper coming out of the kitchen with a bowl of soup for Cathy. Now that bowl of soup is mine. I just had supper. If I eat this much soup too, I will be sick!"

Understanding dawned on Samantha's face. "Oh, I see! Whose bright idea was that?"

Jamie grinned at her, "Our resident Gypsy, Tony's!"

"Of course it was!" Then Samantha's eyes widened and she couldn't help but ask, "You are going to lie to Vincent?"

Jamie looked at her and smiled lovingly. "Oh no, Honey! I really do have cramps. I just don't usually let them put me into bed."

Samantha looked confused, "Cramps?"

Jamie said softly, "something I hope you never have to find out about!" Jamie then jumped into bed and pulled the covers up over her. "Now, give me the soup, please." Samantha handed it to her and stood by the bed while they waited for Vincent.

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A couple of minutes later Geoffrey stepped into the room and told them that Vincent was coming. Geoffrey then sat down on the end of Jamie's bed. Samantha and Geoffrey were both orphans in the community. They looked like brother and sister although they weren't. They were very attractive with dark wavy hair and brown eyes. Both of them were brilliant and could even beat Father at chess now. It was rare not to see them together, because they were best friends and fierce competitors with one another.

When Vincent came in he looked deeply concerned. "Tony told me you were sick!" He looked at Jamie's clothes strewn all over the floor. "You really must be sick. You are always one of the neatest people in our community!" He began picking up her clothes, folding them, and laying them on top of her dresser.

Jamie protested, "You don't have to do that, Vincent! I'll pick them up when I feel better."

Vincent didn't stop. "It's my pleasure. What has made you ill?"

Jamie assured him, "It's nothing serious. I just have cramps."

Father had always taught all of the children to be very open about anything that had to do with their bodies and biological functions and to be sure to report any physical problems they had. So, Jamie wasn't embarrassed when Vincent asked, "Menstrual cramps?"

"I'm afraid so." She replied.

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"Father has medication for that. Do you want me to go get some of it from him for you?" He asked.

"That won't be necessary, Vincent. This usually doesn't put me in bed. I just need some extra sleep, and I'll be fine."

He looked at her nearly empty bowl of soup. "I need to get you some more soup!"

Jamie tried not to giggle. "Oh, no thank you, Vincent, this was more than enough!"

He had finished picking her clothes up, and was holding the one shoe that had been in the pile. He wandered around her chamber until he located its mate on the other side of her bed. Then he placed the pair in the bottom of her wardrobe. He walked to her bedside and took the bowl from her. "Well, are you too old for me to read to you while you try to go to sleep?"

Jamie smiled up at him. "I'll never get too old for you to read to me, Vincent!"

"What book are you reading now?" He asked.

"It's there on the nightstand." She pointed at it.

Vincent laid the bowl down and picked up the volume and looked at it. "Wuthering Heights? That's kind of a dark romance, isn't it? You don't think that you are doomed to wander these tunnels forever in vain, looking for love, do you?"

Jamie laughed, "No! My Heathcliff is out there somewhere, and I'm not going to be stupid enough to ruin him by sending him packing when I do find him!"

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It was Vincent's turn to laugh. "I'm sure that will be a great relief to him!"

Vincent settled down in Jamie's huge recliner and opened the book to where she had marked it. Samantha had moved next to the chair to read along with him. He opened his arms and she climbed onto his lap and settled back against his broad chest. Geoffrey had curled up on the end of Jamie's bed. Vincent read for almost an hour before looking up. When he did, Jamie was sound asleep.

Samantha looked up at him, and he said quietly, "We had better go and let Jamie sleep. I'll walk you up to your sleeping chambers."

Samantha pointed at Geoffrey. "Look, Vincent, Geoffrey has fallen asleep also."

"That's all right, I'll carry him," Vincent said.

Samantha climbed off his lap and he got up, put Jamie's book back on her nightstand, and tucked the covers around her. Then he gathered up the sleeping boy. He and Samantha left Jamie's chamber and started the trip back up to the children's sleeping chambers.

When they arrived in the tunnel outside the girls' and boys' sleeping chambers, they were met by Angela Choshi. Angela was Father's surgical nurse, but since surgery was rarely needed in their community, she also enjoyed being the orphaned children's nanny. She was a very pretty and tiny Japanese woman in her late twenties with lots of energy. Her chamber was positioned between the girls'

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and boys' chambers, so she could hear if anyone had problems during the night. She had just finished supervising everyone's bath and preparation for bed, and the children were all in bed now.

Angela smiled at Vincent. "I wondered where those two were! I see Geoffrey is out like a light. Lay him in his bed, Vincent, and I'll take his shoes off."

Vincent looked at Samantha. "Go get your nightgown on and climb into bed. I'll be in shortly to tuck you in."

Samantha smiled, "OK, Vincent." She went into the girls' chamber.

Angela helped Vincent get Geoffrey settled in bed. Then they went into the girls' chamber. All of the girls except Samantha were already asleep. Vincent tucked Samantha in and gave her a kiss on the forehead. She turned over and curled up. Then he stood up and listened.

Angela looked up at Vincent and asked, "What is it, Vincent?"

Vincent looked down at her and said, "Someone is talking in her sleep."

Angela nodded her head, "That would be Lana. She just started doing that a couple of weeks ago."

Vincent walked over to Lana's bed and watched the pretty twelve-year-old brunette as she slept. Presently she talked again, but he couldn't make out what she was saying. Angela was standing by him, and he turned to her. "She doesn't seem to be distressed. I don't think she

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is having a nightmare.”

Angela reassured him, “I’ve never seen any indication that she has nightmares. She just seems to talk.”

Vincent put his hand gently on Lana’s forehead, and she smiled in her sleep and turned over. Vincent smiled too. “You will let me know if she ever has a nightmare, won’t you Angela?”

Angela smiled at him, “Of course, Vincent.”



With the story over, everyone was filing out of the kitchen to begin their daily activities and to go to their school classes. Tall slender Olivia, with her long auburn hair a little more brown than Diana’s, came over smiling, picked up Luke from off Diana’s lap, and left with him.

Diana shook her head. “Vincent is like a shepherd gathering up all of his little lost sheep.”

Rebecca smiled at that apt comparison, “Exactly, little lost sheep like you!”

Diana echoed, “Yes, like me. Poor Vincent, no wonder he’s still in bed!”

Rebecca added, “It makes him happy to do that, Diana. He loves watching over us, and he never rests until he knows everyone he loves is safe and well taken care of.”

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Diana got up and grabbed her coat, with the precious journal in the pocket, off the back of the chair. “Will you guide me to Vincent’s chamber, Rebecca? I need to talk to him and Father about the reason he had to come and rescue me last night.”



Meanwhile, in his chamber Vincent was dreaming again. This time he was reliving the events that had left him abandoned outside St. Vincent’s Hospital in Manhattan thirty-five years earlier:

Vincent felt safe in his pretty mother’s arms. She had long soft honey-blond hair which he loved to stroke. Her laughing eyes were crystal-blue, and her voice was soft and melodious. She carried Vincent into a room filled with sunlight where the walls and roof were made of glass. Then she showed him a beautiful bush in full bloom with a flowering vine winding up through its branches. The sweet scent was intoxicating, and Vincent reached for the flowers.

Suddenly, glass was breaking and his mother was screaming. Strange men with angry faces were coming toward them, and his mother pulled him closer to her and backed up. Then he heard the angry roar of a wild lion.

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Vincent's father burst through the door from the main part of the house. His father looked like he did, except that his father's hair was black and his eyes were dark grey. The men screamed in terror when they turned around to face his father. They pulled out guns and started shooting at his father, but that didn't stop him from charging at them.

Vincent's mother took advantage of their confusion and ran out the door to the outside and into the city beyond in the frigid January weather. His mother was very scared and so was Vincent, but he stayed quiet as she ran. It seemed like she ran forever, but then she paused in front of a sign. The sign read, *St. Vincent's Hospital*.

"Look Vincent! They named the hospital for you." She tried to sound reassuring for him, but he could tell she was still very frightened. She went into the alley behind the hospital to where there were several dumpsters. There, she caught sight of an abandoned baby doll, and she knew what she must do. She checked the dumpsters and finally found some old linen bedding that had been thrown out. Vincent's mother quickly took his clothes off him and wrapped him securely in the ragged bedding. Then she dressed the baby doll in his clothes. Next, she found a window-well behind the hospital where the window was heavily curtained, so no one could see what was outside. She placed Vincent, wrapped up like a present, down inside the window-well so he would be safe.

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She told him to be very still and quiet, and she would come back to get him just as quickly as she could. She had kissed and hugged him, and that was the last time Vincent ever saw his mother.

The next time someone picked Vincent up and pulled the bedding back from his face, he found himself looking up into the surprised but smiling face of Narcissa. She exclaimed, "There you are!"

Suddenly, Vincent was no longer a baby. He was standing by a pink rosebush in full bloom with honeysuckle vines growing up through the center of it twining around the branches with white and yellow blossoms. The blended scent of those two flowers blooming together smelled like—Catherine! Then Vincent remembered. These were the flowers his mother had taken him to see from the time they began blooming together in the solarium. He loved them so much that she took him to see them nearly every day. It had been an happy memory at the edge of his mind that he had not been able to quite reach until now, and he understood why. It was a memory which was also associated with the terrifying attack on his family.

More than thirty years later, Vincent had been drawn out of the Central Park drainage tunnel by that same smell of roses and honeysuckle, but he didn't know why that sweet scent seemed so familiar. That was how he had found Catherine. The perfume she always wore smelled of

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roses and honeysuckle. That day that wonderful scent of her perfume was mixed with the smell of blood from her facial wounds. That same scent of flowers in the solarium was also mixed with the smell of blood when Vincent's father was shot.

He heard a woman's voice speak softly to his mind, and it wasn't Catherine or anyone else he knew. She said, "You are not some failed experiment dreamed up in the tortured mind of Paracelsus. You are a Tandin."



Vincent awakened with a start and exclaimed, "Narcissa!"

Diana was watching Vincent as she rocked Little Jacob in the rocking chair. "That was some wild dream you were having. Are you OK?"

Vincent didn't say a word. He sat up on the edge of the bed, pulled his boots on and stood up. He took the baby out of Diana's arms, took her hand, and pulled her to her feet. "Come with me! We need to go see Father." Diana was barely able to snatch her coat off Vincent's table before he dragged her out the door.

Diana could clearly see that Vincent was too distracted to talk, so she just let him pull her by the hand through the tunnels toward Father's chambers. When Mary came

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upon them headed that way and saw the look on Vincent's face she said, "I was just coming to get Little Jacob for his bath. Peter is sending down another bottle of breast milk. Why don't you let me take him for now, and I'll bring him to you when he is all fed and bathed?"

Vincent smiled at her. "Thank you, Mary. That would be wonderful." He handed the baby to her, and she headed for the bathing chambers.

When Vincent and Diana arrived at Father's chambers, Vincent asked him, "Why didn't you ever tell me that it was Narcissa who brought me to Anna?"

Father couldn't conceal his surprise at the question. "Frankly, I'm surprised she never told you herself. You were forever sneaking down there to see her. I just figured if she wanted you to know, she would tell you. You actually remembered that?"

Vincent replied, "I just had another dream. This one was about how I came to be abandoned outside of St. Vincent's Hospital above our world in Manhattan. No wonder I've always felt so close to Narcissa. I must go see her, but before I do that, I need to ask you if you have ever heard of the Tandins."

Father wrinkled his forehead and queried, "Tandins?"

Diana spoke up at that point. "That is actually why I am here, to tell you about what I found, and also to warn you about what I heard." Vincent and Father watched her reach into the inside pocket of her coat and pull out the small journal. "You both need to sit down. My mind was

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completely blown by what I read in this little book, but the information is both wonderful and tragic. Vincent, did I understand correctly that you just now dreamed about being abandoned at St. Vincent's Hospital?"

Father and Vincent sat down in chairs around the table, and Diana sat down in the armchair next to it. Vincent answered her. "Yes, and it was a very vivid dream with details that were as clear as being here with the two of you."

Father looked at Vincent intently. "Vincent, tell us what you saw!"

Vincent related his dream to Father and Diana, and then he said, "I can't understand why I am remembering that now. I have never been able to remember anything about how I ended up being here before."

Diana offered an explanation. "Vincent, I think you had help remembering that. According to what I discovered at Gabriel's mansion, you are not alone. What I mean is that you are not the only one of your kind. In fact, you have a very rich heritage. Your people are telepaths, and I think they are trying to help you recover your lost memories now. I found a secret room behind an hidden wall panel in Gabriel's mansion, and this journal was in it. It gives a very detailed explanation for Gabriel's obsession with you and Little Jacob."

Diana then read them the entries from Dr. Dominik Vlas' journal. When she had finished she said, "Vincent, your dream completes that tragic tale. I think it is also

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apparent that your Uncle Tanimus knew about Father's world before you and your mother were attacked. He must have contacted Narcissa telepathically to rescue you, because he was too far away to get to you in time. Also, he would have had the same handicap you have with the danger of being discovered above ground."

Vincent stared at her trying to absorb it all. Hearing his dream confirmed by the journal gave him a feeling of peace he had never experienced before. "I have another family. I have a twin sister! I wonder if it was her voice I heard in my dream. I actually have an history and heritage to offer my son."

Diana and Father looked at one another, and both of them were thinking the same thing, "And your wife."

Diana said with sadness in her voice, "Remember when you gave me Snow's opal ring to research, so I could try to find out who Gabriel was? It's unfortunate that Gabriel took that opal ring away from me. I know that Dr. Vlas would have wanted you to have it."

Vincent looked at her and smiled. "Actually, I do have that ring, Diana. Gabriel gave it to me as proof that he had killed you. Seeing you alive was all that saved him from me."

Diana closed her eyes in relief. "That ring actually belonged to Dr. Vlas, Vincent." She then related to them the sordid details of the murder of Dr. Vlas by Gabriel as she had heard them from Adrian while she was in the secret room. "That ring was a family heirloom meant to

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inspire the search for truth, not evil crimes. It certainly was never intended as a means to reward an assassin for covering up Dr. Vlas' murder! I know he would be really happy to know that you have it. His final wish before he was killed was that the crimes against your family would somehow be made right."

Father looked at Vincent and said, "Vincent, that journal answers the question you have always had about whether you are a man or not."

Diana nodded her head. "You're a man all right. You are just human plus! We are ordinary. You and your people are extraordinary!"

Father added, "That also explains why Little Jacob looks so human. He is only one-quarter Tandin. It also explains why you became so sick after Narcissa brought you to us and why you cried for three days straight. I was sure you were going to die. I held you and talked to you almost non-stop, and then on the fourth day you suddenly became well. Without understanding what I was doing, I guess I managed to make an empathic connection with you which you needed. You haven't had the telepathic support and training you would have received if you had grown up with the Tandins. It is no wonder you have had such terrible mental struggles all of your life."

Vincent smiled at Father. "No child was ever more loved and supported than I was, Father. Apparently Uncle Tanimus had confidence that you were providing me with what I needed, because he decided that it wasn't

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necessary to interfere.”

Diana smiled at Vincent as something else occurred to her. “You know, Vincent, your dream about the rosebush explains all of the pressed roses I found at Catherine’s apartment when I was profiling her. I think she must have kept every rose you ever gave to her, and they weren’t just a few. Many of the books you inscribed for her had passages marked with pressed roses.”

Vincent smiled at the memories. “Yes, any time the rosebushes in Central Park were blooming I would pick one to take to her or would press one to save. I always marked my favorite passages in the books I gave to her with those pressed roses.”

Diana then dropped the bad news on them. “Unfortunately, Gabriel’s empire didn’t disintegrate with his death. As I told you, his older brother, Adrian, is very much alive and well. He is even worse than Gabriel and is still obsessed with finding you, Vincent. I saw that one of the police officers who escorted me yesterday morning is on his payroll. They have my apartment staked out with orders to report to Adrian as soon as they locate me.” Diana deliberately left out the personal threat Adrian had made against her life. If Vincent knew about that, he wouldn’t let her out of his sight, and then he would be in dire danger.

“We have that problem covered now.” The three of them looked at the doorway where the voice was coming from. In stepped Chuck Johnson. He came down the

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stairs to them and sat at the table.

Diana looked at Father with her eyebrows raised and Father explained. "We sent a message to Chuck early this morning about the nasty surveillance situation at your loft. What did you come up with, Chuck?"

Chuck explained the plan. "I had Peter set up an account with your Helpers who own the *Ocean View Bed and Breakfast*," Polly and Curtis Walker. He pulled a receipt and a brochure out of his pocket and handed them to Diana. "This is where you were registered last night, because you needed a break!"

Diana giggled and took the receipt and brochure from him. "I sure did!" She looked at the colorful brochure. "Wow, you can send me there anytime!"

Chuck laughed and went on. "I had our people check on how many have been assigned to watch your loft. Right now there is only one car with two people in it. Central Park is not being watched at all, so I can safely transport you to and from there when you need to come to the tunnels. That is where I am parked now ready to take you back to your loft. We have set up shifts of Helpers to watch those who are watching you, so they don't get any ideas about doing more than just watch." He took a business card out of the breast pocket of his coat and handed it to Diana. "I am now your personal cab driver. Just call me if you need for me to come somewhere we haven't already scheduled."

Diana nodded her head. "Thank you so much, Chuck.

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This is all such a relief! There is one more thing I need to discuss with Father and Vincent before we go, though.” She looked from one to the other and then said, “You two are not going to like this, but I need help in my world from someone who will need to know about your world. I need Joe Maxwell’s help. Now that he has been elected as the official District Attorney permanently, he is the only one with the resources available to help us take down this new madman, and he can’t help us if he doesn’t know about whom Adrian is a danger to and why. I can’t even tell him about the dirty cop, Steve Palmer, without explaining why I was in Gabriel’s mansion alone. I need for you to hold a Council meeting and see if you can get permission for me to bring him down here and solicit his help.”

Vincent asked her, “Do you trust this man, Diana?”

Diana answered him emphatically. “Vincent, I would trust him with my life! Besides, he loved Cathy too.”

Father also spoke to Vincent. “Vincent, the only question he asked me when I took Diana’s drawing of the tile pattern from Gabriel’s mansion to him was why he should listen to me. When I told him because Cathy would have wanted him to, he didn’t ask anything else, and he trusted me. I am also certain we can trust him. Diana, we will call a Council meeting and then send a message to you with the results. When will you see Mr. Maxwell again?”

Diana answered him. “I’m going to type up my report tomorrow at my loft. I then plan to give Joe my official

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report that there was nothing to continue investigating, and to return the envelope of keys and codes he gave me for the mansion, the day after tomorrow. I should be able to be there about 1:00 in the afternoon at his office.”

Father nodded his head. “Well, you will be receiving a couple of delicious sandwiches delivered by our courier, Benny, promptly at 1:00 in the afternoon two days from now then.”

Diana giggled. “That sounds delightful!”

Chuck stood up, went to Diana’s chair, and offered her his arm. “Your chariot awaits Miss!”

Diana smiled, took his arm, and stood up. Vincent and Father stood up as well. Chuck helped her with her coat. She giggled again. “I feel like a princess surrounded by Knights-of-the-Round-Table.” Father’s table was round, and the men all laughed at the comparison. She said, “Well, gentlemen, I bid you adieu! Oh, and before I forget, Vincent, you need to keep this.” She handed Vincent Dr. Vlas’ journal.

“Thank you, Diana. I can’t begin to tell you what this means to me.” Vincent smiled down at her.

Diana smiled back at him. “I know that, Vincent. I have a feeling we will all get to meet your people in the not-to-distant future.”

Father said, “Good-bye, Diana,” and she smiled at him. Then Diana and Chuck walked out of the Council chamber arm-in-arm. After they left, Father looked at Vincent and shook his head. “I guess Narcissa isn’t such

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a superstitious old woman after all!"

Vincent chuckled. "She must have been the only one in our community with a mind open enough to receive Uncle Tanimus' telepathic message. I need to go and see her to find out exactly what happened from her perspective."

While Vincent was talking, Mary came into the chamber with a freshly-bathed-and-fed Little Jacob. Vincent smiled and took him from her. The baby smiled up at his father.

Mary looked at Father. "I just saw Diana leaving with Chuck Johnson. Was he able to fix her problem at her loft?"

Father assured her. "He set things up perfectly so she will be safe. Stay here and I'll tell you about everything Diana found out. Vincent needs to go and visit Narcissa. Wherever she is, the round trip will probably take him too long to take Little Jacob with him. Do we have plenty of babysitters available to take care of him for Vincent while he is gone?"

Mary gave him an exasperated look and shook her head. "Father, you know perfectly well that is a very silly question! There isn't enough of Little Jacob to go around for everyone who wants to babysit him!"

Father chuckled. "I know that. I just wanted to see what you would say."

Father stepped over to Vincent and took Little Jacob from him. "Come to Grandfather. We'll take good care of

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you.” He looked at Vincent. “As soon as you get back, please come and tell me what Narcissa said. I am really curious to know the rest of the story.”

Vincent kissed Father and his baby. “I will, Father.” He looked at Mary. “Thank you for taking such good care of Little Jacob, Mary. I’ll be back as quickly as possible.”

Mary laughed. “Don’t hurry, Vincent!” It seemed like everyone was always telling him that when he handed his son over to them, and he chuckled.

When Vincent finally located Narcissa not far from the burial catacombs, she acted surprised to see him, but he had a sneaking suspicion that she was never surprised by anyone’s visit. She liked living apart from the rest of the community, but she welcomed the occasional visitor. Her favorite visitor, though, was always Vincent. Narcissa was an African-American woman with an ageless beauty. The only evidence of her advanced age was the formation of cataracts on her eyes which nearly blinded her. She could navigate as well as any bat, however, and she had an amazing sixth sense about people and a spiritual wisdom which Vincent enjoyed drawing upon.

Narcissa greeted him with, “Vincent, child! What are you doing here now? You know I am still a crazy old woman! Surely Father has told you so.”

Vincent laughed. “Father is in the process of readjusting his thinking, Narcissa. Why didn’t you ever tell me that you were the one who rescued me when I was

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left in a window-well in the alley behind St. Vincent's Hospital?"

Narcissa was clearly surprised. "I wondered if you would ever remember that terrible day when you were left helpless there and all alone in the bitter cold. I never knew who prompted me to find you, but whoever it was had a very powerful mind which I couldn't ignore. It was clear in my mind, as I was prompted, that the matter was most urgent and I must hurry. I ran out of here and knew exactly where to go every step of the way. Then I found you in the window-well just where I was led. I was also prompted to look at the sign on the back of the building which told me it was St. Vincent's Hospital. I suggested that name to Anna when I laid you in her arms, and I told her that was where I found you. I always thought that was really your name, though. The last prompting I received from that powerful mind was to get you out of there and into Father's world as fast as I could go, and then I took you to Anna. I've never felt that presence again, and I never told you about it, because I couldn't figure out how to explain it to you. Anna had just suffered her miscarriage, so I thought it was perfect to give you to her. I was so wrong! I wish that I had given you directly to Father, and then perhaps Paracelsus wouldn't have poisoned Anna when she worried for your safety with him, and she gave you to Father."

Vincent comforted her. "Narcissa, you were in no way responsible for Paracelsus' actions. Your act of kindness

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toward Anna brought her great comfort after the loss of her baby. I want to tell you about the source of the telepathic message you received to go find me.” He pulled the journal out of his pocket and read it to Narcissa.

When he had finished reading, Narcissa shook her head. “This good man’s wicked son is not done yet! He wants to finish what he started! Beware, Vincent! There is more at stake here than you are yet aware of!”

Vincent reassured her. “Please don’t worry, Narcissa. Thanks to Diana, we are aware of Adrian’s intentions. We have taken steps to stop him, and we will be careful.”

On the way back up to the community chambers, Vincent puzzled over what it was that Narcissa had seen and didn’t tell him. Her cryptic warning held a deeper meaning, which she apparently didn’t think he was ready to hear yet. He had learned to never ignore anything she said, and decided he had better try to be more vigilant about things going on around him.

While Vincent was gone to see Narcissa, plans were made to reassign responsibilities in order to free up the members of the Council for the meeting. Jamie had gone to Father and volunteered to sit with Catherine while the Council was in session because Mary, Sarah, and Rebecca were all on the Council. Brooke was thrilled to take Little Jacob to care for while they discussed the solution to this new threat to their world. Fourteen-year-old Zach, with his brown hair and eyes and very serious attitude, showed

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up in the pipe chamber after word of the Council meeting spread like wildfire through the community. He took over on the pipes, so Pascal could attend the meeting. Angela turned the children over to Olivia for the day.

Then, those six Council members all met informally in William's kitchen to talk the situation over while they were waiting for Vincent to return. William had bowls of fruit on the tables for anyone who was hungry between meals, and they all took a fruit, started nibbling, and then looked at one another.

William finally spoke up. "Do any of you really think this decision needs discussing?" Everyone shook their heads. He continued. "If Diana says we need Joe Maxwell then, I say bring him down here. If he balks, I'll just feed him. That should fix him!" They all laughed, and that was the end of their "discussion."

When Vincent walked into Father's chambers upon his return, Father was happy to see that he was much more relaxed than he had seen him since Catherine was taken. "Well, Vincent, did Narcissa confirm what the journal said?" Father asked him.

Vincent smiled. "She did indeed, Father!" He related to Father the events as Narcissa remembered them.

Father shook his head with wonder. "If it wasn't for her spiritual sensitivity and open mind, you probably would have died of exposure or been killed by Adrian and his men. Our world would have been a terrible dark place

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without you. We owe Narcissa a great debt for our continued existence, which she made possible by saving you.”

The Council members had heard the message on the pipes that Vincent had returned, and they filed into the chamber ready to discuss Diana’s proposal to bring Joe Maxwell to the tunnels as a prospective Helper. The eight members of the complete Council were Father, Vincent, William, Pascal, Mary, Sarah, Rebecca, and Angela. This was more of a formality than a serious Council meeting, because they had already come to an unanimous decision before ever entering Father’s chambers.

After they were all seated at the table, Father began. “Well, I think we all know why we are here. You have all heard about the new danger to our world, and to Vincent and Little Jacob in particular, which Diana has uncovered. It is well to be forewarned, but we must now come to a decision about whether to add Joe Maxwell to our list of trusted Helpers. Diana says that it is imperative to include him, because he is the only one with the power and resources to help her stop Adrian Vlas.”

Pascal spoke up. “Father, I think we are all in agreement that Diana should bring him down here. If she trusts him, then I think we can also trust him. You trusted him once too. If it hadn’t been for his help, you and Diana wouldn’t have been able to rescue Vincent and Little Jacob.”

Father agreed. “That is right, and I do trust him.”

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Sarah then spoke up. "Vincent and Little Jacob would have been killed by Gabriel if Diana hadn't found and stopped him. Her profiling skills saved your life too, Father. If she thinks we need Joe Maxwell, then we must trust her judgment."

Mary agreed. "Sarah is right. If it had not been for Diana, Vincent would not have been able to find you buried alive by Gregory Coil. Diana would never suggest bringing Joe Maxwell down here if she wasn't sure he could be trusted and that he would help us."

Everyone looked at William, and he said emphatically, "You won't find me disagreeing with anything Diana suggests! We would all be dead or scattered if it wasn't for her. I say bring Mr. Maxwell down here! We obviously need him if Diana says that she needs him too."

Rebecca chimed in. "I'm in complete agreement. Diana is our shield in the world above just like Vincent is our shield down here. We need to follow her advice, so she can continue protecting our world."

Vincent looked at Angela. "You haven't said anything yet, Angela. Would you like to add something?"

Angela smiled at Vincent and then looked around the table at the other members of the Council. "Diana loves all of us, and I have watched how she is with all of the children and with Little Jacob. She is a very smart and a very good woman. I think we would be extremely foolish not to bring Mr. Maxwell into our circle of Helpers."

Father finished up the meeting. "Well, then it is

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decided in favor of bringing Mr. Maxwell down here. She will be meeting with him at the District Attorney's office tomorrow afternoon. William, would you please wrap up two sandwiches to send up to Benny to be delivered to Diana in Mr. Maxwell's office at 1:00? I'll prepare the note to put into hers. We will have her bring him down here the next day, Saturday morning. He won't be reporting to his office on the weekend. That should give us time to convince him to help us."

William smiled. "We are going to be having meatloaf and homemade bread for supper tonight. I'll make those sandwiches with the leftovers!"

Vincent chuckled. "If we get Joe Maxwell down here and take him to your kitchen to be fed, William, he'll never want to leave!" Everyone laughed.

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Chapter V

Tea Party in Wonderland

Dianna once again found herself picking her way through the main office of the Manhattan District Attorney headed for Joe's office. Her mind wandered back to a couple of days ago when she had arrived in Chuck's cab back at her loft from her night in the tunnels. She was really grateful that Chuck had set up that little "getaway" of hers. One of her neighbors, who usually had absolutely nothing to say to her, had suddenly shown an interest in where she had been. She had pulled out the *Ocean View Bed and Breakfast* brochure with her receipt and had shown them to her "nosy" neighbor. He showed no further interest, and she strongly suspected that he had been slipped some money to get information concerning her previous whereabouts.

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Finally, in the quiet refuge of Joe's office, she found him just sitting and thinking. She sat down in the chair in front of his desk and waited for him to say something. He looked at her and she smiled at him.

He spoke to her. "You have the report on Gabriel's mansion for me?"

She answered him. "I do. I also have the codes and keys you gave me." She took the large envelope out of her bag and gave it to him. "The report is in there too." She thought to herself, "The bogus report!"

Just then, Bennie came into Joe's office with a bag in his hand. Bennie spread cheer wherever he went with his bright smile and happy attitude. He was in his early twenties and of average height with a slender build and brown hair and eyes.

"Hello, gorgeous!" Bennie exclaimed to Diana with his infectious smile. "Here is your custom sandwich order." He handed her the bag. "Yours is the one on top." He winked at her.

Diana smiled back at him. "Thank you so much, Bennie. Give my compliments to the chef."

"I'll be sure to pass them along. Good-bye, Diana." Bennie headed for the door.

"Good-bye, Bennie," she called after him.

Diana looked at Joe. "I sprang for lunch for us. You need a better meal than I've seen you eat in here." She opened the bag and pulled the two sandwiches out. The top one had her name on it, and the bottom one had Joe's

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name on it. She handed it to him, and then got up, went to his water cooler, and poured cups of water for both of them. When she came back to the desk, Joe was just staring at his now opened sandwich.

He said in awe, "Is this really a meatloaf sandwich on homemade bread? Where on earth did you find this?"

She had to stifle a giggle and thought to herself, "You mean where under the earth did I find it?" However, aloud she said, "It's a quaint little joint. I'll have to take you there one day and introduce you to the chef."

Joe already had his mouth full but talked around it. "I'd like that!"

Diana opened the wrapper on her sandwich and put the note inside down on her lap before reading it. The note was from Father telling her to bring Joe to the Central Park tunnel secret door on Saturday morning at 10:00.

As she ate her sandwich, she watched Joe devouring his. He looked up and asked, "What?"

Diana smiled as she replied, "I was just thinking about how much the chef would enjoy watching your attack on the sandwich he made for you." After she had taken her last bite and finished her cup of water, she asked Joe, "You don't have any plans for this weekend, do you?" Before he even had time to empty his mouth and answer her, she went on. "Of course you don't! Dress in comfortable clothes tomorrow morning, and be ready to be picked up by a cab I'm sending for you. He'll be outside

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your building waiting for you at 8:30 sharp.”

Joe looked at her with amazing calmness. “What is this all about, Diana?”

Diana got up to leave and said, “It’s about answering every question you ever had about the Cathy Chandler case, Joe.”

“You’ve been avoiding talking to me about the Cathy Chandler case as if it were the plague! Now, you’re telling me that you want to answer all of my questions? That’s a mighty strange about-face, Diana! OK, I’ll be ready, but this had better be good!” Joe warned.

“I guarantee you won’t be disappointed,” Diana promised.

As Diana began walking toward the door, Joe called after her, “I could have had plans!”

Diana tossed over her shoulder, “Uh-huh, later Joe!” Then she walked out the door.

When Chuck dropped Diana off at her loft, he waited for her while she went up. They had already decided that she should pack a bag and stay overnight at the *Ocean View Bed and Breakfast*. Chuck was going to show her tonight where she could access the tunnels under the spacious home the next morning, and also provide her with a map to the manhole, where he would pick her up after he picked up Joe. The bottom of his cab trunk had been equipped by Mouse with the same type of trap door as the coroner’s van for covert tunnel access. Chuck had

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shown her the two-way catch in the trunk, so she could climb up from the tunnel into the trunk and then through the fold-down section of the back seat. They wanted to make sure no one was aware that she was meeting with Joe, in case he was also being watched, which was very likely.

The next morning, Joe left his building a few minutes before 8:30, and the cab was already waiting for him. When Joe climbed into the back seat and saw who the driver was, he said. "I might have known Diana would send you, her personal cab driver and bodyguard. At least this time you aren't kidnapping me! I don't suppose you would be kind enough to enlighten me about what is going on here?"

Chuck responded, "I'm sorry, Mr. Maxwell. My job is to drive the cab. Any enlightening will have to be done by Diana."

Joe sounded resigned, "This should be interesting at least."

Chuck smiled into the rearview mirror at Joe. "I guarantee it will be, Mr. Maxwell!"

About twenty minutes later, Chuck turned into a fairly busy street in the business-office section of town and paused halfway between intersections. He turned on his left blinker for about two seconds and then the right one. Almost immediately, about a dozen teen and pre-teen kids

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magically appeared and congregated around the cab and started washing the windows. Chuck opened his window to speak to them. He also pulled three times on a lever on his floorboard. Within seconds Joe felt the cab rock a little, and then Diana's head popped out of the seat next to him.

Joe nearly jumped out of his skin, and Diana giggled at him. "Good morning, Joe!"

Joe's quick wit returned along with his composure. "What, are you just now getting up? I've been awake for hours!"

Chuck spoke up quickly before Diana was all the way out of the trunk. "Diana, stay down! Mr. Maxwell, don't turn around. We've picked up a tail."

Diana wiggled out of the trunk onto the seat and then sat in the floor-well with her back against the door. "Can you lose them, Chuck?"

Chuck smiled and replied. "We were prepared for this possibility. I'm setting the contingency plan in motion now." Then he spoke to Zach outside of his window. "How is it that you aren't in the pipe-chamber with Pascal, Zach?"

Zach answered. "We decided that it would be best if I led the kids on this little expedition. Which car is it?"

Chuck told him. "It's the dark blue sedan three cars back."

Zach glanced behind the cab and said, "I see it. Don't worry; we'll take care of them!"

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Chuck handed him a twenty dollar bill for show, and Zach started waving it around triumphantly. He and his little band of kids worked their way behind the cab, leaving a kid to wash the windows of each car between the cab and the offending tail. When Zach got to the dark blue sedan that had been following Chuck's cab, he took the bucket of dirty soapy water he had been holding and threw it on the windshield of the car. The rest of his troop of kids surrounded the vehicle and began furiously washing windows.

Chuck had been watching in his rearview mirror, and he then flew around the other cars in front of him and made it around the corner before the tailing car's windshield could be cleared. He ducked into a parking garage and quickly snatched the parking ticket from the automated gate. He drove in and backed into a space where they could watch the entrance. It was Saturday in the business-office section of town, so the garage had very few cars in it. After several minutes they watched the blue sedan drive past the entrance. Chuck waited a few more minutes and then drove out, paid the attendant, and went back the way they had come. He then headed for Central Park.

At that point Joe couldn't keep quiet any longer. "Diana, what on earth is going on here? Why are we being tailed?"

Diana stayed on the floor as she answered him. "Joe, that report I gave you was false. Gabriel's organization is

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alive and well, because he has an older brother who is even worse than he was. You also still have dirty cops who are now working for the brother.”

Joe looked sternly at Diana. “I don’t suppose you want to explain to me how you know all of this?”

Diana replied. “I will, I promise, but this case has become a lot more complicated, and there are good people in peril who need our protection. Before I explain everything, I need to ask you something. Joe, can I trust you with a secret, one which you must never reveal to anyone else?”

Joe looked surprised by the question. “Unless it is illegal, you can tell me anything, Diana, and I’ll keep your secret.”

Diana spoke very seriously. “Joe, I promise you it has nothing to do with anything illegal, in fact, quite the opposite is the case.”

Joe was just as serious. “Then tell me.”

Diana watched for Joe’s reaction as she spoke. “I want to take you to meet someone—to meet Vincent.”

Joe’s mouth dropped open, and then he said, “Is this the same Vincent, the ‘perfect man,’ that you told me Cathy made up to deal with the trauma of her attack when her face was slashed—that Vincent, the one I was convinced had something to do with her murder?”

Diana raised her eyebrows and widened her eyes as she replied, “The same.”

Joe exploded. “I knew you were keeping things from

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me!”

Diana ignored his outburst. “Yes, well, I’ve already apologized to Cathy’s rosebush for telling you that fib.”

Joe was unexpectedly disarmed, “Cathy’s rosebush? You mean the one with the red and white roses you found on her balcony—that rosebush?”

Diana couldn’t help but smile at Joe’s change in demeanor. “That would be the one!”

Joe snapped back to his previous annoyed tone. “Well, I guess you can apologize to me now!”

Diana complied. “Joe, I’m sorry, but I know you will understand why I told you that story when you meet Vincent. I made a promise to him then, and I got his permission to bring you to him now.”

Joe gave Diana a skeptical look. “Are you sure he’s not into anything illegal?”

Diana was very sober as she replied. “Do you really think I would be protecting him if he was?”

Joe looked thoughtfully at her. “No, I know you wouldn’t.”

Diana went on. “Vincent is anything but a criminal.”

Joe gave her a wry smile. “Let me guess. He’s a caped crusader whose true identity must be kept a secret.”

The image of Vincent in his dark hooded cloak, which he wore when he ventured above, passed through Diana’s mind as she said, “Something like that.”

Joe sat back and relaxed. “All right, I’m all yours. Take me to Vincent. By the way, am I correct in assuming

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you didn't spend the night in the trunk?"

Diana laughed. "I'll explain that secret to you as well as soon as we stop."

When they arrived at Central Park, they were met, shortly after going through the gate, by Bennie on his bike. Chuck stopped and rolled down his window to talk to him. "Hey, Bennie! How's the weather in the park today?"

Bennie laughed as he answered. "Clear as a mountain Brooke! We have several Helpers who have checked it out thoroughly this morning, and no one is lurking around who shouldn't be here."

Joe gave Diana a completely bewildered look. "Didn't he deliver our lunch to us yesterday? Now, you're telling me he is scouting out Central Park for bad guys—on his bike, no less? That's not to even mention the little gang of window-washing kids you have, who are distracting tailing cars that are chasing us around the city! What kind of an extra-curricular operation are you running, Diana?"

Diana was nearly in stitches over Joe's consternation, as she said to him through tears of laughter, "Just be still for a few minutes longer, Joe, and all of this will make sense."

Joe shook his head. "Yeah, sure it will! It will probably make about as much sense as Alice going down the rabbit's hole and having a tea party with the mad hatter!"

Chuck and Diana both exploded with laughter over

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that remark, and Diana told Joe, "You can't imagine just how on target that wise-crack really is!"

Joe looked from Chuck to Diana as they continued to laugh. "I'm glad you two are having such a good time!"

When Chuck stopped again near the drainage tunnel, they all got out of the car, and Diana and Chuck went around to the back of the car with Joe following. Chuck opened the trunk, and showed Joe the two-way catch in the trunk, and then he explained. "That's how Diana got into the cab this morning."

Joe looked at him and asked, "Got in from where?"

Diana answered. "I got in from a manhole cover leading to a maintenance access-way for a water main. I went through tunnels under the city to get to where Chuck picked me up. Come with me and things will become a lot clearer."

Diana shook Chuck's hand. "Thank you, Chuck. It is going to take some time to explain everything to Joe, so you don't need to wait around."

Chuck smiled. "You're very welcome, Diana. I'm going to go see about that 'getaway weekend' for Mr. Maxwell we discussed right now." He got back into his cab and drove away.

Joe gave Diana a confused look. "What getaway weekend?"

Diana answered him. "You may end up needing an explanation for where you were this weekend, and it can't be where I'm taking you. Chuck has done the same thing

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for me, and he's really good at it."

Joe then followed Diana as she led him into the huge drainage tunnel. Several yards inside, they came to a gate over a large round opening, covered by a metal door within the opening. Diana pulled an hidden catch behind another gated door to the right of the tunnel. The metal door slid to the left revealing the tunnel beyond it. Diana opened the gate to the tunnel, grabbed Joe's hand, and took him through the doorway into the tunnel. She closed the gate, pulled the catch on the other side, and the door slid shut again.

Father and Vincent, holding Little Jacob, were standing just a few yards ahead in the tunnel. All the members of the entire Council were with them as well. When Joe caught sight of Vincent, he stood transfixed for a few awkward moments. Then he said, "Well, I told Cathy she needed a guy who was more down-to-earth!"

At that everyone except Joe burst into laughter. Joe looked at Diana. "You know, you and Cathy could have trusted me."

Father spoke up. "It was not their decision, Mr. Maxwell. They made a promise to us not to reveal our world to anyone. We do trust you. You have proven that we can. That is why you are here now."

Joe looked at Father. "Jacob Wells—I should have known you were connected to Vincent somehow. Please, call me Joe."

Father responded. "Vincent is my son, Joe. Everyone

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calls me Father.”

By that time, Joe was mesmerized by the baby in Vincent's arms. He walked up to Vincent and held out his arms. “May I?”

Vincent smiled. “Of course,” and he placed Little Jacob in Joe's arms.

Joe gazed into the tiny face and smiled. “He looks just like Cathy, except for his eyes.” Looking into Vincent's face, Joe said, “He definitely has your eyes.”

Vincent smiled at Joe. “Everyone says that.”

Joe was looking at the baby again. “What's his name?”

Vincent replied, “Jacob, after Father.”

Joe repeated softly, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Dr. Marx had put into his autopsy report that Catherine had given birth just before she was killed. I spent a lot of sleepless nights wondering what had happened to her child. He is truly a miracle!”

Diana was fascinated by this side of Joe, which she had never seen before. The tough District Attorney was nowhere evident, only a gentle man who obviously loved children. Vincent was watching the way Diana was looking at Joe, as if she had never really seen him before, and he made a mental note of it.

Vincent spoke to Joe. “Diana told us that you won the election, Joe. Congratulations on being made the permanent District Attorney.”

Joe looked at Vincent. “Thank you, Vincent.” Then he shook his head. “Wow! All kinds of strange things I've

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been puzzling over for the past few years, since Cathy joined our office as an investigative attorney, are suddenly making sense.” Joe noticed Vincent’s wedding ring. “You and Cathy were married, weren’t you?”

Vincent nodded. “Yes.”

Joe went on. “That explains the letter of resignation I found in Cathy’s desk after she disappeared. She never gave it to me, and I couldn’t figure out why, because it was dated weeks before she disappeared.”

Vincent explained. “I suffered a serious illness which robbed me of many of my memories, including our marriage. She was waiting to give me time for those memories to be restored. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen before she was kidnapped.”

Joe looked at Vincent’s hands, with his sharp claws, and remembered the inexplicable autopsy reports, indicating that some of the criminals Catherine had been investigating over the years had been mauled by what appeared likely to be a wild lion. “You *were* Cathy’s protector, just like Diana told me you were before she clammed up on me, weren’t you?”

Vincent replied. “Yes. I was connected to Catherine empathically, and I always knew when she was in trouble.”

Joe nodded. “Good for you! If I had known you were watching out for Cathy, I wouldn’t have worried about her so much.”

Vincent added with sadness in his voice,

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“Unfortunately, that illness also severed my connection to Catherine. That was how Gabriel was able to kidnap and kill her. I almost had a chance to rescue her when she tapped out an S.O.S. on the pipes at the warehouse where Gabriel first kept her. Our people figured out where she was, but by the time I got there and broke through their barriers, they had taken her away to the old Battery Arms building where she was killed, and I couldn’t find her before she was dying. Then, all I could do was take her body to her apartment and call Dr. Marx. Gabriel had stolen Little Jacob, and it took me nearly three months and Diana’s help to find him and bring him home.”

Joe shook his head trying to grasp what he was being told. “Vincent, are you telling me that Dr. Marx knows about you too?”

Vincent replied. “Yes, Dr. Marx is one of the people from your world we call Helpers. We have developed a network of them over the years. They are people who help us with supplies and services, and they can be trusted to keep the secret of our world down here.”

Joe went on. “That explains why he evaded all of my questions about Cathy’s case and your fingerprints on her balcony.” Joe looked at Diana. “Remember when you were coming out of the autopsy you attended with Dr. Marx on the kidnapped and murdered little girl you were investigating, Sally Rogers?” Diana nodded, and Joe continued. “I tried to waylay Dr. Marx then, and he told me he wasn’t supposed to talk to me, and actually ran in

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the other direction. I always thought his behavior was peculiar. Now I know who he was trying to protect.” Joe quickly grasped everything then, and he looked at Vincent. “I am so sorry for your loss! Diana obviously figured you out before she ever found you, and then she had to shut up when she did find you. Even Elliott Burch protected you from me and my investigation.”

Vincent smiled sadly. “In the end, Elliott Burch sacrificed his own life to save mine.”

Joe said, “It seems that you bring out the best in everyone.”

Vincent was quick to disagree. “No, it wasn’t because of me. It was Catherine who brought out the best in everyone. Elliott saved me to honor her memory.”

Joe nodded his head. “Then I can do no less.” He looked around at Father’s people. “You all live down here?”

Father answered him. “We do, and it is a very special place. I know Diana has told you that you must not talk about this world of ours with anyone in the world above. The life we enjoy leading here would not be possible if you did.”

Joe assured him. “Don’t worry, Father. I promised Diana, and I am promising you now, that I will keep your secret.”

Father nodded. “Thank you, Joe. Before we take you any further, let me introduce you to our Council members. These were the people who made the decision to follow

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Diana's advice and bring you down here." Joe shook hands with each of them as Father introduced them. "Pascal is in charge of our communication system which involves tapping on the pipes using a code unique to our community. Mary is our nurse and midwife, and I am our medical doctor and surgeon. Angela is my surgical nurse and the nanny for the orphaned children in our community. Sarah is our practical nurse, and she checks on the members of our community who choose to live in the more remote areas, those who are somewhat eccentric. Rebecca is our candle maker, and William is our community cook."

Joe's face lit up, and he looked at Diana and grinned, "Quaint little joint, huh?" Diana giggled. He looked back at William. "I want to talk to you about that sandwich you made for me!"

William laughed heartily. "Well, I plan to feed you while you are here with us."

Joe laughed too. "Be careful! I may never leave!" Everyone laughed with him.

Vincent then said, "Come; let us show you what you will be protecting."

Joe kept Little Jacob in his arms, and Diana took Vincent's arm as they started back down the tunnel. Diana whispered, "It looks like you have another willing babysitter!" Vincent looked down at her and grinned.

The little group took Joe on a grand tour through the

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community. They showed him all of the educational facilities they had set up for the children, the music chamber, the children's chambers, family chambers, guest chambers, recreational chambers, their hospital, and even the Waterfall Cavern. They took him to Father's Council chamber, and Joe marveled at the beautiful wrought-iron circular staircase there, leading up to Father's extensive library in the balcony above. Then they visited a large cavern equipped with every type of both new and antique sewing machines, pressing equipment, washing machines, and dryers. Joe saw men, women, and children sewing and caring for clothing and obviously enjoying the tasks. They passed community members working in the tunnels, repairing electrical wiring, duct work, and water pipes.

Joe was then taken to a tunnel where a new set of chambers was being cut out of the rock cavern walls for a couple expecting a new baby. There, he saw someone he recognized. Kanin Evans was bent over maps and blueprints on a table in the chamber they were working on. Joe stepped around the large pile of long pipes in the tunnel and walked up to Kanin. "Don't I know you?"

Kanin looked up from his work and smiled at Joe. Kanin was a tall, very handsome man with red-brown hair and grey-green eyes. "Yes, Mr. Maxwell. I'm Kanin Evans. You met me when I turned myself in to Cathy for the D.U.I. I had dodged for sixteen years which caused the death of a little boy. I was just released two months ago."

Joe remembered the case. "Please, call me Joe. I

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wondered how Cathy managed to solve that case so quickly. I gave her that file to go looking for you. Had you been down here all that time, Kanin?”

Kanin answered him. “Yes, Joe. I never took a drink again after that mistake that cost the life of that little boy. I made a new life down here, married Olivia, and had a baby boy of my own, before Cathy came to me and told me about that file you gave her. She helped me to face up to my mistake, and she let me turn myself in. It was the best decision I ever made, and I think it helped the mother of that little boy as well. I can now enjoy my own family with a clear conscience. Before, I was in a far worse prison of my own making.”

Vincent spoke up at that point. “We missed Kanin dreadfully while he was in prison. He is our head architect and a stone cutter and mason. We weren’t able to accomplish much in the way of new construction while he was gone. He is the one in our community who is the most skilled at cutting and shaping the natural stone walls down here.”

Father then asked Kanin, “Are these pipes from Mouse’s stockpile, Kanin?”

Kanin smiled and nodded. “Yes, Mouse estimated that it would take all of these to extend the radiant oil heating, plumbing, and communication pipes into these tunnels and chambers.”

As they continued on the tour, everyone except Father, Vincent, and Diana filed off to their other responsibilities.

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William told Joe he would see him later in the kitchen for lunch. Because there wasn't sufficient time, they could only tell him about some of the other wonders in their world, like the Crystal Cavern and the Chamber of the Winds. They also promised to take him, during a future visit, to see Elizabeth's Painted Tunnels. Elizabeth had used her skill as a painter to turn the abandoned manmade tunnels in an upper level into beautiful murals depicting an history of Father's world. Those tunnels made a better canvas for her art than the rough stone walls in the lower natural tunnels. They finally ended up in Vincent's chamber.

The first thing Joe noticed was the rocking chair Cullen had made. "Well, I can see what you people think of Diana!" He sat down in the rocker with Little Jacob.

Father chuckled as they all sat down. "Yes, Diana has helped to keep us safe from the world above like Catherine used to do."

Vincent began explaining, "This is my chamber, where I took Catherine when I first found her with her face slashed and her ribs broken. Her assailants had left her for dead near the Central Park tunnel entrance we just brought you from. Father treated Catherine's injuries, and I took care of her here for ten days before returning her to your world."

Joe had been utterly amazed by everything they had shown him. Now, he said, "You can't imagine the speculation that occurred over where a wealthy socialite

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could have disappeared to for those ten days. The speculation became even wilder when she finally reappeared, and then refused to explain where she had been! I can understand all of it now, including the mysterious leads and the anonymous witnesses that Cathy came up with. You people have helped to catch dozens of felons and lock them away. Let me ask you another thing. Did you also have something to do with the enormous gift of rare antiques, in a large trunk, that the Sisters of Mercy found on their doorstep at St. Regina's Aid to the Homeless in the southwest corner of The Bronx?"

Brooke and Jamie had just come into Vincent's chamber, and they sat down on Vincent's bed.

Father answered Joe. "Yes, that treasure came really close to destroying our community. One of our engineers found it buried in one of the unmapped tunnels he was scouting out. The entire sunken ship was there. Apparently, as the coastline changed over the centuries, it ended up in the tunnel."

Jamie spoke up. "Cathy called what happened to us, when we realized what we had, a disease from your world."

Joe nodded, "Greed!"

Father nodded too and said, "Yes, in its most hideous and vicious form. When a couple of our community members came to blows over it, and a serious injury occurred as a result, we had decided to throw the entire

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trunk full of treasure into The Abyss, so it wouldn't cause us any more harm, but Vincent stopped us. He reminded us that, even though it had no place in our world, we couldn't turn our backs on those above who were hungry and homeless. If we did, then it would have defeated us. So, we left it on the Sisters' doorstep in the middle of the night."

Vincent commented to Joe. "Your mind works as fast as Diana's does."

Joe laughed, "On good days, if I'm lucky! Well, I can definitely see that your community is no threat to the city. In fact, you have been doing more than your fair share to support the city with your maintenance work and crime fighting, to say nothing of that generous gift for the homeless. In fact, your community is like the ultimate dream informant for law enforcement. Obviously, I don't ever have to worry about which side of the law you people are on!"

Father added, "Good people in your city have always protected and supported us. It is the least we can do, to give something back to your world. We maintain the water lines, sewer pipes, gas mains, and electrical wiring down here, partly out of self-interest, so no one has to come down here to make repairs and finds us, but also to contribute to the welfare of the city we are an hidden part of."

Joe looked at Diana, and then went on with his realizations. "This also explains some of the leaps of logic

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you took that I couldn't figure out, like knowing that the Gregory Coil killings had ended. I assume that this world was your *Ouija Board* in that case?"

Diana smiled as she remembered giving that silly explanation to Joe, and Vincent answered for her. "Gregory Coil was a boy who had been lost from our world for more than twenty years. His father had been killed in a tragic accident down here, and it drove Gregory mad. I went to Diana when someone began killing our Helpers. It turned out that those murder victims were the survivors of that accident. Diana then realized that her case that she had been investigating was our case too, and that was the connection between the victims which their disparate lifestyles had not revealed. Unfortunately, she couldn't tell you that, but she did solve the case with that information.

"Gregory finally committed suicide by jumping off the Serpentine Stairwell into The Abyss. Diana got there just as Gregory jumped, and she tried to save him by grabbing his hand and was nearly pulled in herself. Fortunately, I arrived on that terrible scene just in time to pull her back to safety, but she lost her grip on Gregory and he fell to his death."

Joe was shaking his head again as he looked at Diana. "No wonder you were so sure Gregory would never kill again."

Vincent continued, "You might also want to know that your *Subway Slasher*, the vigilante Jason Walker, fell to

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his death down here. I tried to capture him after he threatened Catherine's life when she figured out his identity. I had him cornered on the Catwalk Bridge, but he grabbed a tree root and tried to swing around me. It broke, and he fell into the Whispering Gallery. Both of those areas in our world are too deep for us to plumb, so there wasn't any way to retrieve their bodies."

Joe responded. "I'm happy to know that Jason Walker won't be shredding any more teenage trouble-makers or hapless security guards that get in his way. He left a legacy of fear behind, though, among those young criminals. We haven't had as many instances of attacks by them on the subways since Jase's vigilante activity ended."

Brooke spoke up at that point. "William sent us to get you for the lunch he has prepared. Let me take Little Jacob, and all of you go eat. He's already fed me, so take your time." Brooke got up and went to Joe, who stood up and reluctantly handed the baby over to her after kissing him. She smiled at Joe and took his place in the rocker.

Vincent got up and went to a drawer in his desk and opened it. He took out a small notebook and the journal Diana had discovered, and he put them into his pocket. Vincent looked at Brooke and smiled. "Are you sure you won't starve to death on me before I come back?"

Brooke laughed. "Oh, get out of here, you big tease! Olivia is bringing some more breast milk from Peter for Little Jacob in a few minutes. We will be just fine, thank

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you very much!" Vincent laughed and they left his chamber.

When they arrived in William's kitchen, Joe looked around in continuing amazement. He turned to Father. "I can't begin to tell you how impressed I am with this world of yours. You have built something truly wonderful here, and everyone looks so happy and relaxed. I know where I want to spend my next vacation!"

Father chuckled. "Come anytime! We'll have a guest chamber waiting for you."

William walked up to them with a big smile. "Come and fill your plates. We already asked for a blessing on the food, so Brooke could eat and go take care of Little Jacob for you."

Joe smiled. "That's really nice. Everyone can always use more blessings!"

William had all of the food, plates, and utensils set up like a buffet on top of the counters along one of the walls. They went over and filled their plates, picked up the glasses of a pretty red beverage, and went to one of the long tables together.

Joe was the last to gather his food and was taking his time choosing between the delicious selections William had prepared. When he picked up his glass of the beverage, he tasted it. Looking at William, he asked, "What is this? It is really good!"

William answered him. "That is an herbal tea blend of

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hibiscus flowers, rose hips, and honey leaf from Dr. Wong's herbal shop in Chinatown."

Joe suddenly burst into laughter, and everyone looked at Diana quizzically. She giggled and said, "I think Joe just realized that he really is down the white rabbit's hole attending a tea party in Wonderland!" Vincent laughed, and Father looked confused. "Never mind, Father, you had to be there."

Joe joined them at the table and looked at Diana. He was still grinning as he said, "Now I see what you and Chuck were so tickled about this morning."

Diana smiled. "I'm glad to see that you are finally enjoying the joke!"

Vincent chuckled as he said, "Your joke reminds me of something my brother, Father's natural son, Devin, said to me when he returned here after traveling around the world for many years. He said, 'I've been everywhere south of Oz and north of Shangri-La, but what I dream about is an hole-in-the-ground—weird, huh?' I told him that wasn't so weird, when that hole-in-the-ground is home."

As they ate, Diana was glad to see Joe's enthusiastic consumption of his meal and how much pleasure it was giving William to watch him eat it. When they were finished, some of the older children came and took their dishes away and cleaned up the table. The members of the Council had been coming in throughout the meal, and all of them were seated at the table now.

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Pascal spoke up before any other discussion started. "I just received a message from our Helpers who have been keeping an eye on Polly's and Curtis' bed-and-breakfast for us. There is a rotation of suspicious cars keeping surveillance on it. I'm sure they are watching to see if Diana is really there."

Vincent looked at Diana. "I'll take you back to the Walkers' place, through the tunnels, when we get done here." Then he looked at Pascal. "Thank you, Pascal."

Chuck came in the door at that point, and he sat down at the table with them. William got up and went to the counter. He brought back a plate of food and a drink for Chuck.

Chuck looked at William with gratitude. "Thanks, William. I'm starved!" Then he looked at Joe. "I've got your weekend plans all set! You went to an antique car show."

Joe chuckled. "Did I now?"

Chuck pulled a folded up flyer for the show and a brochure for an antique Rolls Royce out of his pocket and gave them to Joe. He explained, "The flyer got you to the show, and then you picked up the brochure on the car you liked while you were there. This show is actually going to be going on all afternoon and most of the night. It would be best if someone took you through the tunnels to the access point we have there. It is under a maintenance shed on the edge of the lot where this show is taking place."

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Joe smiled as he looked at the Rolls Royce brochure. "I have really good taste in cars, don't I?"

Jamie was sitting beside Joe and looked at the flyer as he unfolded it. "I can take him through the tunnels. I know right where that is."

Chuck continued. "That's great, Jamie. Joe, I'll pick you up to take you back to your apartment building from the show then."

Joe was shaking his head again. "I wish our world was this well organized. Now that we have plans in place for confusing the bad guys, I think it is time you explained to me who the bad guys are and why they are a threat to your world. I know that it must have been something serious that made you decide to take a chance bringing me down here. What exactly has happened?"

Vincent pulled the small notebook out of his pocket. "Before we begin telling you about the new problem, I have something here that you will probably need." Vincent handed the notebook to Joe, and Joe was visibly shaken as he recognized it.

Joe's voice was heavy with emotion as he said, "This notebook of Gabriel's is what started this whole mess. It nearly got me killed, and it did get Cathy killed. I wish I had never told Cathy about this, and she might still be alive." Father and Diana looked at one another but stayed silent.

Vincent tried to console Joe. "The only one responsible for Catherine's death was Gabriel, Joe."

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Joe spoke with a bitter tone, "And our dirty District Attorney, John Moreno!" John Moreno's autopsy report came to Joe's mind, and he asked Vincent, "You were the one who killed Moreno and the hired gun that was with him at the carousel in Central Park, weren't you?"

Vincent replied. "Yes, Moreno was with one of Gabriel's men, and they had come there to murder Elliott. I had to kill them to save him."

Father added, "Vincent took two bullets that night saving Elliott."

Vincent went on. "It was after that incident that Elliott and I began meeting on the *Compass Rose* docked on the East River. Elliott was trying to help me find where Gabriel was keeping my son."

Joe commented with disgust, "It makes me sick to think that Gabriel ever had his filthy hands on Cathy's and your baby!"

Vincent went on with his explanation. "It was following the explosion of the *Compass Rose* that Diana found me on Catherine's grave severely injured. She took care of me at her loft for three days."

Joe nodded in understanding, and looked at Diana. "And that was when you stopped talking to me, with good reason. I'm sorry for what I put you through, Diana. I wish I had known." Then, he looked back at Vincent. "I told Cathy about this notebook when I was being treated in the burn unit at the hospital, after Gabriel's lawyer, Patrick Hanlin, was blown up in his car for giving it to me."

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I was only a few feet from his car when it exploded, and I was badly injured. Patrick had come to me, because we went to law school together. He told me that he had never really believed there was an hell, until he became a lawyer for this criminal organization. He promised to tell me who he was working for, and to give me the key to the code in this notebook, as soon as he and his family were safely out of the country. Then he died in the explosion when he tried to start his car. Cathy retrieved this notebook from my jacket pocket at the hospital to investigate it. I wondered what finally happened to this. I had just assumed that Moreno destroyed it.”

Vincent explained what happened. “No, Catherine gave it to Elliott Burch, so he could have his cryptographers try to break the code. They weren’t able to accomplish that, though, before Gabriel bankrupted Elliott. Elliott gave the notebook to me as he was dying, after Gabriel blew up the *Compass Rose* with both of us on it.”

Joe looked at Father as he remembered when Chuck had nabbed him on Father’s behalf. “No wonder you turned white as a sheet and ran off when I told you the *Compass Rose* had exploded and burned to the waterline!”

Father looked grim. “Yes, that was a very frightening time for our community. We were afraid we had lost Vincent.”

Then Joe addressed the current problem. “Diana told me that Gabriel has an older brother. It looks like I need

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to play catch-up here. Tell me about him.”

Vincent pulled Dr. Vlas’ small journal out of his pocket, and then he began, “Diana went back into Gabriel’s mansion through a secret door to the tunnels in the basement, and she found an hidden room in an office in that basement. Before she tells you about what she heard the older brother, Adrian, say, I need to explain to you that in the end, Gabriel was no longer interested in what Catherine knew about his criminal organization. He was only interested in stealing our son after he was born. In fact, Gabriel was completely obsessed with that idea because of an history between my people and Gabriel’s brother, Adrian. In order for that to make any sense, I need to read you the contents of this journal.”

Joe had great concern in his voice as he said, “Please do!”

Vincent proceeded to read Dr. Vlas’ journal entries to Joe, and then he told him about the dream he had and his conversation with Narcissa. When he was finished, Diana went on to explain everything she had heard Adrian say in his conversation with Jonathan Pope, and she told Joe about the dirty cop, Steve Palmer. Once again, she left out the threat Adrian had made against her own life.

Vincent commented afterwards. “Before Diana found this journal, and I had that dream, we never knew where I came from, or how I even came to be born. I was very blessed that Father adopted me.”

Joe looked very thoughtful. “Vincent, I would love to

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tell you that our civilization has evolved since your people were being hunted in Romania two-hundred years ago. The truth is, though, I know the Tandins wouldn't be any safer up top now than they were then in Romania. We are still a society of ignorant frightened people. Well, the first thing we need to do is retrieve the rest of Dr. Vlas' journals Diana found. We sure don't want Adrian to get his hands on those. Diana, I guess you and I had better make a date to do some more 'spelunking' under Gabriel's mansion next Saturday. Since Adrian was dragging Gabriel along on his evil escapades thirty-five years ago, I'm sure he is the actual head of the entire criminal organization, not Gabriel, as we had thought. If we could just break the code in that notebook, we would have plenty to charge Adrian with that wouldn't involve your world, Father. That crime syndicate is involved in extortion, money laundering, drugs, racketeering, illegal gambling, and almost every other type of organized crime imaginable. We know it. We just can't prove it yet."

Vincent spoke up. "I should go with you to Gabriel's mansion."

Diana and Joe exclaimed simultaneously. "No!" Then Joe went on, "Vincent, you have your little son to think about. He doesn't need for both of his parents to end up dead, like yours did. Let Diana and I take care of this problem in our world. When we get the journals, we will bring them here to you. Meanwhile, this notebook would be safer here in your hands." Joe handed it back to

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Vincent, who pocketed it again. "I don't want Adrian to know that it still exists. I assume, Chuck, that you can help us come up with a way to get into the tunnels under Gabriel's mansion without Adrian's thugs catching on?"

Chuck smiled. "Sure, Joe, I'll come up with a plan before next Saturday. I'm going to go ahead and take off now and head over to that antique car show. I'll take you back to your apartment as soon as you get there with Jamie."

Joe shook Chuck's hand and chuckled. "Thank you for all of your help, Chuck. It really has been interesting!"

They all got up from the table, and Joe said to Diana, "I guess we had better rely on old-fashioned note-passing, because as powerful as Adrian is, he probably has an illegal tap on our phone lines. I'm going to see what I can do about running covert surveillance on Steve Palmer. Maybe he can lead us to some of Adrian's other corrupt agents in the legal force."

Diana nodded her head. "I'm quite sure he does have our phone lines tapped. I'll be sure you receive a message with the details of next Saturday's adventure."

As Diana with Vincent and Joe with Jamie started to leave, everyone in the kitchen chamber gathered around Joe with expressions of gratitude. The men shook his hand, and the women hugged him. Little blond five-year-old Darla with her big blue eyes tugged on his pant leg. Joe looked down, smiled, and picked her up. Darla gave him a kiss on the cheek, and he hugged her. Angela

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smiled at Joe as she took the child from him. Joe was visibly moved by this show of affection for him. He almost didn't want to leave this peaceful place.

Jamie finally interceded, though, and took Joe's hand to lead him to the car show. Vincent also left with Diana to take her back to the bed-and-breakfast. The others either stayed behind in the kitchen chamber to help William start preparing the evening meal or went out to their other responsibilities. They all felt a profound sense of relief that they now had Joe as an ally in facing the threat from Adrian. Everyone was confident that he and Diana could handle that threat and help keep their world safe.

As Joe followed Jamie down the tunnel, he heard something and paused. Jamie turned around and looked at him. "What is it?" She asked.

There was beautiful orchestral music echoing through the tunnel along with the sweet sound of children singing. Joe whispered, "That is heavenly! What is it?"

Jamie smiled at him. "That is our children's choir and orchestra practicing for an upcoming recital."

As they continued down the tunnel, Joe thought to himself, "This world is worth any price to preserve it! I must help Diana protect it, even if it costs me my career. If it does, at least I have someplace to go. I wouldn't mind camping out in William's kitchen!"

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Chapter VI

Assembling the Troops

On Wednesday, Bennie delivered a plate lunch from William to Joe in his office. When Joe took the plate out, he found a note in the bottom of the bag from Diana. It read, "Figure out a way to leave work early tomorrow. Chuck will pick you up at 3:00 in the afternoon outside your apartment building. Wear blue jeans, dark tennis shoes, a large coat, and a baseball cap. Diana."

The next afternoon, when he climbed into Chuck's cab, Joe said, "This isn't Saturday yet. Am I in for some additional enlightening, or is there some more sinister reason I'm dressed like this?"

Chuck replied, "Nothing sinister, but we are going to be playing a little shell game with the bad guys. Diana

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will have to fill you in on the enlightening part, though.”

Joe smiled, “That’s OK, Chuck. I’m getting used to it. What do I need to know to play this shell game?”

Chuck filled Joe in. “I’m going to drop you off at Catherine’s old apartment building. Just as we figured, the usual tail is following us right now. When you get out, just step up on the curb, and then project your voice loudly to tell me to wait for you. Go into Catherine’s building, and take the elevator on the right. Cullen will be there waiting for you.”

Joe queried, “Cullen?”

Chuck asked, “Did you see the rocking chair in Vincent’s room?”

Joe smiled. “How could I miss it? That is some work of art!”

Chuck continued, “Well, Cullen is the artist who created it. He’s about your height. He’s going to trade coats with you, and he will need to wear your baseball cap, because he doesn’t have one. He’s not quite as muscular as you are, but Diana figured that the large coat would cover up that difference. Then, he and I are going to make several stops around the city, dragging our tail behind us. At the last one, he’ll take the cap off, so that Adrian’s goon squad in the tailing car can see that they’ve been following the wrong man, and they won’t have a clue where they lost you.”

Joe chuckled. “That’s brilliant! Now, what am I supposed to do in Catherine’s building?”

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Chuck explained. "You go down to the basement, and Diana will take you into the tunnels. That is one of our access points, which Catherine used to use to get to Father's world. Meanwhile, as we speak, Mouse and Kanin are working on an access point in the basement of your apartment building. They will be done with it by the time Diana is finished showing you something you need to know about. Then she'll take you back to your own building through the tunnels."

Joe laughed. "That should leave those scoundrels scratching their heads!"

Chuck grinned into the rearview mirror. "That's the idea! They should be thoroughly confused. Hopefully, Adrian won't be at all pleased with their report."

When Joe got out of the cab, he walked up onto the sidewalk, turned around, and yelled over the traffic for Chuck to wait for him. Then he went into Catherine's apartment building. The unhappy memory of the last time he had come to this building, to answer the call that Catherine had been found murdered in her apartment, washed over him, and he winced. He went through the lobby to the elevator on the right and pushed the button. When the door opened, he stepped in and saw a tall man in a patchwork coat, wearing blue jeans and dark tennis shoes, standing in the back corner.

Joe stepped in, hit the basement button, and let the elevator door close before he spoke. "Cullen?"

Cullen was obviously relieved, and answered. "Yes,

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Joe. We didn't get to meet the other day, because I was obsessing over finishing a cradle for one of our couples expecting a new baby."

Joe shook Cullen's hand, and asked, "Is that the couple that Kanin was working on a new chamber for?"

Cullen replied as he and Joe were exchanging coats. "Yes, we all get very excited over new babies in our world."

Joe took his baseball cap off and gave it to Cullen, who put in on. Then Joe said, "Well, your world is a wonderful place to raise children in. That rocking chair you created in Vincent's room is an inspiring piece of art! You are very talented."

Cullen smiled, "Thank you, Joe. It was just fun for me."

Joe looked at the two of them in the mirror on the wall of the elevator. "It looks like we're ready for the shell game to begin!"

Cullen laughed. "Yes, I guess it's time for me to go confuse Adrian's goons! You are going to really like it where Diana is taking you, Joe."

The elevator had landed in the basement, and when the door opened, Diana was standing there waiting for him. Joe stepped off, and they both said good-bye to Cullen as the door closed, and he went back up to the lobby.

Joe turned to Diana. "Everyone is being really mysterious about where you are taking me, Diana. Are you going to tell me now, or is it going to be a surprise

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again?"

Diana smiled at him. "It's going to be a surprise, but I know that you are really going to like it, Joe. Come on, Father is waiting in the tunnel for us."

She took him to a small door at the back of the basement, where they climbed out onto a short ladder leading down to the tunnel floor. Father was at the bottom waiting for them.

"Hello, Father," Joe said. "I understand I'm in for a surprise."

Father smiled at him. "Yes, Joe, one I know you will be very happy about."

Diana and Father began leading Joe through the tunnels to Peter's home. Along the way, they chatted about Father's world.

Joe asked, "When is the children's choir recital? I heard them practicing as Jamie was taking me to the antique car show last Saturday. They are really good!"

Father replied, "They are good! We are very proud of them. They will be performing in my Council chamber this coming Saturday evening. If you and Diana get finished at Gabriel's mansion in time, you are definitely invited to come."

Diana smiled. "I hope we are! That would be a real treat."

Joe continued the conversation. "It will sure be a lot simpler to have the access-way under my building that Mouse and Kanin are working on. I'm really happy that

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you thought of doing that. Keeping Adrian's criminal workforce confused up top is hazardous at best. Access from our own apartment buildings will be a whole lot safer."

Father nodded. "Wherever possible, we have always added access-ways like yours whenever we are blessed with new Helpers up top. It is a much more discreet way for them to get to our world than manholes or storm grates. We were very fortunate with both of your apartment buildings this time. Your building already had sub-basement access to a water main service tunnel adjoining our tunnels. So, Kanin and Mouse just had to use a torch to cut an access door between the service tunnel and our tunnel system. Diana's building is older. Someone in the past had already installed an access doorway to our tunnels in the basement, but it had been sealed up. All Kanin and Mouse had to do with hers was to reopen that access door."

Joe went on. "Father, if you don't mind my asking, there are a number of questions about your world that have come to my mind since my visit there last Saturday."

Father smiled at Joe. "Ask away. I'll answer any question I can."

Joe started asking his questions. "Since we are already on the subject of Kanin, how did you manage to obtain all of the cutting and drilling equipment and tools that I saw his team working with?"

Father answered with a smile, "Our entire community

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has learned how to salvage all kinds of useful things your world throws away. Equipment and tools like Kanin and his team were working with are frequently junked by construction crews above long before their useful life is over. Even equipment that is damaged or non-functional can usually be repaired with some patience by Mouse and his team of electricians and engineers.

“We have access to several freight elevators in our Helpers’ warehouses and storage buildings around Manhattan to transport some of the larger, heavier equipment we have salvaged down into our tunnels. We were only able to accomplish access via freight elevators in the Helpers’ facilities which were directly over our tunnels. In those warehouses and storage buildings, Mouse and Kanin together with their teams extended the elevator shafts down into our tunnels. They set up the floor indicators in the buildings above, so that they don’t show our tunnel levels, but our floor indicators below do. Then they put in tunnel floor buttons on the elevators behind service panels inside the cars, which can only be accessed with keys that we and our Helpers have. We never use those freight elevators except after our Helpers’ business hours, but just to be sure, Mouse installed cameras in the cars with monitors in our tunnels, so we can be sure that no one who shouldn’t know about us is in the elevators when we need to use them. The freight elevator modifications constituted a very complex engineering project, and Mouse was thrilled by the technical challenge.

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“When Kanin first started creating new chambers down here around eighteen years ago, he painstakingly did it all with just an hammer and a chisel. It took many months to sculpt each new chamber from the caves he started with, but each was a work of art when he was finished. At that time, there were only a very few community members with the skills and aptitude necessary for him to train to help him. Now, with the power equipment Mouse scavenges and keeps in running order for him, and with a bigger team to assist him, it only takes him a few weeks to craft each new chamber. Of course, with Catherine’s trust fund, we can afford new equipment, but the salvaged equipment is still working perfectly right now, so there isn’t any need to buy any.”

Joe smiled, “He does impressive work! How many community members do you have in your world now?”

Father answered, “At present count, we total two-hundred-sixty-three souls. When I first began organizing the tunnel-dwellers into a community, I started a record of our people. I recorded everyone’s name and birthday, and kept a running record of every birth, every death, made entries for those who joined our community from above and why, and for those who felt ready to leave our world and why. We had to make an educated guess about the birth dates of some of the children we rescued from above, because they were too young to even know themselves. Our records also include the family genealogies and everyone’s medical records.”

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Joe was amazed. "Wow! You have carefully accounted for everyone and their needs. These people really are blessed that you took an interest in their welfare. They are obviously healthy, happy, and productive. The tunnels and chambers in your community are very comfortable, even though we are in the dead of winter. How do you manage to heat them? I didn't see heaters of any kind anywhere."

Father smiled at Joe. "When I was first brought to the tunnels, we had no heating system. It was cold, but not completely unbearable, because we were protected in the tunnels from exposure to the chilling winds. However, even very warmly dressed, it was not comfortable. During the summer, we have no need for air-conditioning, because the tunnels are naturally cool, even on the hottest days, but winters were a problem. It was especially hard on the children. Fortunately, we ended up with a few of our members who had electrical skills. At that time, we had to tap into the city's abandoned electrical lines, and those electricians of ours devised a way to adapt an idea they had seen above for heating the tunnels. They had our stone cutters carve out channels along the tops of the tunnel and chamber walls. Then they electrified oil filled pipes in those channels, which provided radiant heat for the whole community. It was safe, because the stone walls weren't going to catch fire. Having the heat at the top of the walls also kept the children we have running around safe from burn injuries. Next, they scavenged fans

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from abandoned and condemned buildings, repaired them, and placed them in strategic places around the community to effectively circulate the heated air. Those fans run during the summer too, so we have proper ventilation.”

Joe had one more question. “There is one last thing that I’ve been wondering about. I saw the washers and dryers that you have in the sewing cavern, and I know that you have a major water source from that beautiful Waterfall Cavern you took me to. What do you do for bathrooms? Everyone is obviously clean and well-groomed.”

Father actually laughed at that one. “That explanation is a little more complicated, but it is really pretty funny. We owe our modern plumbing to Mouse.”

Joe interrupted Father. “Before you tell me about Mouse’s plumbing, please tell me about Mouse. He sure is an odd duck, but I get the impression from everyone in your world that he is nothing short of a genius.”

Father then explained. “Mouse is one of our children for whom I had to make up a birth date. By that guess, he is twenty-two now. When he was five, we all began to notice small amounts of food disappearing on a regular basis. Vincent staked out the pantry one night to try to catch the culprit, and it turned out to be Mouse. Vincent caught him and picked him up, biting, kicking, and screaming, and brought him to me. He was filthy, dressed in rags, and malnourished. Obviously, he had been

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surviving on his own for a very long time. He couldn't even speak. He was so wild, only Vincent could handle him. Vincent was very patient with him, though. He bathed him, dressed him in clean clothes, fed him properly, and then he began the long process of teaching him to speak and then to read. The result is the man you have seen. He is strange, and he still keeps his speech to only the necessary minimum, but he is an absolutely brilliant engineer, inventor, and craftsman. When we noticed his extraordinary gift for figuring out how to make things work, we began letting him work with our electricians and engineers. It wasn't long before they were learning from him!"

Joe shook his head. "If Vincent hadn't caught Mouse, all of that talent would have been wasted. He probably would have met an early death pilfering from the wrong people. Tell me about how he managed to take care of your plumbing needs."

Father went on. "Mouse really blessed our community by solving that critical need. Before he set us up with modern plumbing, we were making do with chamber pots, with a few out-houses we were able to dig out in some of the lower caverns where we infrequently found areas with dirt, rather than rock floors, and with the use of our Helpers' facilities or public restrooms. It was inconvenient, messy, and definitely not the healthiest way to handle our sanitation needs. Bathing wasn't a very serious problem, because we do have ample water from

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the Waterfall Cavern, some springs we located, and even a few hot springs, which we still sometimes use for bathing during the winter. Even now, each member still has a water pitcher and basin in their own chamber for immediate washing needs. Mouse improved our situation dramatically.

“When Mouse was ten, he disappeared on us. We were pretty frantic until Jamie told us that he and she had gone to the closest train station to use the bathroom. They had been exploring above, and Mouse had wanted to stay in the bathroom when Jamie was ready to go. She took William and Cullen to the bathroom where she had left Mouse, and they found him studying the toilets. It was a good thing they got there when they did, because he had pulled his tools out of his pocket and was ready to take one of the toilets apart. They practically had to drag him away from it, and he was very unhappy. He insisted for days afterwards that he wanted to figure out how those toilets worked. He was sure he could put toilets into our world.

“I had an opportunity to talk to one of our Helpers about Mouse’s obsession with toilets, and he told me to bring Mouse to his home. He took Mouse out to his guest house, which wasn’t being used then, and showed him where the water cutoff was. He told Mouse to go ahead and dismantle the toilet. Mouse spent two days taking the toilet apart and putting it back together again. He wouldn’t even leave it alone to eat, and he slept on the

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floor by it. Our Helper and his wife ended up taking meals out to him and hand feeding him, because he wouldn't stop working on that toilet in order to eat. The Helper told me that Mouse finally asked him for a new wax sealing ring, whatever that is. He got it for Mouse, and Mouse put that toilet back together in perfect working order.

"Well, then our ten-year-old Mouse had a new obsession, finding toilets for our world. We knew we weren't going to hear the end of it until we found him some, so Kanin and Cullen went scouting above to find toilets for Mouse. Meanwhile, Mouse asked to look at the maps of our world, and he made up detailed drawings of how to access the water from the Waterfall Cavern, which would provide the water pressure he needed, and how to hook into the city's sewer lines. He also found the perfect central location for his very complex project. It was an huge cave that we really couldn't do anything with, because it was so big. He drew up plans to partition it off and install plumbing pipes.

"When Kanin and Cullen returned, they had found the perfect source for Mouse's toilets. It was a large hotel which was scheduled for demolition in just a few weeks, and it was filled with bathroom fixtures. When Mouse went through the building with them, he was very excited. He didn't just want the toilets then. He wanted the tubs, the sinks, the water heaters, the huge commercial dishwasher in the hotel kitchen, and the washers and dryers in its laundry room! When the community

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members saw his plans, and realized that Mouse knew what he was doing, they also became excited over the prospect of having actual plumbing fixtures.

“Our electricians hooked up the electricity to the hotel freight elevator temporarily. Kanin cut out an access door in the basement of the old hotel, and then everyone began carrying out plumbing and water fixtures as fast as Mouse could take them apart. It always amazes me how wasteful people can be up top. All of those beautiful, useful things were just going to be blown up and destroyed! Mouse made sure that we salvaged even the pipes from that building to use for our communication system and heating in our extended tunnels and the newly constructed chambers. I know we at least saved that company some money on trips hauling the rubble away.

“Within six months, with everyone’s help, and some more building materials salvaged from a construction site that was throwing them away, Mouse had an assigned private bathroom with a tub, sink, and toilet set up for each single community member, couple, and family. He built ten extra ones to accommodate visiting guests and for new community members. He also built enough of them for the orphaned children that Angela cares for, so that no more than three children would have to share a bathroom. He set up the washers and dryers in the sewing chamber you saw, and installed the dishwasher in William’s kitchen. We have four areas outside of that central bathroom cave, where we have men’s and women’s

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bathrooms nearby. Those four places are our Great Hall, where we have our holiday celebrations, William's kitchen chamber, our hospital chamber, where Mouse installed two full baths, and a boys' and a girls' bathroom just down the tunnel from the children's sleeping chambers. He then set up a large storage chamber where he organized and cataloged the remaining fixtures for future use. Catherine left us a very generous trust fund, so the washers and dryers, along with William's kitchen appliances and dishwasher, have all been updated. Mouse's bathroom fixtures, though, are still in perfect working order."

Diana spoke up at that point. "All of that happened because a child the world threw away was fascinated with a toilet! That is a truly awe-inspiring story!"

Joe added, "Nothing seems to be impossible in your world! It sounds just like Cathy to leave your community well provided for."

When they arrived at the elevator in Peter's basement, they slipped into silence as they rode it up to Peter's hospital wing. When the doors to the elevator opened again, Diana took Joe's hand and said, as they stepped off the elevator, "Joe, what we are going to show you will undoubtedly take you by surprise, but it will make you very happy. Are you ready?"

Diana was so intensely serious, that Joe felt a touch of apprehension. "I'm ready. Go ahead and show me."

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Father and Diana led Joe down the hallway, and took him into Catherine's room. Joe stood frozen in the doorway and stared at Catherine for several minutes. Then tears started streaming unchecked down his face. Diana put her hand on Joe's arm, but he didn't even notice. He walked to the bed, picked up Catherine's hand, and sat down in the rocking chair beside her.

Joe finally looked up at Father and Diana. "Dr. Marx realized that she was alive, while the rest of us idiots were looking around her for clues, didn't he? This is another really good reason for his odd behavior!"

Diana took Father's coat off him, and Joe slipped his off and handed it to her as Father explained, "Yes, David sent me a note, and I helped him to stabilize her and bring her here. We have been hiding her here ever since. Joe, don't feel badly. Vincent carried her all the way from Gabriel's building to her apartment, and he didn't even realize she was alive. Her heartbeat and respiration were so slow that it was a miracle David noticed."

Joe looked at Father with extreme worry on his face. "So, she has been like this for almost four months. Is there any hope that she will wake up?"

Father smiled at Joe. "Actually, she is much better than she was when we brought her here. Her life is no longer in danger, because she is out of her coma. She is just deeply asleep."

Joe knitted his eyebrows together as another thought occurred to him. "Vincent doesn't know she is still alive,

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does he?" Diana had laid their coats on the table and was back by the bed. She and Father shook their heads. Joe exclaimed, "Why on earth haven't you told him? He is devastated over losing her!"

Father then explained at length to Joe their reasons for not telling Vincent. Father emphasized that it was imperative that Vincent be protected from that knowledge until his link with Catherine was reestablished naturally, and he found her on his own. Joe nodded as he fully comprehended the wisdom in what Father's community was doing for Vincent and Catherine.

Father added to his explanation. "Catherine seems to be trapped in some sort of nightmare, which Vincent is just beginning to pick up on, judging from the dreams he has been having. Right now, Vincent thinks she is reaching out to him from beyond the grave. We are hoping that when Vincent's link with her is completely restored, that perhaps he will be able to help her to wake up. We have been pumping Catherine's breast milk and sending it down every couple of hours to Vincent for Little Jacob. Handling her milk is causing him to have dreams and visions about her. Hopefully, it won't be too much longer before Vincent is reconnected to Catherine."

Joe was finally fully composed again, and he said, "It is such a good thing that she is hidden here, so Adrian doesn't know that Gabriel's attempt to kill her failed. According to what Diana heard, he would want to grab Cathy again as a lure to capture Vincent."

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Father added, "Exactly, when David rescued her from her apartment, part of our reason for hiding her then, was because no one even knew who had attempted to kill her. No one knew about Gabriel. Besides hiding her from Vincent for the moment, so his link can be healed, it is also still imperative to protect her from Adrian. To that end, Diana advised us that we should only visit her through the tunnels. That way, only people who belong here are seen entering or leaving by the street entrance."

Joe nodded his head. "That is a very wise precaution. By the way, who does belong here?"

As Joe asked the question, Peter stepped into the room with Sarah, and they both smiled at Joe. Joe stood up and went to Peter with his hand outstretched, and Peter grabbed it. Joe exclaimed, "Dr. Wellington! I remember when you helped us with an insurance fraud case a couple of years ago. So, you know about Vincent and Father's world too?"

Peter answered, "Yes, Joe, I've known about it from the beginning, because Father and I went to medical school together. I can't tell you how relieved I was to find out that they had brought you in to help us with our girl and Vincent."

Joe spoke with joy in his tone. "Seeing Cathy alive has sure made my world a brighter place! I am so thankful that they decided to trust me, and brought me into this secret." Joe suddenly stopped talking for a moment and looked at them. "Wait a minute! What in the world did we

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bury in that cemetery? I was one of the pall bearers, and it sure didn't feel like an empty casket!"

Father laughed as he replied. "It was a one-hundred-five pound sack of sand."

Joe chuckled, "Better sand than Cathy!" Then he looked at Peter again. "Remember when you came to my office for that deposition and found Cathy working there with us?" Peter nodded, and Joe continued, looking at the others. "He told me that the first time he met Cathy, she was stark naked!" Diana's eyes widened and she giggled. Joe was smiling as he finished. "What he failed to mention was that Cathy was also upside-down and screaming at the top of her lungs in the delivery room. Poor Cathy turned red as a beet!"

Father chuckled and then looked at Peter. "I was telling Joe on the way here about Mouse's 'toilet fever.' Do you remember that?"

Peter laughed, "How can I forget! I thought that I was going to have to write that toilet off."

Joe was chuckling. "So, you were the one brave enough to let a little boy obsessed with toilets take yours apart to see how it worked?"

Peter laughed again. "I was, and I've never regretted it. That old toilet still works perfectly!"

While everyone was still chuckling, a tall, dark-haired man entered the room. He was just shy of Vincent's height, but not as big boned, with blue eyes and very handsome features, marred only by three long deep scars

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on his left cheek.

When Joe caught sight of the man behind everyone, he grinned and shook his head. Then he walked around the others and went to the man. “Jeffrey Radler! You were one of my deputy district attorneys for a very brief period of time. So, you know about Father’s world too?”

Everyone turned around, and Father gave the man a look of combined joy and surprise. Father stayed silent, though, to give the man a chance to answer Joe’s question.

The man spoke to Joe. “Hi, Joe, it is really good to see you again. Actually, I’m not exactly who you think I am.”

Joe raised his eyebrows. “Oh? Who exactly are you, then?”

The man explained. “I’m Father’s son, Devin Wells. The truth is I never really had a law degree.”

Joe shook his head slowly. “Let me guess. Cathy knew who you really were.”

Devin replied, “Not at first. In fact, when she did find out my true identity, and the fact that I had never even attended any law school, she hit the roof. She did give me the option of handing you my resignation rather than turning me in, though.”

Joe responded, “That was generous of her.”

Devin added, “She didn’t do it for me, because I didn’t deserve it. She did it for Father and my brother, Vincent. She knew how much it would hurt them if I landed in serious trouble.”

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Joe nodded his head. "Well, law degree or not, I have to tell you that the legal brief you left for us when you resigned, kept that animal, Eringer, in prison where he belonged. Thanks to your brief, his case was not overturned, and he will never be able to molest little girls again. You left so quickly, I never got a chance to thank you for that."

Devin smiled at Joe. "Thank you, Joe. Cathy did tell me that, and it made me really happy to know that something good came out of it."

Then Father stepped up to Devin and threw his arms around him. Devin hugged him back, and Father said, "Devin, I am so happy to see you! When did you get in? We didn't even know you were here."

Devin explained, "Peter's letter finally caught up to me in Europe, telling me about this tragedy with Cathy. I had been at a special hospital in Sweden with Charles, because I found out that they were doing experimental surgeries on test subjects with neurofibromatosis. I discussed the risks with Charles, and he wanted to let them try to help him. You wouldn't believe the miraculous results they had with him! Between the surgeries and the work I've been doing with him, he's a completely different man. They were even able to reset his jaw and straighten his teeth. We just arrived last night."

Father smiled at Devin. "Then Charles is here with you?"

Devin replied, "Yes, he's sleeping right now. I told

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Peter, and he agreed with me, that we had better stay here and not come below to the tunnels. That way, Vincent won't be wondering why I've stopped wandering around, and I won't have to make up some story about why I'm back home. Also, it seems that having bodyguards in Peter's home is probably in order right now anyway."

Joe spoke up as he put his hand on his own left cheek. "It just occurred to me how you probably ended up with those unique scars on your cheek. You got into a tussle with your brother, Vincent, at some point, didn't you?"

Devin chuckled. "You are absolutely right! When I was fourteen, and Vincent was twelve, I accused him of something he didn't do. I started the fight." Devin then pointed at his scars. "And Vincent finished it!"

Joe smiled at Devin. "Well, judging by the pride with which he spoke about you the other day, he forgave you a long time ago for whatever it was that caused that fight. I'm glad that you brought up the subject of bodyguards, Devin, because that has been on my mind ever since Father and Diana brought me here. We need to set up better security for Catherine, now that we know what Adrian's true agenda is. Dr. Wellington, can you accommodate enough guests, so that there are around-the-clock shifts of bodyguards to protect both Cathy and your family?"

Peter was very serious as he answered. "Joe, please just call me Peter. I have plenty of guest rooms and bathrooms for as many people as you think are necessary

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to protect Cathy.”

Joe nodded, “That’s good, Peter. Father, we need at least one person here who is licensed to carry a gun. I am, and I really wish I could be that one, but I need to keep up appearances at my office, and a leave-of-absence right now wouldn’t be very smart. I’ve been circulating that fake report of Diana’s, so Adrian doesn’t know that we are onto him, but I need to keep an eye on Steve Palmer and anyone else we uncover. Are there any of your Helpers, besides Diana and I, who are licensed to carry a gun?”

Father nodded, “Actually, there is one, and I’m sure that you know him. Do you remember the deaf young woman, Laura Williams, who helped you to put away that group of police officers, who murdered one of their own a few years ago, over drugs they were stealing from the evidence room?”

Joe shook his head in wonder. “Don’t tell me that she is also one of your Helpers!”

Father quickly corrected him. “No, actually she was one of our children. Vincent helped to raise her after she was found abandoned as a child in Central Park by an Helper. Vincent was also the one who taught her sign language. She married one of your former detectives, Jerry Bookman, and he is now one of our Helpers. Since he resigned from the police force, he runs his own private detective agency. No one would think twice about him taking on a private security job, and they wouldn’t wonder

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about where he is. He is also still licensed to carry a gun.”

Joe chuckled, “I’ve known them from the time they met during that deaf-gang case Cathy and I were working on. Jerry broke more than a few rules getting involved with Laura when he infiltrated that deaf-gang under cover, but they are such an happy couple! I had no idea they were part of your world. That is absolutely perfect. Now, if we just had one more formidable person trained to act as a bodyguard, we would be covered for three eight-hour shifts.”

Just then, an enormous man bent under the doorway and stepped into the room. He had amber eyes and thin sandy-blond hair. When he caught sight of Devin, his slightly irregular-featured face lit up with a very happy smile. “There you are, Dev! I wondered where you had run off to.”

Devin smiled at him. “I just didn’t want to wake you up, Charles. You were so tired when we got in last night. Do you feel better now?”

Charles beamed, “I feel wonderful, Dev!” Then he saw Catherine, and his expression became one filled with compassion. “You warned me about what to expect, but it is still heartbreaking to see Catherine like this.” He walked over to her bedside and patted her hand.

Charles Mason was completely transformed under Devin’s tutelage. The once deformed and frightened man, who had been kept in a cage his entire life by his brother as a side-show freak, billed as “The Hideous Dragon Man,”

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was now very refined with a quiet confidence. Devin had taught him not only how to socialize with others, but also how to safely control his powerful physical strength. Devin introduced Charles to everyone, and he shook their hands very carefully, so he wouldn't hurt anyone. He remembered having broken Father's wrist accidentally when Devin had first taken him below after rescuing him from his abusive brother.

Joe looked up at him and smiled. "I don't think anyone will mess with Cathy as long as you're around, Charles!" The compliment made Charles glow.

Diana then spoke up. "Father, does Isaac Stubbs know about your world? I found entries about him in Cathy's journals. He was her self-defense instructor, and she wrote about an incident when he helped her to find Vincent after he had been injured in an explosion. It was unclear, though, whether Isaac was part of your world or not."

Father winced as he remembered that frightening event. "No, he isn't part of our world, but he has never betrayed us. I know that we can trust him, and I know that he would be thrilled to know that Cathy is actually alive. She was like a daughter or a little sister to him. The incident that Cathy wrote about occurred when Vincent had stayed close to Cathy to protect her when she went into a rough neighborhood to interview a witness. A gang called The Silks shot guns into the building where she was meeting this witness and injured the man.

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Vincent got Catherine out of the building, and then he went back in to try to save her witness. The Silks threw a pipe bomb into the building. Vincent was badly injured and temporarily blinded, and The Silks captured him. Catherine called Isaac Stubbs to help her to find Vincent. Vincent escaped from The Silks, but he couldn't see. Catherine and Isaac finally found Vincent, and Isaac sent them into the tunnels to me. He has kept that secret safe ever since."

Joe spoke up then. "Well, Isaac Stubbs sounds like our best option for additional protection here. Peter, can you go hire Jerry Bookman?"

Peter answered, "I'll go see him tomorrow morning."

Diana looked at Father. "Do you want to go with me to see Isaac Stubbs in the morning? At least he has some idea who you are."

Father smiled at her. "We didn't actually meet, but he did see me in the tunnel. He knows that I am connected to Cathy and Vincent. Have Chuck pick me up at the Central Park tunnel entrance."

Diana nodded, "I will, Father." Then she looked at Joe. "Well, it looks like you are doing a bang-up job of assembling the troops! Are you ready for me to take you back to your new tunnel-access-door in the basement of your apartment building?"

Cullen came into the room with an happy grin on his face, and everyone turned their attention to him. "That was fun!" He exclaimed. "We left those morons chasing

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their tails trying to figure out what happened. I do believe Adrian has some very unhappy campers, because they know he isn't going to want to hear this report!" Everyone laughed.

Joe shook Cullen's hand, and said, "Thanks Cullen. I guess we can chalk another one up for our side!" Cullen and Joe exchanged coats again, and Cullen gave Joe his cap back. Then everyone said their good-byes, and Diana grabbed her coat and took Joe back through the tunnels to his apartment building.

Chuck picked Diana up from the alley behind Catherine's old apartment building the next morning. Earlier in the week, Kanin and Mouse had completed her new tunnel-access in the basement of her apartment building, before they had started on Joe's access. Diana's loft was closer to Catherine's building, and Father's chamber was closer to the Central Park tunnel entrance. When she traveled underground to Catherine's building to meet Chuck, she left her "watchers" thinking that she was working at home. If they wanted to check on her, she had her usual message on the answering machine. "I'm working. If you still want to talk to me, leave a message, and I'll think about calling you back."

Diana found Father waiting at the tunnel entrance when Chuck drove into the Park. She helped Father into the cab, and then Chuck took them to Isaac's self-defense instruction school. He waited outside to take them back

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to the park with Isaac. When Father and Diana walked into the building, they found Isaac working out alone on his equipment. Isaac Stubbs was a very handsome, muscular African-American man, in his mid forties, a little over six feet tall, with a neatly trimmed mustache. He grabbed a towel and came to meet them as he was drying the sweat from his face.

Isaac recognized Father from when he saw him in the tunnel, where Father had come to meet Catherine to help her take Vincent home, after his injury in an explosion in a seedy section of town. "Well, I really never expected to see you again!" Isaac said to Father as he shook his hand.

Father smiled at him. "My name is Dr. Jacob Wells, Isaac, but everyone in my world calls me Father. Cathy spoke very fondly of you when she explained who you were to me, after you helped her to rescue Vincent."

Isaac continued, "Well, Father, I want you to know that I never asked Cathy for any explanation about that incident, and I have never told anyone about what I saw."

Father nodded his head. "I know you never did, Isaac. That is actually why we are here now." Father turned to Diana, who shook Isaac's hand. "This is Diana Bennett. She is the special crimes investigator, from your world, who was assigned to investigate Cathy's case. You and she have something in common. She also rescued Vincent once. That is how she too knows about our world, and she has kept our secret safe like you have. We need your help, Isaac, and we know that we can trust you."

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Isaac asked, "How can I help you?"

Father replied, "We want to hire you to be one of Cathy's bodyguards."

Isaac stared at Father for a long moment, and then asked, "Why do you need help guarding a dead woman? Have there been vandalisms at the cemetery, or are grave robbers causing trouble?"

Father shook his head. "No, Isaac, we need you because Cathy is not dead." Isaac blinked at Father while trying to wrap his mind around what he was being told, and Father continued. "The man, who tried to kill her, Gabriel, is dead, but he has a brother, Adrian. If he knew that Cathy is alive, he would either kidnap her again, or try to finish the job Gabriel started. We have been hiding her for nearly four months now. She is still unconscious, but we believe that she will eventually recover. We have her in the hospital wing of Dr. Peter Wellington's home, which is where you would be staying."

Isaac exclaimed, "Give me twenty minutes to shower, change clothes, and pack a bag! This is the time of year when I usually close up shop and take a month's vacation anyway. I'll go ahead and put that message on my answering machine, and put my vacation sign on the door. No one will miss me."

When they arrived in Catherine's room, it was Isaac's turn to sit in the rocking chair holding Catherine's hand. "Cathy is like a baby sister to me. I can't tell you how

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happy it makes me to see that she is still alive.”

Father smiled at Isaac. “I know exactly what you mean. I came to love her like a father even before she married my son, Vincent.”

Isaac looked at Father. “She married Vincent, and you are his father?”

Father explained, “I am his adoptive father. Before recently, we didn’t know who his real parents were. He and Catherine married almost a year-and-a-half ago. It was after Vincent rescued her from two young men who were slashing young women to death. They had tried to kill Catherine too for investigating them.”

Isaac nodded his head. “I can’t say that I’m surprised that they married. There is no way to describe the depths of love I could see she had for Vincent. When he was injured and lost, and she came to me desperate for help finding him, it was clear that she would have done anything to save him. Cathy told me that she owed Vincent her life. When I saw them reunited in the tunnel as you were coming to meet them, their obvious love for each other brought tears to my eyes. I can only hope that a woman looks at me like that some day.”

Father explained to Isaac, “Vincent was the one who found Cathy when she was left for dead by the men who slashed her face. He brought her below to our tunnel home and nursed her until she was strong enough to go back up top. She would have died if he hadn’t found her.”

Isaac then told them about the first time he met

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Catherine. "It was after that attack that she came to me for lessons in self-defense. Cathy was one of my best students. She was so determined not to ever be a victim again."

Devin had entered the room and was listening. He broke in. "She must have been a good student. She sent me flying head-over-heels when I surprised her in her building once. I had gone to her to ask for her help making sure that Charles' abusive brother, Eddie Mason, would never come after Charles again. Like an idiot, I didn't announce myself to Cathy before I grabbed her arm. So, she promptly gave me an elbow to the ribs, and then she sent me flying over her shoulder into an elevator car. All I could do was look up at her and say, 'I guess we're going down?' It is amazing what you taught that tiny little woman to do!"

Isaac laughed, "Well, I told her when she first came to me that I didn't teach any of that 'kung-fu' stuff. I teach good old New York City street-fighting, and I taught Cathy to use whatever she had on her and any convenient materials close at hand as weapons for self-defense."

Devin continued, "You taught her well, because her elbow and hip leverage were all she needed to flatten me!"

They were all still laughing at the image of little Catherine sending big Devin flying through the air when Laura and Jerry Bookman arrived in the room. They were a cute young couple. Laura was a pretty little brunette with short wavy hair and big brown eyes. Jerry was tall

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and clean-shaven, with light-brown hair and eyes.

Diana had met Laura at Little Jacob's Naming Ceremony, and Laura had been delighted that Diana knew sign language. Diana approached Laura and hugged her, and then the two women began signing a conversation with one another. Meanwhile, Father sat down at the table in the room with Devin, Isaac, and Jerry. Peter and Charles came in and joined them at the table. Father then told Isaac the whole story of how they had found Catherine, of why they were keeping her condition a secret from Vincent, of their discovery of who Vincent's people were, and of the new threat that Diana had uncovered.

Peter's wife, Susan, together with Rebecca then came in. Susan took the Bookmans and Isaac to see their guest rooms that she had prepared for them. Diana and Father took their leave to go home at that point, leaving Devin, Charles, and Rebecca taking a shift watching over Catherine.

On Saturday morning, when Joe exited his tunnel access-way, he found Diana and Vincent waiting for him. He glared at Diana with an expression of pure exasperation, and she grinned. "What was I supposed to do? The big Monster called me a Brat, and then reminded me that I was sound asleep when he carried me from Gabriel's mansion to Father's world. He's right! I don't have a clue how to get there underground, and we can't travel above ground without alerting Adrian's people."

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Vincent told Joe, "Don't worry yourself over me, Joe. I'll stay in the tunnel and wait for you. I will feel much better, though, being close by just in case you run into trouble."

Joe was very serious when he replied. "Please do stay in the tunnel, Vincent! I would never forgive myself if Little Jacob lost his father. At least, since all three of us have backpacks, I guess we will be able to carry more. Well, lead on, Vincent."

Some time into their trek to Gabriel's mansion, Diana interrupted the lively conversation they had been enjoying with a question to Vincent. "Is it my imagination, or are we going downhill?"

Vincent answered her. "We are, indeed, going downhill. This tunnel is a real feat of engineering which must have taken my people a very long time to construct. We are actually traveling under the East River floor between Manhattan and Staten Island. Feel the walls here. It isn't rough rock. It feels smooth, almost like the rock has been melted."

Diana and Joe had run their hands over the walls as Vincent spoke, and Joe shook his head in amazement. "The Tandins must have developed some pretty impressive technology!"

Diana added, "This is what Dr. Vlas was talking about, when he mentioned the tunnel access from his home to the Tandin world. I wonder where their world is located. I guess they'll let us know when they think it's necessary."

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Vincent agreed with her. “Yes, that is the feeling I have been getting, now that I am aware of their existence. They are waiting for something. I don’t know what it is yet, but it must be important.”

Diana and Joe exchanged expressions of sudden comprehension, as they realized what the Tandins were waiting for. The words of Dr. Vlas’ journal entries returned with startling clarity to both Diana and Joe, and, once again, they recognized how compellingly important Vincent’s welfare was to the Tandins. The Tandins were waiting for Vincent to find Catherine.

When they arrived at the access door under Gabriel’s mansion, Diana took her backpack and coat off, and told Joe, “You had better give Vincent your coat. The mansion is pretty warm, so you won’t need it in there. We can move more quickly without them.”

Diana gave Vincent her coat, after taking the small flashlight and the remote control for the secret panel out of the pocket and putting them into the pockets of her blouse. Vincent exchanged his backpack for Joe’s coat. Then Joe and Diana went through the tunnel access-door into the mansion, leaving Vincent alone in the tunnel.

Diana led Joe into the office under the stairs and turned on the light. She took the remote control out of her pocket, pointed it at the picture of Alice and the white rabbit, and pushed the button. The panel swung open, and the light inside turned on.

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When Joe saw the picture of Alice and realized that it held the remote sensor, he laughed. "You have got to be kidding me! You told me that wise-crack of mine was on target. It really was, wasn't it?"

Diana giggled, "It would be a lot funnier if this wasn't the home of an insane murderer. *Alice in Wonderland* was so incongruous with Gabriel, it practically screamed 'delve deeper' at me."

Diana showed Joe where the light switch and the button to close the panel were inside the secret room, and she explained how the fan would come on any time the room was shut from the inside. Just then, both of them heard the floor creak overhead, and they realized someone was in the house with them. Diana threw her backpack on the chair in the secret room. "Joe! Go in there and shut the panel behind you!"

Joe stared at her open-mouthed as Diana ran to the office light switch and turned it off. Then she ran to the far right side of the room, pulled out her flashlight, stuck it in her teeth, and started scrambling up the book shelves like a little monkey. As she reached the wooden beams and headed for the platform in the pointed corner, she heard Joe's exasperated whisper, "Oh yes! I'm really going to go hide in the closet, and leave you alone out here with those devils!"

He tossed his own and Vincent's backpack onto the chair next to Diana's in the secret room. Diana pulled the flashlight out of her mouth and whispered back, "Oh, for

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Pete's sake, Joe!" She balanced on the beams, and turned the flashlight on. Then she took the remote control out of her pocket again, pointed it at Alice, and closed the panel, putting the remote control back into her pocket. "Then hurry and get up here! There is room for two on top of those two corner beams with the platform."

When Diana reached the beams just under the platform, she discovered a fatal flaw in her plan. She wasn't quite tall enough to reach the platform. Joe saw her predicament and wished he had time to rib her about it. Since there was no time to be amused at Diana's expense, he climbed around her without a word, reached up, grabbed the edge of the platform, and pulled himself up onto it. While he was still on his knees, he reached down, locked right wrists with Diana, and pulled her up onto the platform. Then Joe stood up, lifted her to her feet, pulled her against him, and shrank back with her into the pointed corner of the walls just as two men came into the room and turned the light on.

Diana had turned off and pocketed her flashlight. Now she was trying to calm her breathing and her racing heartbeat. Her head was against Joe's chest, and his heartbeat was calm and steady. That helped her to calm down. She suddenly became very aware of Joe as he held her in his arms. "Focus, Bennett!" She thought, and then another stray thought ran through her mind. "Why does he have to smell so good?"

As he felt Diana begin to relax in his arms, Joe was

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having his own errant thoughts. "This is nice! Oh, forget it, Maxwell! The only way she would be interested in you is if you were lying on a morgue slab as the victim of an unexplained homicide she found intriguing."

Diana had her back to what was going on below, but she heard Adrian Vlas' voice, in a very angry tone, talking to the second man below them. "What do you mean they keep losing them?"

Then she heard Jonathan Pope's apologetic voice answering. "I'm sorry, Sir. Every time our people try to tail either Diana Bennett or Joe Maxwell, they manage to slip the tail. They don't seem to be communicating with each other at all. Our taps on their phones reveal no recorded conversations between them. I don't think they are even aware that we are trying to keep track of them. It's very perplexing."

Adrian stormed, "Just hire more competent people, Pope! You have a bunch of imbeciles working for us. I can't plan to eliminate Diana Bennett, if I don't know where she is!"

Joe's arms tightened around Diana, and his heart rate doubled. "Oh, why did he have to go and say that?" She thought in dismay.

Jonathan Pope sounded contrite. "I'll be sure to do that, Sir."

Adrian responded in his usual commanding tone. "Make sure that you do! Now help me move this filing cabinet beside the desk here. According to the note that

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Gabriel left for me, along with a key in the locker he sent me to, there is a vault in the floor under this filing cabinet.”

The two men moved the heavy filing cabinet, revealing the vault, and then Adrian said, “Take this key, Pope, and open it. Give me everything you find inside.”

Pope knelt down and unlocked the floor vault. Joe watched him give Adrian a notebook, the same size as the one Vincent was keeping of Gabriel’s, and several videotapes. Adrian put them all on the desk.

When Pope stood up after emptying the vault and locking it again, Adrian looked at him and said in a triumphant tone, “Do you realize what all of this is?”

Pope answered him. “No, Sir, I don’t.”

Adrian went on. “The notebook isn’t important. According to Gabriel, it is the key to the code he had his lawyers using in that missing notebook about our operation. We never found it in Elliott Burch’s office building or at his home, so it must have been destroyed when the *Compass Rose* blew up. All of these videotapes, though, are a gold mine! Two of them are the surveillance tapes my brother recorded of Vincent’s attack on the two buildings where he was keeping Vincent’s woman, the investigative attorney. The others are all videotapes my old man recorded of Vincent’s people, which Gabriel discovered when he found this vault. The old man videotaped them when he was doing his genetic research. These should be very educational! We need to go find a

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large box to put all of these in, so I can move them to my Manhattan mansion. I'll put them into my vault there."

The two men left the room without turning the light off, and Joe and Diana listened to them go up the stairs. As soon as the men were off the stairs, Joe released Diana, and he quickly climbed down off the platform and onto the beams. Diana lowered herself over the edge of the platform, and Joe took her by the waist and put her safely on the beams. Then they climbed the rest of the way down to the floor. Diana opened the panel and grabbed her backpack.

Joe was furious. "That maniac has been under my nose in Manhattan this entire time!"

Diana's tone was desperate. "Don't worry about that now! We've got to get the records I found, these videotapes, and that notebook, out of here before they come back."

They both began stuffing journals and tapes into the three backpacks, as Joe said with a worried tone, "Taking journals they aren't aware of yet won't alert them. If we take these videotapes and the notebook too, they will figure you did it. Obviously, Adrian suspects that at least you are still investigating their organization in spite of your report I've been circulating."

Diana looked at Joe and frowned. "What's worse, having them aware we've been here and swiped the notebook and videotapes, or having them get their hands on solid proof that Vincent and his people exist? It's one

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thing for Adrian to rave like a lunatic about mythical lion-people living under the streets of New York. It's quite another for him to have documented proof that they do!"

Joe was very firm as he answered. "I agree with you, but I heard that personal threat Adrian made against your life. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you heard that the last time you were here, and you just decided to conveniently leave that out of your narrative to Vincent and me! You will have to go and stay with Father's people until this is all over with. That is the only safe place for you right now."

Diana didn't argue with Joe, and she didn't deny his suspicions about her omission in relating what had happened when she discovered the secret room. She simply said, "All right."

Joe strode over to Diana, grabbed her by the shoulders, looked down into her eyes, and said, "I've already nearly lost one woman who was important to me to these animals. I'm not about to take any chances and lose another one. Promise me you will stay below!"

Diana met Joe's worried gaze, and she smiled softly at him. "Don't get so intense! I promise! Now, let's hurry!"

When Joe and Diana stepped back through the tunnel-access-door, Vincent gave them a very relieved look. "I heard men's voices in there. What happened?" He took one of the backpacks from Joe and handed them their coats. Joe and Diana laid their backpacks down,

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and put their coats back on. Grabbing their treasure-laden backpacks, the three began the journey back to Father's world, as they discussed what had happened in the mansion.

Joe chuckled, "We just took Adrian's 'gold mine' away from him. He is going to be more than a little upset." Then, in a more serious tone, he said, "Diana, here, failed to mention that Adrian had plans to kill her if he got the chance. I told her that she has to stay below in your world until this is all over with."

Vincent looked sternly at Diana. "I'll make sure that she does!"

Diana looked from one man to the other and said, "You bullies! I promise I will be a good little girl. You don't need to worry about me. I won't run off! Joe, do you remember that list of high-priced mansions that we found out had the same Italian pattern of tiles as Gabriel's mansion?"

Joe nodded, "I still have that list in the desk at my office."

Diana was relieved. "That's good! Three of those homes were in Manhattan, and I'm sure it wouldn't be difficult to figure out which one is Adrian's. Guess what else we took away from Adrian, Vincent!"

Vincent had finally relaxed, and he smiled at her. "What else did you take away from him?"

Diana was almost giddy with joy. "We are now the proud owners of the key to the code in Gabriel's little-

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black-crime-notebook!”

Joe was sober as he added, “Taken illegally, though. The search warrant has expired.”

Diana looked at Joe in surprise. “Joe, what difference does it make how you break the code? The original notebook was given to you by Patrick Hanlin. There was nothing illegal about that. He was about to turn ‘state’s evidence,’ and he was killed for it. All you have to do is break the code, and you have everything you need to shut Adrian down. No one has to know how you did it! Adrian won’t know what hit him, because he thinks the original notebook was destroyed.”

Joe was smiling as he nodded. “You’re absolutely right! This is the perfect way to take him down without involving your community, Vincent. Oh, and you will be happy to know that we now also have all of Gabriel’s and Dr. Vlas’ videotapes of you and your people.”

Vincent looked at Joe. “You have videotapes of my people?”

Joe smiled at him. “We do. Do you want to view them? We could set that up below, if you want to.”

Vincent shook his head. “Actually, Joe, it would be better if we just destroyed them. I know that we will be meeting my people soon enough. I can wait. We need to just throw them into The Abyss. That way we can be sure they can never be recovered and used to harm my people.”

Joe agreed, “That’s probably the wisest thing to do. Diana, I’m going to leave several messages on your

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answering machine on Monday, and then I'm going to report you missing on Tuesday to Steve Palmer. That should really confuse Adrian and his minions. Meanwhile, why don't you, Vincent, and Father work on breaking the code in that notebook Vincent has. I've had the three detectives that I know I can trust, Greg Hughes, Nick Dunlap, and James Faber, keeping an eye on Steve Palmer and anyone else he contacts within the police force. With the addition of whatever you can decipher in that notebook, we should have Adrian out-of-business in no time!"

Diana declared, "It's a good thing I'm going to be below. James Faber hates me!"

Joe laughed, "He doesn't hate you! He's just annoyed that you're smarter than he is. He finds your methods incomprehensible. He's more comfortable with old-fashioned police legwork."

Vincent chimed in with a smile, "It isn't very many people who can truly appreciate a brilliant mind like yours in action, Diana. Most of them are satisfied to just go on about their mediocre lives, ridiculing what they don't understand. We definitely appreciate you and your unique point-of-view."

Joe laughed, "Amen!"

Vincent chuckled, "That reminds me, if we hurry, we will get back in time for the children's choir recital in Father's Council chamber this evening."

Joe said with enthusiasm, "Let's do! I was treated to a

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preview of that recital when Jamie dragged me out of William's kitchen chamber a week ago."

The three continued homeward, carrying on their lighthearted conversation, now that the end of Adrian's evil empire was clearly in sight. When they arrived back in Father's Council chamber, the children were just warming up in preparation for their recital. The choir was singing scales, and the orchestra was busy warming up on the instruments. Father's desk, up on the platform, had been moved back against the book shelves to make room for the choir and orchestra. The music director, Paul Matthews, was giving last minute encouragement to the children. Paul was a tall, big-boned man in his late thirties. He looked very distinguished with his black hair and carefully trimmed beard and mustache.

Vincent, Joe, and Diana laid their backpacks and coats on Father's table and then looked for places to sit. The Council chamber was completely packed wall-to-wall. Most of the children, who weren't participating in the recital, were seated on the steps of Father's circular staircase with their legs dangling over the sides. Diana found an unoccupied easy chair, and Joe took a seat in a chair near hers. Vincent observed that Little Jacob was comfortably settled on Brooke's lap, and then he went up the staircase into Father's library and found a seat there. Diana soon had two little children, Luke and Darla, on her lap.

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Paul turned around and faced the audience, and an hush fell over the chamber. He announced the pieces the children were going to perform, and then the recital began. The music was breathtaking in its beauty, and it was obvious that the children loved what they had been able to accomplish with their hard work.

Vincent was enjoying listening to the music, but it was Joe and Diana he was watching. They were glancing now and again at each other, when they each thought the other wasn't looking. Vincent smiled, as he realized what he had suspected as he had walked back with them from Gabriel's mansion. Something had happened between them and, neither one of them was aware that the other one had felt it too.

When the recital was over, everyone applauded, and then all the adults began gathering up children and exiting the Council chamber to go to bed. Vincent and Joe found Diana and the children on her lap sound asleep. Angela collected Darla, and Vincent picked up Luke and handed him to Olivia. When he turned back around to gather up Diana, Joe already had her in his arms.

"I guess you had better show me where to deposit Sleeping Beauty, here." Joe smiled at Vincent.

Vincent smiled back at him. "Come on, we'll take her to the chamber she slept in the last time she stayed with us." He spoke to Father first, though, as he picked up Joe's and Diana's coats. "Father, can you keep these backpacks and my cloak in your bedroom chamber until I

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return? I want to show you what Diana and Joe collected from Gabriel's mansion."

Father replied chuckling, "Of course, Vincent. It looks like you two wore poor Diana completely out!"

Vincent smiled at him. "Yes, it has been a long, eventful day, but a very productive one."

Rebecca joined Vincent and Joe as they headed for Diana's guest chamber. When they arrived there, Vincent laid the coats on the chair by the door. Rebecca turned back the covers on the bed, and Joe laid Diana on it. Rebecca took her shoes off and put them under the chair. Vincent then covered Diana up and tucked her in.

When Vincent stood up, Joe chuckled. "When she's asleep, she looks like a little kid. I wish we could keep her that way for a couple of weeks until this is all over with."

Vincent laughed softly. "Well, I suppose we could have Father sedate her."

Joe tried to keep a straight face. "That's really tempting, isn't it? I think, though, that she would probably clobber both of us when she did wake up!"

Vincent chuckled, "Oh, I'm sure of it! Don't worry about her, Joe. We'll keep her safe here. She has more sense than to go running off. Besides, breaking that code in Gabriel's notebook will keep her mind occupied for awhile."

Joe was very serious as he replied. "I hope so, Vincent. Adrian meant business when he talked about his determination to kill Diana."

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Vincent nodded his head. "Well, as soon as we do break that code, you can put Adrian where he belongs, and he won't be able to follow through with that threat."

Rebecca looked at the two men and smiled. "Go ahead and take Joe home, Vincent. I'll sleep in the next chamber tonight and keep an eye on Diana."

Joe smiled at Rebecca as he picked up his coat. "Thank you, Rebecca. When she wakes up, tell her I'll check back here in a few days to see how she is coming with breaking the code."

Rebecca nodded and smiled. "I'll be sure to tell her, Joe."

Vincent then accompanied Joe back through the tunnels to Joe's apartment building. In spite of all of their precautions, both men still found themselves worrying about Diana's safety in light of the ominous threat from Adrian.

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Chapter VII

Unfinished Symphony

Dianna walked into Vincent's chamber with a bottle of breast milk for Little Jacob and found Vincent rocking him. He looked up and smiled at Diana. She smiled back at Vincent and sat on the edge of his bed. Diana was dressed like a tunnel-dweller, wearing a pretty patchwork jumper and blouse. The community members with clothing designer skills enjoyed seeing what they could create from fabrics and clothing thrown away by topsiders. What they made was not only attractive but practical.

Vincent grinned as he spoke to her. "You look just like one of us!"

Diana stood up and modeled for him with a giggle. "Do you really think so? I've got two suitcases full of clothes from Chuck's cab and from what I had left at the

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Walkers' place, but these are a lot more comfortable. Almost every morning when I wake up, my wardrobe has expanded because of what everyone keeps bringing to me."

Vincent chuckled, "They are having fun taking care of you. Did you get a chance to ask Peter about who is donating this milk to Little Jacob?"

Diana answered, "I told Peter that you wanted to know."

Vincent looked at her. "What did he say?"

Diana answered smoothly, "Peter told me that she needs to remain anonymous."

Vincent gave her a probing look, "Hmm, 'needs' rather than 'wants,' interesting choice of words!"

A nervous laugh escaped Diana, but she recovered quickly with, "You Monster! Are you actually going to argue semantics with me? What can I say? I'm a crime investigator! Delivering breast milk from anonymous sources is just a side-gig!"

Vincent chuckled, "Well, little Brat, wherever Peter is getting it from, Little Jacob is thriving on it. If you see Peter again, will you please ask him to pass along my thanks to the woman?"

Diana smiled at Vincent. "I'll be sure to do that, Vincent. I'm going to go back to Father's chamber now. We're making really good progress using that code to translate Gabriel's notebook. We've nearly got it licked." Diana put the bottle on the table beside Vincent and headed out the door. When she was down the tunnel and

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out of earshot of Vincent, she whispered, "And I will pass along your thanks as soon as humanly possible!"

Vincent looked at the bottle of breast milk on the table. He had finally realized that every time he picked up one of Little Jacob's bottles of milk, he would experience a vision about Catherine. He assumed that such phenomenon must be a manifestation of his sorrow that it wasn't Catherine's breast milk that was feeding their son. He would have looked forward to visions about her, if she wasn't always so distressed in them, or if he could only manage to save her from whatever terror she was facing in those visions. Instead, she always slipped out of his grasp or evaporated from sight before he could. He wondered what he would see this time as he picked the bottle up.

Vincent was swept away instantly into another waking vision. Little Jacob was still in his arms, and the baby was also with him in this vision. They were in a beautiful meadow, and Catherine stood before him only a few yards away. She looked ecstatic to see him.

"Vincent, you have him! You have our baby! He's safe!" Catherine's voice was filled with pure joy as she began to run to Vincent.

Vincent had Little Jacob in his left arm, and he reached his right arm out to receive Catherine. However, before she could get to him, a dark faceless figure sprang out of the ground behind her and threw a black cover over her. She screamed in terror as she was snatched off her

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feet, and then the figure disappeared back into the ground with her. Vincent roared with anger and frustration, and then he was back in the rocker with Little Jacob looking up at his father with huge, frightened eyes. He quickly comforted the baby and began feeding him his bottle.

It was no more than a few minutes after Vincent's vision that Mary appeared in his doorway with her usual look of concern for him. "You had another vision, didn't you?" She asked him.

Vincent answered with sadness in his voice. "Yes, Mary. I'm sorry that I alarmed you. I'm afraid I scared poor Little Jacob too."

Mary smiled at him. "He doesn't look much worse for the wear! Do you want me to take him for you? You do look worse for the wear!"

Vincent looked at her for a moment, and then he said. "You know, Mary that would actually be very helpful. I need to go see Narcissa about these dreams and visions. She is the only one of us who truly understands that world. Father and Diana are busy working on translating Gabriel's notebook, so I don't want to disturb them. Will you please let them know where I have gone? I should be back late tonight."

Mary took Little Jacob when Vincent stood up. "Don't worry, Vincent, I'll let them know. Just take your time."

Vincent never knew where he was going to find

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Narcissa. This time, he was surprised to actually find her in her own large chamber, not far from the Chamber of the Winds. He used to love to play as a child on the stone staircase there and to explore all of the mysterious caverns surrounding the bottom floor of that chamber. One of those caverns was Narcissa's, and she was at home.

Narcissa called out to Vincent before he even entered her chamber. "Come in, child! I have been expecting you. Your mind is troubled, is it not?" When Vincent entered Narcissa's chamber, it was filled with the light of many beautiful candles. Sea shells of all sizes and shapes were everywhere, and brightly colored cloths and tapestries adorned the entire chamber.

Vincent smiled at her perception as he replied. "You are right, as always. Something very strange is happening, Narcissa. I am having dreams and visions that are as real to me as standing here talking to you is real. They all involve Catherine being lost and trapped in some sort of continuous nightmare. I can't understand why I would constantly dream such a thing."

Narcissa shook her head at Vincent. "You know what Father would say about my advice! 'She lives in a make-believe world of nonsense.' If you want it though, dreams should never be ignored. Follow your heart, Vincent, and find your woman! She needs you! Your connection to her is healing, and love is holding her in this world still."

Vincent's expression was dubious. "I have always

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trusted your wisdom, Narcissa, but this cannot be. I was with her when she died, and I carried her body to her home. She can only be reaching out to me from beyond the grave. I just don't know why yet."

Narcissa looked intently into Vincent's eyes with her nearly sightless ones, and she said gently, "Vincent, child, you of all people should know that things are not always as they appear!"

Vincent was taken aback by this shocking statement. "Narcissa, you have knowledge! Please share it with me!"

Narcissa put her hand on Vincent's arm. "It is not what I know that is important, Vincent. It is what you already know that is! Search your heart, child! Follow your connection with your Catherine. She is lost, and she needs for you to find her. Whether she is here or beyond the grave is for you to figure out, so that you can help her."

Vincent patted Narcissa's hand. "Thank you, Narcissa. I will figure it out, and I will help her. I know what I need to do now."

Narcissa smiled at Vincent. "You knew what you needed to do before you ever came looking for me, child. Don't worry, you will find your Catherine and save her from her nightmares. I have seen it!"

When Vincent finally arrived back near his own chamber, he chuckled as he heard Tony doing voice impressions as he read *Snow White and the Seven*

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Dwarves to Little Jacob. The baby was giggling. When he walked into his chamber, Tony was holding the book of children's stories he was reading from, dancing around Little Jacob's bassinet, and making funny faces to go along with the voice impressions of the seven dwarves as he read. Tony looked up from his antics and grinned at Vincent.

Vincent sat down on the edge of his bed. "Don't let me stop you, Tony. I'm enjoying the story too!"

Tony laughed, "OK, Vincent." Then Tony resumed the story while Little Jacob continued giggling at him.

Vincent reached over to his nightstand and picked up the last journal Catherine had given to him following his illness when his memory was left severely impaired. She had told Vincent that it seemed appropriate for him to get a fresh start with a new journal. He opened the cover and fingered her written words to him, "With love all things are possible. Forever, Catherine." Vincent hadn't been able to face reading his previous journals because of the pain it would cause him to know how much he had forgotten. Now, though, it was time to do just that. The answers he was seeking had to be in them. He laid this last gift of Catherine's down, stood up, walked to one of his book shelves, and collected his journals from the previous two years.

He put the journals into his backpack, and then he turned to Tony, who had now finished reading the story. "Tony, I need to go on a journey to the Crystal Cavern in

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the morning. Would you please see to Little Jacob's care while I am gone? I also need for you to let everyone know where I will be. I'm not sure when I will be back. Tell Father that I am doing what I should have done some time ago to figure out what these dreams about Catherine mean."

Tony was very serious as he replied. "I'll let everyone know and talk to Father for you. Don't worry about Little Jacob. Everyone loves babysitting him. I'll come back here early in the morning and take care of everything."

Vincent smiled at him. "Thank you, Tony."

The next morning, Vincent stopped by William's kitchen. William was very happy to pack up provisions for his journey. Then Vincent started the day-long trek to the Crystal Cavern. He knew that only there would he have the tranquil quiet, without distractions, that he needed to figure out how to help his restless and distressed Catherine to find peace.

When Vincent finally arrived at the Crystal Cavern, he laid his lantern on the ground at the edge of the threshold. Then he climbed down the eight foot drop at the mouth of the cave onto the floor of the cavern. He picked the lantern back up and put it into a crevice in the wall. Every time he visited this cave, the spectacular beauty of the sparkling crystals in the cavern walls always took his breath away. This time was no different, and he stood still for a moment enjoying the prism colors that bounced

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around the walls from the flickering lantern light. Father had been convinced that Narcissa's story of the Crystal Cavern was just another one of her fantastic tales of the imagination until Vincent finally found it, and he brought back the crystal from which Mouse created his anniversary gift for Catherine.

Vincent took off his cloak and went to the large, flat-topped boulder that served as a chair when he visited the Crystal Cavern. He spread his cloak over the boulder and sat down on it. Vincent opened his backpack and took out some of the food and drink that William had prepared for him. As he bowed his head and asked for a blessing on his meal, he also prayed for the strength he needed to face whatever he would find in his journals. Vincent wanted to be able to put his dear Catherine finally to rest.

When Vincent was finished eating, he took one of the journals out of his backpack. This was the one that included dates immediately preceding the one on which, according to his marriage certificate, he had married Catherine. Vincent settled back on the boulder and, with his back against the concave surface of the cavern wall behind him, took a deep breath, and opened the journal. He started to read, and a seemingly magical doorway to his lost memories swung open. Vincent stepped through it as the vision opened.

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As Vincent's memories were unlocked, he was taken back in time to nearly a year-and-a-half earlier:

When the justice system in the world above released Cameron Benson and Dale Mercer to continue their cold-blooded murdering spree, Vincent took it upon himself to protect the young prostitutes they were hunting. Instead, the two men became the hunted, and Vincent frustrated each subsequent attempt they made to lure those young girls to their deaths. After watching them slash the throat of their fourth victim in Central Park, and seeing the gleeful pleasure they took in killing her, Vincent had been sickened. The murder had taken place so quickly that Vincent had been helpless to stop it. Their wealthy families had seen to it that Catherine's efforts to get them off the streets, after they killed their fifth victim, had failed.

Vincent was returning above for another night of patrolling when Mouse ran up to him completely out of breath. "Vincent! Caught you! Good! Going above again to protect the girls?"

Vincent gave Mouse a grim look. "Yes, Mouse, I am. I must until Catherine's world can stop those murderers permanently."

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Mouse nodded at Vincent. "Got something for you." He held out an huge Kevlar vest, and Vincent took it from him.

Vincent looked at Mouse with a questioning expression. "Where did you get a Kevlar vest, Mouse?"

Mouse was firm. "Found it! Didn't steal it! You needed. Mouse found!"

Vincent raised his eyebrows and tried to look stern. "You just found a really big Kevlar vest?" Mouse nodded.

Vincent smiled at him. "Thank you, Mouse. This will come in really handy. Why don't you help me get it on?" He gave Mouse the vest, took off his cloak and outer shirt, and handed them to Mouse to hold. Then Vincent put the Kevlar vest on under everything.

"Well, Mouse, thanks to you, I'm all set to stop those madmen." Vincent suddenly stopped talking to Mouse, and his head flew up as he felt the danger Catherine was in. Cameron Benson and Dale Mercer were hunting his Catherine, and she was terrified. He left Mouse without another word, and raced out of the tunnels and into the night air above.

Vincent ran across the rooftops to get to the old movie theater the men had lured Catherine to. They knew that Catherine wasn't going to give up her case against them, and they were sure she was behind the mysterious cloaked figure who kept interfering with their murder attempts, so they had paid a young black prostitute to call

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Catherine with a promise of information about the killings. When Vincent went through an upper story window and found Catherine in the movie theater, Dale Mercer was holding her helpless, and Cameron Benson had a gun pointed at her. Vincent quickly intervened by leaping down out of the balcony with an angry roar, distracting both of them. He quickly slashed Dale Mercer, freeing Catherine, and then planted himself between her and Cameron Benson with his gun. Cameron Benson shot Vincent in the chest, and Catherine screamed Vincent's name in fearful panic, as she saw him stagger from the impact. Then Vincent charged at Cameron Benson and killed him.

Catherine ran to Vincent and grabbed his arm as she said with desperation in her voice, "We've got to get out of here!" As Vincent and Catherine ran out of the theater, she couldn't keep up with him and called after him, "Vincent! Vincent! Are you all right?"

When he finally stopped in an alley, and she caught up with him, she searched frantically for the wound in his chest. Vincent leaned against a building, looked heavenward, and cried out in the anguish of his soul, "Nothing! Nothing but madness! Nothing but blood! When will it stop?" Catherine was silent as she hugged him, trying to comfort him, as he struggled to recover from the necessity of killing again in this violent world to save her from death.

Vincent finally looked down at her. Catherine had a

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stricken expression on her face and had begun searching again for the wound she knew he had to have from the gun shot. Vincent put one giant hand over both of hers against his chest. Then he put his other hand under her chin, and he lifted her face so he could see into her eyes. Next came his impassioned plea, "Catherine, marry me before this world kills you, and I lose you forever!" The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. Catherine watched in wonder as a myriad of emotions passed over his face ending with an expression of shock that he had actually voiced what he had always dreamed of, but he had never dared to utter.

Catherine's reply was equally fervent. "Don't you dare take that back! Yes, Vincent, I will marry you!"

Vincent smiled tenderly at her. "How could I ever take back what has burned in my heart unspoken for such a long time?"

Catherine's expression then changed back to fear again. "Vincent, are you hurt? I saw you take a bullet!"

Vincent replied, "No, Catherine, I'm not hurt, and I'll show you why as soon as we get out of here. We need to get your car away from here, so no one comes looking for you when they find those dead men. I'll take you back to your car, and I'll meet you at the Central Park tunnel secret entrance. Then we can talk where it is quiet and safe."

When Catherine arrived in the Central Park tunnel,

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she opened the gate and tapped on the door. It slid open. Vincent took her hand as she stepped over the threshold, and he shut both the gate and the sliding door again. He laid his cloak on the tunnel floor, and they sat down together against the wall. They had often spent time with one another here, because it was far enough away from both worlds and from the nearest sentry on duty to be private.

Catherine still looked worried. "Vincent, how is it that you are not hurt?"

Vincent opened his shirt and showed her where the bullet had been caught in the Kevlar vest. "Mouse came to me tonight and said that he had found a Kevlar vest for me, because he knew that I was going above again after the girl slashers."

Catherine giggled, "He found it, huh?"

Vincent laughed too, "That was his solemn statement."

Catherine was still smiling. "Thank goodness for Mouse and his timely scavenging. I don't even want to know where he managed to find a Kevlar vest that would fit you!"

Vincent's expression became very serious. "Catherine, what I asked of you was supremely selfish. Before we start planning a wedding, I want to be sure that you understand what it would mean in your life."

Catherine was equally serious as she answered him. "Remember when I told you that it wasn't wrong for you to want that kind of happiness for yourself? I told you that

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you deserve everything. Well, we deserve everything!”

Vincent sighed and smiled at her. “Do you remember when your father passed away, and you came below to me to grieve? You asked me then if we would ever truly be together. I told you, ‘We can truly be together only if and when we understand how great the price is we will have to pay, how great the sacrifices are that we will have to make, and we are able to accept those and move beyond them.’ Do you really think that you are ready to pay that price and leave your life above behind?”

Catherine smiled at Vincent and answered him. “When I had my crisis thinking that I couldn’t manage my relationship with you together with my responsibilities in the world above, I wanted to run away to you. I wanted to hide from everything I thought was impossible in my life; hide from my fear, hide from my confusion, and hide from my pain. You wouldn’t let me run away to you then, because it was the wrong reason to go below. Then, I found a balance and learned to enjoy both worlds simultaneously, and it was worth the sacrifices we made to keep building our relationship with one another during the small snatches of time we had. The fear, confusion, and pain are part of who I am, and I accept that now. I don’t need to hide from them anymore, Vincent. Now, I choose to be yours in your world, not to run away, but because I am incomplete without you. I cannot grow any more as a person or be an happy contributing member of society without you. You are the other best half of me. I

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don't want to be making any more cameo appearances in each other's dreams, Vincent. It is time to live our dreams and be with each other completely."

Vincent looked both happy and relieved. "I have been waiting so long to hear you say that, but I didn't dare to think that it might be possible. I didn't want you to ever feel that you had sacrificed an important part of your life to be with me."

Catherine smiled softly at Vincent. "I think I was waiting to even broach the subject again for you to realize that wanting your dream is not selfish. We have earned this happiness, Vincent, and we are better people because of it. Our relationship reminds me of one of my favorite pieces of classical music, *Schubert's Unfinished Symphony*."

Vincent smiled as he remembered the concerts they had attended in the drainage tunnel under the concert platform. "Yes, you and I have enjoyed hearing it performed a couple of times now by the orchestra in Central Park when we have attended in the tunnel under the stage platform. With the acoustics there, we always have the best seats in the park!"

Catherine nodded and smiled as she continued. "It was Austrian composer Franz Peter Schubert's eighth symphony, which he wrote in 1822, but it wasn't even performed until 1865, thirty-seven years after his death. He wrote only two of the customary four movements, and then he set the work aside and never touched it again. It

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is still an unsolved historical mystery whether he had actually intended for it to be complete with only two movements.”

Vincent smiled softly at Catherine. “You think it is time for us to complete our symphony.”

Catherine nodded, “It is long past time, Vincent. We are best friends, and we are in love. What remains is marriage and living happily-ever-after together.”

Vincent spoke carefully. “Catherine, there are other factors to consider, though. I am something that has never been—an anomaly. I don’t even know if I am altogether human. For one thing, I might not be capable of giving you children.”

Catherine took Vincent’s face in both of her hands, and looked into his eyes as she replied. “Vincent, if we don’t have children of our own, there are plenty of children who need us in Father’s world that we can be parents to. That and my relationship with you is all I need.”

Vincent looked down, sighed, and then looked back into her eyes. “And if you should become pregnant with my child? What kind of a child would it be? What if that child looks like me?”

Catherine wrapped her arms around Vincent’s neck and whispered in his ear. “Vincent, it would be an extraordinary child! I pray that I can bear your child, and that it is just like you! That child would have all of our love and support as well as the love and support of your world of wonderful people. I would be blissfully happy to

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have your child!"

Vincent smiled but then went on with his concerns. "Catherine, another thing that worries me is the part of me that isn't human. That part can be unpredictable and violent. When my inner Demon surfaces to protect those I love, it nearly consumes me, and I have difficulty submerging it again. It would destroy me if I ever harmed you, even accidentally."

Catherine assured him. "Vincent, I know you, every part of you, and I am not afraid! You would never hurt me."

Vincent reminded Catherine of a conversation they had long ago. "Remember when we were chasing the 'Subway Slasher,' Jason Walker?" Catherine nodded her head, and Vincent continued. "I worried that I wasn't any different from that vigilante. Jason Walker felt that he was protecting the weak and elderly from the young thugs who mugged them on the subway. You assured me that I was different, because I would never hurt an innocent person who got in the way like Jason did, and that I was gentle. Then I told you that even the gentlest man has a demon locked inside him. The Demon inside me wants to protect you and would only harm those seeking to terrorize or destroy you. The Beast inside me, however, is purely selfish, is violent, is consumed by passion, and he wants desperately to seize and possess you. I am more afraid of the Beast than I am of the Demon. I never want to cause you fear, pain, or anguish of any kind."

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Catherine put her hand over Vincent's heart.

"Vincent, this woman likes a little Beast in her man, and she loves you, not just the gentle part on the surface, but all of you, even the parts you carefully control. I feel safe and protected by my vigilant Demon. I'm thrilled and excited by my passionate Beast, and my cultured, gentle, and intelligent man makes me feel comforted, adored, and beautiful. Believe me, Vincent, it is very sexy to know that I am that desirable to you, and it is even sexier to know that you are the master of your Beast. You are not just some hollow-imitation-man. You are the real genuine article, a complete man, with wonderful complexities, and new depths of personality for me to enjoy discovering. I could never be afraid of you now, not ever!"

Vincent covered her hand with his. "Your confidence and love have made me a better man, Catherine."

Catherine smiled at him. "And I am a better woman because of you, Vincent. You were deeply hurt by what happened with Lisa when you were a teenager, and you have never fully forgiven yourself for that. When she was practicing her ballet steps for you, it was a natural reaction to try to embrace her when she danced to you and then kissed your cheeks. It wasn't your fault when she became alarmed, abruptly pulled away from you, and you couldn't release her quickly enough to avoid scratching her back. Lisa didn't even think that accidental scratch you gave her was important. She didn't have the same desire for you that you had for her. You

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were just a playmate to Lisa, and she was too self-absorbed to realize what she was doing to you, and how you were affected by her teasing. I do desire you so very much! It has never even occurred to you that a part of me might want to be seized and possessed by you, has it?"

Vincent looked shocked. "Never! Doesn't that frighten you?"

Catherine shook her head and replied emphatically, "No!"

Vincent looked at her in wonder. "Why not?"

Catherine explained to him, "Because I can feel how much you love me, Vincent."

Vincent still looked unsure. "Be that as it may, and it does relieve me to hear you say it, I want to make love to you, Catherine, not just have sex with you when we are married. In order for that to happen, I must keep the Beast within me tightly leashed."

Catherine smiled softly at him. "That is why I am in love with you, Vincent, and why I've never allowed any other man to ever lay an hand on me. Fortunately, they all showed me their true colors before I was ever even tempted to let them seduce me."

Vincent's heart leaped for joy, but then as the full meaning of her words dawned on him, he became very concerned. "Are you telling me, Catherine, that you are also a virgin? I had just assumed with the other relationships you have had before me, and having been engaged twice—"

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Catherine told him, "The fact is, my attitudes about sex are very old-fashioned, thanks to my parents. I believe in premarital chastity." She studied his face. "That worries you, Vincent. Why?"

Vincent looked deeply into her eyes with loving concern. "I feel a great responsibility to be sure that your first sexual experience is warm and wonderful, in no way painful, either emotionally or physically. Father was very thorough in our sex education classes, and he warned the boys about being careful in order to avoid virgin injuries when we married."

It was Catherine's turn to look shocked as she finally realized what it was that Vincent was anxious about. "Vincent, are you afraid of physically hurting me when we make love?"

Vincent nodded, "I'm terrified of that."

Catherine hugged him and said, "Poor Vincent! Please don't worry about that. I'm not a teenager. I have been having gynecological exams for years now. You can't hurt me that way!"

Vincent closed his eyes in relief, opened them, and finally asked her, "Have you thought about how long you want to be engaged?"

Catherine was very firm as she answered. "I don't want to wait, Vincent. As far as I'm concerned, we have been engaged for over two years now. That is more than long enough! Let's get married Saturday. Just tell Father that we only want a simple ceremony. We don't need to

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have your world making a fuss over us. I just want to be yours forever as soon as possible!”

Vincent nodded his head and smiled. “Well, since you are sure, now let me do this the right way.” He stood up, took both of her hands, and pulled her to her feet in front of him. Then he dropped to one knee, and pulled her down to sit on his upright knee. Vincent looked deeply into her eyes, which had turned bright with unshed tears and said, “Catherine, I’ve wanted to marry you and make you mine since the moment I laid eyes on you. Will you grant my fondest wish and the greatest desire of my heart, and marry me?”

Catherine was completely overcome. “Oh, Vincent, yes! I want you more than anything else in my life!” She threw her arms around his neck, and cried softly with joy.

Vincent whispered in her ear, “Then, my Love, there is just one more thing I must do.”

Catherine pulled back, and looked at him through her tears. “What is that, Vincent?”

Vincent took the ceramic rose out of its pouch and said, “Hold this for a moment,” and he placed it in her open hand. Then he emptied the pouch into his own hand, and took the rose from her, placing it carefully back in its pouch. She looked with curiosity at the little black velvet pouch in his hand, and he emptied its contents out into his hand. She stared at the two beautifully crafted crystal rings, and laughed with delight. He brushed the tears off her cheeks, and put the larger ring into her hand.

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It was a wide masculine yellow-gold ring studded all around with tiny heart-shaped crystals. Her rings were masterpieces of craftsmanship too. The center ring, which Vincent lifted out from between the two joined guard rings, had a beautiful solitaire setting of an heart-shaped crystal on a yellow-gold ring studded all around with tiny round crystals. The joined yellow-gold wedding guard rings each had half of a lovely white-gold rose, which surrounded the heart-shaped crystal stone when the engagement ring was inserted between them.

Catherine's eyes were huge as she admired the rings. "Oh, Vincent! They are exquisite. How did you get these? Are they from the Crystal Cavern?"

Vincent smiled with happiness at her delight. "They are. Cullen and Mouse worked on these for weeks for me. They started on them right after Mouse made your crystal necklace that I gave you on the first anniversary of finding you."

Catherine stared at him in amazement. "You have had them in the pouch I gave you all this time?"

Vincent nodded and smiled. "I have. They kept my dream of marrying you someday alive." He took her left hand and put the engagement ring on her finger. Then he put the guard wedding rings and his ring back into the velvet pouch. "Catherine, I know that you can't wear this in the world above yet, not until you have wrapped up your life there. I want you to keep these rings for us until you can wear them and be with me permanently. Now, I

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need to get you back home to bed.”

Vincent stood her up again, and stood up in front of her. Catherine looked up at him with wide eyes and said, “Vincent, you forgot something!”

Vincent raised his eyebrows as he smiled and looked down at her. “Tell me, Catherine, what did I forget?”

Catherine smiled back at him. “You can’t ask me to marry you and then not seal it with a kiss!”

Vincent had dreamed of kissing Catherine, but he had never allowed himself to dwell on that happy possibility. He looked completely flustered, and Catherine giggled softly at him. Then she asked him, “Remember when you helped Elliott Burch and me escape from that South American death squad?”

Vincent answered, “Yes, I do. That was a very frightening time for all three of us.”

Catherine went on. “Well, I know that you remember feeling that kiss Elliott gave me out-of-the-blue. After he gave me that kiss, he told me that he could then die happy. I told you later in your chamber when you mentioned feeling that kiss that I had wished that it was you kissing me.”

Vincent nodded, “And I remember telling you that Elliott could give you so many things that I never could.”

Catherine shook her head at him. “Elliott could never give me what I have been given by you, or anything that I really need, which you give to me in great abundance. My friends used to say that I was the one most likely to major

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in and then practice ‘fashion law’.” Vincent chuckled at her. “After you found me, my priorities changed, and so did my life. It became so much richer, and I am so much happier. I don’t know what Joe Maxwell is going to think of my resignation. Do you want to hear what he said to me recently?”

Vincent smiled and said, “Tell me, Catherine.”

Then he chuckled again as Catherine imitated Joe’s masculine voice. “Well, Radcliffe, I sure misjudged you when you came to work for us! I thought that you were just another rich ‘Daddy’s girl’ trying to relieve her guilt over her ‘silver spoon’ life by doing a month of penance as a civil servant. I didn’t ever figure you would stick around for the hard stuff!” Then Catherine looked deeply into Vincent’s eyes as she said, “I had the strength to ‘stick around for the hard stuff’ because of you.”

Vincent said firmly, “The strength was already within you, Catherine.”

Catherine responded, “But you taught me how to tap into that strength, Vincent.”

Vincent went on. “You have given so much time and effort to your job. Joe Maxwell should understand your wish to pursue something else now.”

Catherine nodded at him. “I’m sure he will. He has been a really good friend to me. Now, Vincent, I want that kiss that I have been waiting forever for!” Vincent blinked at her and still looked hesitant. “Vincent, tell me what is troubling you.”

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Vincent spoke softly. "Catherine, I can't imagine anything more wonderful right now than kissing you for the first time. I have never allowed myself to dwell on that possibility, though, because I am so afraid of losing control of myself with you."

Catherine took his face in her hands again. "Vincent, you won't lose control. I know you. That won't happen!"

Then Vincent gave her a smile as he shrugged his shoulders. He took his forefinger and gently caressed her lovely lips, and she was thrilled by his touch. "Catherine, I have never kissed a woman on the lips before. You are going to have to teach me."

She smiled and replied, "I'll show you."

Catherine reached up as she stood on her toes, locked her arms around Vincent's neck, and pulled his head down to her. Vincent wrapped his arms around Catherine, and just before their lips met, he received both an empathic feeling as well as a telepathic vision of the kiss she wanted, and he acted accordingly. His mouth took possession of her lips, and all of the unexpressed desire they felt for each other was communicated in that passionate kiss. The thrill was like electricity pulsing between them. Vincent felt warmth spreading throughout his body. Catherine sighed with pleasure and melted in his arms as his embrace tightened, and he lifted her off the tunnel floor.

When they finally parted, and Vincent set her gently down, Catherine was breathless. "Oh, Vincent! I don't

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need to teach you! I don't know anything about kissing that you don't already know!"

Vincent smiled down at her. "But, you did teach me, Catherine. I received that vision from you just before we kissed."

Catherine giggled, "There, you see! Elliott Burch could never do that for me! Tell me how you feel now, Vincent."

Vincent smiled softly at her. "Catherine, there are no words!"

Catherine nodded and smiled. "For once, I agree with you."

Vincent added, "I could live happily on the memory of that kiss for the rest of my life!"

Catherine was still smiling, "Me too!" She picked up Vincent's hand and put it against her cheek. "I am so deeply in love with you, Vincent! So much has happened tonight! You saved my life yet again. You treated me to the most romantic proposal I could ever have imagined. You rocked my world with that heart-pounding, very exciting, passionate kiss. I am now pleasantly worn out and wonderfully sleepy."

Vincent sat down against the wall of the tunnel, and held out his hand to Catherine. She took it, and he pulled her down onto his lap. She laid her head on his massive chest, and Vincent whispered, "Sleep then, sweet Catherine."

As Catherine lay relaxed on Vincent's lap, cradled in his arms, she said softly, "My body is still tingling from

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that kiss!”

Vincent smiled as he replied, “Yes, I can feel that.”

Catherine looked up into his eyes. “You really can, can’t you?”

Vincent nodded, “Our bond is very strong, especially now. It gave me intense pleasure to feel you respond to my touch and kiss like that, Catherine. Before you loved me, I thought that all I would ever inspire in any woman was fear.”

Catherine lay her head back on Vincent’s chest and said, “I am so happy that we are getting married, Vincent, because I want you desperately.”

Vincent sighed with happiness, “And I want you just as desperately, Catherine.”

Catherine sounded drowsy. “You aren’t even tired, are you, Vincent?”

Vincent smiled softly and whispered, “No, Catherine, I just feel profoundly peaceful, holding you safely in my arms.”

Catherine sighed, “Your strength and endurance are truly astonishing. I do feel so very safe and protected when I am in your arms.”

Within minutes she fell sound asleep. Vincent took the engagement ring off her finger, put it back into the velvet pouch in her hand, and then put the pouch into her jacket pocket.

When Vincent was sure she was fully asleep, he gathered her up in his arms and stood up with her, so he

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could carry her through the tunnels to her building. Almost halfway there, he met Father and Mary rushing through the passage toward him. Father was limping on his cane, and Mary was carrying his medical bag. Both were completely out of breath.

Father looked panic stricken. "Vincent! Is she hurt?"

Vincent smiled and whispered, "No, Father, she is only asleep. It has just been a very long night. You two needn't have troubled yourselves."

Both of them were visibly relieved, and Mary said, "Jamie was on night watch on this end, and she saw you carrying Catherine. Mouse had told us that you went above hunting for those killers again. When you left him abruptly and ran out of the tunnels, he knew you felt that she was in danger from them."

Vincent nodded, "Catherine was in danger, but I got there in time."

Father continued, "Jamie got Zach to cover her post, and then she came to our chambers and woke both of us up, because she feared the worst. What has become of those men?"

Vincent was grim as he replied. "They will never kill another young girl again." Then he smiled with joy. "I have wonderful news for both of you. I'll tell you as soon as I get back from taking Catherine home. If you see Jamie again, could you ask her if she could grab my cloak off the floor at the park secret door?"

Father nodded, "Of course, Vincent."

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Then Mary asked, "Do you want to put Catherine to bed in one of the satellite chambers down here?"

Vincent replied, "No, she must work tomorrow, and she will rest better in her own bed."

Father nodded, "All right, we'll wait for you to get back then."

When Vincent arrived at Catherine's tunnel access under her building, he gently awakened her to send her up to her apartment. When Vincent set her down, she looked at her hand in panic. "Did I drop the rings?"

Vincent chuckled, "No, Catherine, they are in your jacket pocket."

Catherine put her hand into her pocket and was reassured by the feel of the velvet pouch. "Oh, Vincent, I can't wait until Saturday! I feel like a silly school girl. When will you talk to Father about making the arrangements with Kevin Chin?"

Vincent chuckled at her charming look of little-girl excitement. "There is nothing silly about you, Catherine. Father and Mary are actually waiting for me now. They met me in the tunnel with Father's medical bag as I was carrying you here. Apparently, Jamie saw us and was sure that you had been injured by those killers."

Catherine's expression changed to concern. "Poor Jamie, Mary, and Father, I'm so sorry we frightened them! If you hadn't come after me, I would have been more than injured. I would have been dead! You have saved my life

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so many times in the course of doing my job because of our connection. I love you so much, Vincent.”

As they embraced, Vincent whispered, “I love you too, Catherine. Meet me in the park tomorrow night under the bridge at 9:00.”

She whispered in his ear. “I’ll be there, Vincent.” Then he watched her climb the ladder to the basement of her building.

When Vincent arrived in Father’s chamber, Jamie had already retrieved his cloak, and it was lying on Father’s table. Father had fallen asleep on his easy chair, and the book he had been reading had fallen to his lap.

Mary came in and shook her head. Vincent looked at her and said, “I’ll take care of Father, Mary. You go on to bed, and I’ll tell both of you my news in the morning. There isn’t anything that can be done about it tonight anyway.”

Mary smiled at him as she started back out the door. “All right, Vincent. I’ll see you in the morning then.”

Vincent picked up the book on Father’s lap and laid it back on the table. He reclined the easy chair, and then he went into Father’s sleeping chamber and brought back an heavy blanket and a pillow. He put the pillow under Father’s head, covered him with the blanket, and tucked him in. Then Vincent picked up his cloak, went to his own chamber, and went to bed.

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The next morning, a Wednesday late in September, Father found Vincent and Mary in William's kitchen chamber eating breakfast together. He sat down beside them and asked, "Why didn't you wake me up last night?"

Vincent smiled at him. "You needed your rest, Father. There wasn't anything you could do last night about my news that couldn't be done better today anyway."

Father looked curious. "Tell me, Vincent."

Vincent practically glowed with happiness. "I asked Catherine to marry me last night, and she said yes!"

The entire chamber full of community members heard Vincent's news, and they all gathered around him with happy laughter and congratulations. They were all clamoring to know when they were to be married.

Vincent answered them all. "We want to be married this Saturday, and we just want to have a very simple, no-fuss ceremony. No one needs to go to any trouble setting this up for us."

Rebecca put her hands on her hips and glared at Vincent. "Are you out of your mind, Vincent? Yours is the wedding we have all been praying to see! We may have only three days, but this wedding is going to be spectacular!"

Vincent looked around the chamber, and all of the women as well as the men were nodding their heads at him. He laughed, "Well, I guess the words 'simple' and 'no-fuss' are no longer in my vocabulary. I bow to the majority!" They all laughed with him.

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Later that afternoon, Father came into Vincent's chamber and sat down in his easy chair. Vincent closed the journal he had been writing in at his table and looked at Father. Father gave him an helpless look. "I've just been shooed out of the Council chamber! With all of the hullabaloo going on in there, I don't think I want to be around there anyway. The entire community has gone completely wedding crazy! Everyone will be telling stories about your wedding for years to come."

Vincent laughed, "I'm glad that they are having such a good time with our happy news. You are welcome to camp out here until after the wedding."

Father chuckled, "I might have to!"

Then Vincent became serious. "Actually, I'm really glad you are here, Father. There is something important that I need to talk to you about. I need your counsel and advice."

Father looked at Vincent with concern. "Tell me, Vincent!"

Vincent began, "Father, you were always very open with us about biological matters, and you made us feel comfortable talking to you about everything concerning our bodies that we might worry about. I need your wisdom now about making love to Catherine after we are married. She is also a virgin, and I am afraid of hurting her. I would rather abstain from sex altogether than ever cause her any pain."

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Father's expression was one of compassion for Vincent's fear as he said, "I think Catherine might have something to say about that. It is very clear that she desires you."

Vincent nodded his head. "Yes, she actually had plenty to say about that. She is completely fearless."

Father smiled at Vincent. "That's good, Vincent! You don't want her to be afraid. Fear is the major cause of virgin injuries. Also, she is not a young girl. I'm sure that she has been having regular gynecological examinations. Intercourse won't cause her to tear, if that is what you are afraid of."

Vincent looked vastly relieved. "Thank you, Father. That information is very helpful. Catherine actually said the same thing about the examinations. I guess I just needed to hear you confirm it."

Father went on with his gentle advice. "Obviously, you remember my sex education classes with you youngsters. You just need to be careful and take your time. Don't rush your love-making, and both of your bodies will be prepared. I can't imagine that you would rush anything with Catherine anyway. You have waited years to ask her to marry you. Vincent, you have all of the patience that is required to make your first sexual experience with Catherine truly beautiful."

Vincent nodded but still looked worried. "Foreplay, yes, I remember your lessons about that. Intellectually, I understand the biological and emotional concepts. I just

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hope that I can put them into practice and not lose control of myself. If I was a normal man, perhaps there would be no problem, but you and I both know that I am not normal.” Vincent held up his hands. “These hands are capable of great harm. It would devastate me, if in the throws of passion, I injured Catherine.”

Father spoke very gently, addressing Vincent’s concerns carefully. “You are thinking and worrying too much, Vincent. You are also letting yourself be unduly affected by what happened between you and Lisa.”

Vincent responded, “Because of intense urges and desires that I couldn’t control!”

Father went on. “You have tortured yourself for too long over that, and obviously Lisa didn’t take the accidental injury, when you embraced her and scratched her, seriously. That was apparent when Lisa visited here during her latest ballet tour. She was seeking refuge from the criminals who were chasing her, and she sought protection specifically from you. That made it clear that Lisa placed no importance on what happened so long ago.”

Vincent nodded, “Lisa said as much to me. She even accused me of holding too great a reverence for the past. Lisa said that the accident was no more than child’s play.”

Father shook his head. “As careless as Lisa may have been about the way she was affecting you with her teasing and flirting, she is right. You are no longer a confused adolescent.”

Vincent sighed, “Perhaps, but it is only wise for me to

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learn from that experience, and let it serve as a warning to be very careful with Catherine.”

Father smiled softly at Vincent and continued with his advice. “Yes, well, you have the maturity to accomplish that now. Let your heart be your guide and teacher. It is very apparent how much Catherine wants you. She will be ready for you. Catherine does realize that your union will likely be childless, doesn’t she?”

Vincent answered with a smile. “Catherine says that doesn’t matter to her. She told me that there are plenty of children in our world for us to parent, and that she will be fulfilled by that and our relationship with each other.”

Father smiled too. “There certainly are plenty of children down here needing love and parenting. I can’t think of any two people more qualified to give them what they need.”

Vincent got up and went to Father. He looked much more relaxed as he bent down and kissed Father on the head. “Thank you, Father. You have made me feel much better.”

That night, as Vincent waited under the foot-bridge for Catherine, he saw her approach, and she pretended that she didn’t see him waiting for her. As Catherine walked past Vincent, he silently stepped out from under the bridge and swept her off her feet from behind with a giant arm around her waist. Catherine giggled as he shrank back into the shadows under the bridge with her. He set

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her down, and she whirled around and threw her arms around him. Vincent held her for several minutes as he looked out over the park behind her thinking how rich and rewarding life was right now, and then he saw something that disturbed him.

Catherine lifted her head to look into Vincent's face and saw his look of concern. "Vincent, what is it?"

Vincent looked down at her with such sadness, it wrenched her heart. "Catherine, look, there is someone asleep on that bench over there. This early fall air is brisk tonight. Let's go check and see if that person needs help."

Catherine nodded, "Of course, Vincent."

When they got to the bench, Vincent recognized the pallor of death on the young woman's face, and he was heartbroken. "Catherine, we are too late!"

Catherine said sadly, "I'll go back to my apartment and call Dr. Marx."

Both of them gasped as they saw the coat the young woman was wearing move. Vincent scooted Catherine back. "Stand back, Catherine, it looks like I may have to chase a rat away from her body."

Catherine stayed back as Vincent unbuttoned the woman's coat and opened it. Tears sprang to Catherine's eyes and ran down her cheeks as she saw a tiny girl with blond curls staring up at Vincent, completely unafraid, with huge blue eyes. She reached up with her little arms, and Vincent picked the child up and hugged her. She was dressed warmly except that she had no hat or hood on her

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coat.

Catherine sobbed, "Oh, Vincent, she looks just like her mother!"

Vincent walked to Catherine and said softly. "Take her for a minute, Catherine, so I can put her under my cloak."

Catherine took the little girl and said, "Vincent, she has an envelope safety-pinned to the back of her coat. It must have information about her in it. Her mother must have known she was sick and was afraid her little girl would play with the pin and be hurt by it, so she put it where she couldn't reach it. This child is well dressed and cared for. This poor mother must have sacrificed her very life to take care of her child."

Vincent had opened his cloak, and he took the little girl back from Catherine and covered her up. The child snuggled against Vincent's chest and fell almost immediately asleep. "Catherine, please go ahead and call Dr. Marx to collect her mother's body. I'm going back through the secret door, and I'll send a pipe message for Father, Mary, and Angela to meet me in the hospital chamber. We will read whatever is in the envelope, and I'll have Father examine her to make sure she is healthy. Angela will be able to get her settled with the other children below."

Catherine could see that Vincent was reluctant to leave the dead woman alone. "Vincent, don't worry about her mother. I will claim her body and see to it that she has a decent burial. That little girl will have a beautiful

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grave to visit when she is old enough to understand what her mother did for her.”

Vincent smiled at Catherine. “You have such a generous and kind heart, Catherine. Do you want to meet us in the hospital chamber?”

Catherine nodded, “Yes, I will be there just as soon as I phone this in to Dr. Marx.” Catherine then took off running in the direction of her apartment building.

When Vincent arrived in the hospital chamber with his precious charge, he was met not only by Father, Mary, and Angela, but also by Cullen. Cullen said, “I heard the pipe message that you had found a baby girl with her dead mother in the park. I wanted to see her and get started right away on an appropriate bed for her.”

Vincent smiled at Cullen as he uncovered the little girl, and Angela took her from him. Everyone’s eyes were now on the little beauty in Angela’s arms. Vincent spoke as Angela turned to take her to Father. “Wait, Angela, I need to take the envelope off the back of her coat. Catherine and I are hoping that it contains information about her.”

Angela stopped and stood still as Vincent unpinned the envelope from her coat, and then Angela took the child to Father. Father laid the sleeping little girl on the examination table, and she stayed asleep as Mary undressed her.

Father started his examination, trying not to wake her in the process, as Vincent opened the envelope and took

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out its contents. There was a photograph of a young couple holding a newborn infant. The woman in the photo was the child's mother, but she looked perfectly healthy and happy in the picture.

Mouse appeared and was completely out of breath as usual. "Was fixing a leaking water pipe under the kitchen sink. Heard the message about the baby girl in the park." He looked with wonder at the sleeping child. "Baby angel!"

Vincent smiled at Mouse as he unfolded the letter and then read it aloud. "My name is Elaine Montgomery, and this is my little girl, Darla. If something should happen to me, please take care of my baby girl for me. Darla is a very good little girl. When she is old enough to understand, please tell her that I am sorry that I couldn't keep taking care of her, and that I love her very much. My husband, Daniel, was killed in a car accident, and then we lost our health insurance. There was no money to pay for a doctor when I became sick. When I became too weak to work, we lost our home. I know that I am dying, but I have tried to make sure that Darla always had what she needed. Darla turned three years old last July 30th."

They were all crying when Vincent finished reading that poignant plea from a dying mother. Cullen said, "I'm going to start on a convertible crib for her first thing in the morning. If she is three, it won't be too long before she'll need the youth bed it will convert to."

Brooke had come into the hospital chamber with Catherine. Catherine was also breathless from running

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the entire way. She told them, as she looked at everyone's tear-stained faces, "Dr. Marx is coming himself to pick up the mother's body. What did the letter say?" Vincent handed Catherine Elaine's note, and she began crying again as she read it to Brooke.

Brooke spoke up, "We can put her to bed in the crib here in the hospital chamber for tonight, and I'll stay with her until Cullen can finish making her own crib."

Vincent smiled at Brooke. "Thank you, Brooke."

Father looked up from his examination, and Mary began dressing Darla again. "Vincent, this child is perfectly sound. She is clean, well dressed, and obviously well nourished. That little mother did an excellent job of taking care of Darla."

Catherine took Vincent's arm and looked up at him. "Vincent, I'll ask your Helper at the funeral home, Marcus Brenner, to see if he can locate Daniel Montgomery's grave, so we can be sure that Elaine is buried next to him. If he ended up in a pauper's grave, I'll have both of them interred in my family's burial plot."

Vincent took Catherine in his arms and said, "You are such a blessing, Catherine."

Cullen was scratching his chin, deep in thought, and then he said, "As soon as I finish Darla's crib, I'm going to make a wooden memory box for her. I'll make a frame for that photo, and I'll build the box big enough to put these pretty clothes she's wearing in it. We should put her mother's letter in it also. Darla needs to know how well

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she was loved and cared for by her dying mother.”

Angela spoke up. “I’m going to go to the children’s clothing storage locker and get some footie pajamas for her. Then we can send her clothes to the laundry chamber, and have them cleaned to store in the memory box.”

Mouse lit up. “Bronze shoes!”

Vincent looked at him, “Mouse?”

Mouse continued, “Saw it in a window up top! Melt bronze, dip baby shoes, let them cool! Shiny bronze baby shoes in memory box! Mouse can do easy!”

They all knew what Mouse was talking about, but they enjoyed seeing how enthusiastic he was as he explained the project. Catherine told him, “Mouse, Elaine Montgomery will be smiling from Heaven at you for those bronzed baby shoes for her Darla.” Mouse beamed at her.

Brooke had picked up Darla and was rocking her in one of Cullen’s rocking chairs that he had made for the hospital chamber and for each of the orphaned boys’ and girls’ sleeping chambers. Darla slept as everyone continued their happy plans to be sure that her mother’s sacrifice was never forgotten by either Darla or the community.

Saturday morning finally came. When Vincent walked into the Council chamber to take his place in front of the beautifully crafted portable wooden altar that Cullen had made for their wedding ceremonies, he stopped and stared

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in awe. Neither Vincent nor Catherine had been allowed near the Council chamber since they had announced their wedding date, and he couldn't believe the transformation that had taken place in that chamber in just three days.

Silk ribbons and beautiful bows had been wound around the library balcony, the circular staircase, and the entryway stair banisters. Cullen had made rose-shaped molds for Rebecca, and she had made dozens of white and red rose-shaped candles which were lit all over the chamber. Margo Tomlinson, their Helper who owned a plant nursery and florist shop, had sent down beautiful basket arrangements of flowers. It also looked like Margo had cleaned the city out of white and red roses, because there were crystal vases full of them scattered all over the chamber.

The orchestra, comprised of both children and adults, was warming up on the instruments. Mouse came up to Vincent smiling, and he actually had his hair combed and was dressed in his Sunday best. Mouse was going to be Vincent's Best Man, and Vincent handed Mouse the velvet pouch that Catherine had given back to him with their rings in it. Mouse popped it into his pocket, and they walked to the altar together.

Kevin Chin was already there behind the altar. He was a tall Chinese man with strong handsome features and a kind face. He looked at Vincent and asked, "Are you ready for this, Vincent?"

Vincent smiled at Kevin. "I have been ready for this

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ever since I found Catherine!” Kevin smiled and nodded his head.

The chamber was completely packed with community members and Helpers. All eyes were on Vincent at the moment. He was dressed in a black velvet vest over a ruffled white shirt with black pants and boots. The contrast of his golden mane against the black vest, together with his startling blue eyes, gave him a very striking appearance. No one had ever seen him look more magnificent.

While all eyes were on Vincent, his eyes were on the doorway. Then he noticed Tony near the door, holding little Darla in his arms, and he smiled. Tony was also holding a small basket filled with rose petals. Vincent watched Tony set Darla down, and he put the little basket in her hands. Tony whispered something in Darla's ear, and she looked up at him smiling.

Then the entire room hushed as the orchestra began playing Richard Wagner's "Bridal Chorus." Tony stayed beside Darla as she looked toward Vincent and began walking to him throwing handfuls of rose petals as she walked.

Vincent was so mesmerized by the tiny girl that he nearly missed Catherine's entrance into the chamber. When he looked up and saw her enter on Father's arm, his heart began pounding. There were "ohs" and "ahs" all over the room. Catherine had told him that she was going to wear her mother's wedding gown, but he had never

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seen it before now. It was a delicate white gown beaded with natural pearls, trimmed at the neckline and at the ends of the long elegant sleeves, with intricate white lace. Her light brown hair was swept up and practically glowed in the light of the candles. The rosebush on her balcony had gasped out two final roses before going dormant for the winter, one white and one red. They adorned her hair now.

Catherine was a vision of beauty, and Vincent couldn't take his eyes off her. He had to, though, when he felt a little tug on his pant leg. Vincent looked down, and Darla was looking upward at him with her arms extended. Vincent chuckled, and he picked the little girl up along with her now empty basket.

Vincent kissed Darla on the cheek and said, "You did that perfectly, Darla." She giggled as Vincent gave her back to Tony.

Catherine was now beside Vincent in front of the altar, and the music stopped. Vincent and Catherine turned to face each other, and Vincent held out his hands. Catherine put her hands in his, and then they became so lost in each other's eyes that they didn't hear a word of Kevin's ceremony.

Kevin finally tapped on both of their shoulders gently and whispered, "Hey you two, wake up! It's time for the big question and the rings."

Everyone in the entire chamber was giggling happily. Catherine giggled too, and Vincent smiled.

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They both looked at Kevin, and he asked, "Vincent Wells, do you take Catherine Chandler to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, forsaking all others, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, now and always?"

Vincent replied as he looked back into Catherine's eyes, "Yes, I do."

Kevin looked at Catherine. "Catherine Chandler, do you take Vincent Wells to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, forsaking all others, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, now and always?"

Catherine smiled as she looked into Vincent's eyes. "Oh yes, I do."

Vincent looked at Mouse, and he emptied the velvet pouch of rings into Vincent's outstretched hand. Vincent gave Catherine his ring, and then he took her left hand. As he slid the rings onto her ring finger he said, "With this ring, I thee wed, and entrust my heart to thee, with all of my love, for all of my life and forever."

Catherine took Vincent's left hand, and as she slid his ring onto his ring finger she said the same, "With this ring, I thee wed, and entrust my heart to thee, with all of my love, for all of my life and forever."

They looked at Kevin, and he whispered, "I trust you are going to hear this!" Then he projected his voice so everyone could hear. "By the power vested in me by the state of New York, I now pronounce you man and wife!

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Vincent, you may now kiss your bride, Catherine!”

They both smiled at Kevin, and then Vincent enveloped Catherine in his arms and kissed his bride passionately. Kevin then announced, “I now present to all of you, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Wells!”

Vincent kept his arm around Catherine as they turned and faced their ecstatic community. The orchestra began playing Felix Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March.” Everyone crowded around the happy couple with their well-wishing, and nearly everyone was teary-eyed.

Father had climbed the circular staircase to observe from above after he left Catherine at the altar with Vincent. Now, he practically had to shout to get everyone’s attention, and he said, “We are having a reception now in the Great Hall for Vincent and Catherine. Everyone is invited to attend. William has prepared a feast for the occasion.”

With that, everyone began heading out the door to go to the Great Hall. Vincent and Catherine knew that they had to make an appearance at the reception, but they had already arranged with William to just save plates of food and some of their cake for them. Since Catherine had cases in the District Attorney’s office that she had to finish working on for a few months yet, she was holding onto her resignation for the moment. There would be no honeymoon right now, and so their time together was limited and precious.

The community had caught onto their desire to excuse

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themselves early, so the moment the couple stepped into the Great Hall, the orchestra began playing a lovely waltz. Everyone looked at Vincent and Catherine expectantly. Vincent looked down at his little bride and held out his hand to her. She took it, and he swept her away across the floor waltzing. The whole community watched with joy at their happiness, and then other couples joined them on the floor. Vincent waltzed Catherine over to the staircase, and they climbed it and escaped.

When Vincent and Catherine finally arrived outside of Vincent's chamber, he stopped and looked down at her. "Catherine, I could ask Kanin to put us on the list for a new set of chambers."

Catherine looked up at Vincent and shook her head. "Vincent, this is the first place you brought me after my attack. You gave me back my life and helped me face the world again in this chamber. I can't imagine being anywhere but here with you. I don't want another set of chambers."

Vincent smiled and swept her up in his arms, carrying her across the threshold to the center of his chamber. "My chamber is your chamber then and always has been." He set her down and then took his vest off and hung it in his wardrobe. Next, he pulled a room divider over in front of his doorway, and he hung his cloak over it. The community had been informed that this meant "do not disturb." They weren't planning on coming anywhere near

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Vincent's chamber this weekend anyway.

When Vincent was satisfied that he had secured their privacy, he turned around. Catherine was still standing in the middle of his chamber watching him. Vincent strode over to her, and then his acute senses suddenly became aware of changes in her body. Catherine's heart rate had quickened, and her breathing was rapid. Her pupils were dilated, and her cheeks and lips were flushed. Catherine's body was producing clouds of pheromones which blended with her perfume, and Vincent was overwhelmed by all of these clear indications of her arousal.

For a moment Vincent thought he would go mad with the desire that was sweeping through him like a tidal wave. However, when he looked deeply into Catherine's eyes, so full of trusting love, he finally realized that his fear of losing control was unwarranted. Catherine's gentle hand was holding the Beast's leash, and that was all he needed. For the first time, Vincent allowed himself to savor the anticipation of expressing their passionate love for each other by becoming one, both body and soul, with his beautiful Catherine.

Catherine whispered breathlessly, "Make love to me, Vincent."

Whenever Vincent spoke her name it was like a gentle caress, and he breathed it now. "Catherine!" He took her in his arms, covered her lips with his, picked her up, and carried her to his bed.

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Hours later, as Vincent held Catherine curled up against him, he basked in the warm afterglow of their love-making. The realization of their dream of being with one another in marriage was more heavenly than he had ever imagined it would be. Life was so sweet!

Catherine propped herself up on her elbow, looked into Vincent's eyes, and sighed happily as she picked up one of his hands. "See? I told you that these hands of yours are beautiful! Your gentle caresses take my breath away. I am so happy, Vincent! How do you feel now?"

Vincent smiled tenderly at her. "There truly are no words."

Catherine giggled softly at him. "Try one!"

Vincent looked at her for a long moment, and then he said, "Complete—ours is a wondrous completed symphony now, composed by love, and beyond mortal description." Vincent paused and then asked, "How can anyone treat such a beautiful expression of love casually or sell it? They can't have any idea what they are cheating themselves out of by doing that!"

Catherine nodded, "You are right, they can't. I'm just thankful that I waited for you and that you found me!" She laid her head on Vincent's fur-covered muscular chest and heard a low, soothing rumble. She lifted her head again and giggled with delight. "Vincent, you're purring!"

Vincent smiled at her. "It seemed appropriate. Do you want me to stop?"

Catherine's eyes were twinkling, "No! I love that

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sound. It is so wonderfully comforting. I could go to sleep to that.”

Vincent stroked her cheek. “Then by all means sleep, Catherine Love.” She laid her head back on his chest, cradled in the safety of his arm, and soon he felt her relax as she drifted off to sleep.

For a few all-too-short weeks they were blissfully happy and had settled into what was supposed to be a temporary routine. Catherine lived her life above in her apartment during the week as she continued to work on cases she couldn’t abandon, and Vincent lived below. On the weekends, she would come below with the little velvet bag of wedding rings, and they would enjoy living together as man and wife in Vincent’s world. Those precious moments spent with one another were always like a dream to both of them.

Then their world came crashing down and shattered. Paracelsus had been monitoring the pipe communication in Father’s world, and he had been made aware of Vincent’s happy union with Catherine. He decided that it was time to bring Father’s world to its knees by destroying Vincent.

Paracelsus was determined to bring Vincent’s Beast to the surface and keep him there. In his twisted mind, that would make Vincent his own son and not Father’s. Paracelsus had a follower who was highly skilled at

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creating vinyl face masks of those Paracelsus wished to impersonate. Paracelsus could also reproduce the voices of others by altering his own. He used this talent to carry out his evil plan.

By impersonating Elliott Burch, Paracelsus convinced an ambitious newspaper reporter by the name of Bernie Spirko to be conveniently on hand to snap pictures of Vincent rescuing Catherine from vicious attacks by murderous assailants whom Paracelsus had hired. Paracelsus knew full well that he was sending those men to their deaths, and that was part of his plan. Paracelsus had hoped that Vincent would be unable to control the Beast awakened by the danger Catherine was in, and he would go on to kill Bernie Spirko when he realized that the reporter was taking pictures of the events.

Paracelsus' agenda included provoking Vincent into killing an innocent person in the wake of killing Catherine's assailants. That plan failed when Vincent was able to stop himself, and so Paracelsus killed Bernie Spirko himself. Paracelsus didn't want Father's world exposed to the public by the reporter. He just wanted to be able to take control of it himself.

Vincent and Catherine were unaware that Paracelsus was behind the attacks, and they didn't know that Bernie Spirko had been murdered. So, the entire community held its breath in horror as it waited for the reporter's pictures to be published. That incident marked the beginning of the devastating illness which destroyed

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Vincent's connection to Catherine.

Vincent and Catherine both began experiencing each other's nightmares, and Vincent even started sleepwalking. Vincent sent Catherine away permanently, because he feared that his deteriorating mental condition was a danger to her. Because they were sure the pictures would soon be published, Vincent made plans to leave Father's world, and go deeper into the tunnels, to keep those he loved safe from the hunters who might come after him. When Vincent held Catherine in his arms for what he feared would be the last time, she was shaking with terror over what might happen to him, and with pain over the prospect of being separated from him forever.

Now that Paracelsus had managed to isolate Vincent from those he loved, he carried out the next phase of his cruel attack on Vincent. He allowed Bernie Spirko's body to be discovered by the police. That brought Vincent back to the community, but great psychological damage had already been done. Vincent was severely stressed and in a fragile state-of-mind.

Paracelsus then carried out the last step of his plan to destroy Vincent. He sent Father copies of the pictures Bernie Spirko had taken along with a note to come to a penthouse at 1900 4th Avenue, which Paracelsus had rented, or Father would see the pictures published. Father, of course, burned the pictures and then went to the penthouse. Paracelsus knocked Father out and then tied him up, gagged him, and hid him in a secret room

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behind a wall panel. He didn't want Father dead, because he wanted Father to see the destruction of his world. Paracelsus then showed up in the tunnels disguised as Father.

He proceeded to tell Vincent cruel lies about where he came from. Paracelsus, disguised as Father, told Vincent that Paracelsus' wife, Anna, had been Vincent's biological mother. Vincent was then told that Paracelsus had experimented on his own wife because she was barren, and that Vincent had been the result. Vincent was in a state of shock over the news that Paracelsus was his actual father, but the next lie that Paracelsus told him sent Vincent careening over the edge of sanity. He told Vincent that he had been born in blood, that after only three months of gestation, Vincent had ripped his way out of Anna's body with his claws, killing Anna.

The Beast had emerged at that point in uncontrollable anguish and anger, and Vincent just barely managed to keep the Beast in check. Paracelsus then goaded Vincent further by asking, "Why do you resist your own nature?" Once more, the Beast emerged. When it looked like Vincent might be able to get his Beast under control again, Paracelsus went on to add horrific details to the lie about Vincent's birth. He described how Anna had screamed in painful agony for hours as Vincent clawed his way out of her body. Vincent could take no more, and he delivered a fatal blow to Paracelsus. As he was dying on Father's Council table, Paracelsus removed his mask,

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revealing his true identity, and he said to Vincent, “It’s all right. Don’t be afraid! At last, you are my son!”

Meanwhile, Elliott Burch had been incensed when Catherine made an enraged appearance in his office accusing him of manipulating the reporter, Bernie Spirko. Since Elliott was innocent, he launched his own investigation into who had impersonated him. When Bernie Spirko’s corpse was found with Paracelsus’ signature wound on his body, Catherine went back to Elliott and apologized for accusing him. Elliott then took Catherine to the penthouse Paracelsus had rented. There they discovered Father imprisoned behind a secret wall panel.

Catherine and Jamie had Father supported between them when they entered the Council chamber as Paracelsus was dying. Vincent was nearly catatonic at that point, and mental illness combined with a burning fever swiftly ravaged his mind and body.

Father told Catherine that Vincent had suffered a similar illness as an adolescent after the incident with Lisa, and that no human medicine he had tried had worked on Vincent’s physiology. They finally had to restrain Vincent during that illness. During those long months of that teenage illness, Father had read books to Vincent. Father told Catherine that they had thought Vincent would die, and that his vital signs had actually

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ceased. Then he suddenly recovered and became well again. He came out of that illness a scholar from all of the reading Father had done with him.

This illness was far more devastating, though. As Vincent slipped further and further into delirium, he became obsessed with a poem by Dylan Thomas, "And Death Shall Have No Dominion." He repeated over and over again these lines:

*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 no dominion.*

He wanted Catherine to hear those lines of the poem, so he went up to her apartment looking for her. She was still below discussing Vincent's deteriorating condition with Father, and they were not aware that Vincent had left the tunnels to go find her. Vincent became confused by Catherine's absence, and he ripped through her apartment looking for her before he finally collapsed. Catherine called in sick to the District Attorney's office, and with Peter's help, she nursed Vincent for a week in her apartment. However, they were unable to determine the exact nature of his illness, or come up with a way to successfully treat him.

Vincent finally awakened in Catherine's bed to her recitation of these lines from Dylan Thomas' poem as she

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was holding him:

*Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.*

Vincent opened his eyes and asked her, “You know those lines?”

Catherine told him, “You’ve been repeating them for three days. Who wrote them? Was it Dylan Thomas?” Vincent slipped back into unconsciousness before he could answer her.

When he awakened again, Vincent realized that he was still sick, and that he was a danger to Catherine, so he went back to the tunnels. Once there, he fled from everyone deep into the caverns beyond the burial catacombs, and he took refuge in one of the small caves there. His anguished roars, reverberating throughout the tunnel network, communicated a combination of rage, confusion, and terror. Vincent’s illness had driven him mad, and the madness of the Beast within him was destroying him. While community members kept watch outside of the cave nearby, Father went to get Catherine.

When Father and Catherine finally arrived near the cave Vincent was in, Father tried to stop Catherine from going into the cave with Vincent. He told her that Vincent was not himself, and that he might end up killing her.

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Catherine's poignant response was, "He is my life! Without him, there is nothing!" Then she left Father and the others and went into the cave after Vincent.

The Beast was in full possession of Vincent as Catherine entered the cave, but she was determined to save the man she loved. When Vincent's distorted vision made out the small figure coming toward him, he charged forward with another terrifying roar of fury. His hand was raised and ready to strike.

Somewhere deep inside of Catherine, Vincent's psyche connected with hers. Catherine held her ground and let out an ear-splitting, blood-curdling primal scream of her own, one word, "**VINCENT!**" The Beast was at once quelled and quieted. Vincent's vision cleared, and he beheld the angelic countenance of his little wife standing fearlessly before him.

Vincent reached both arms toward her and whispered her name, "Catherine." Then, like a giant oak which had just been struck by lightning, Vincent fell. In a desperate attempt to cushion the impact as he crashed, Catherine rushed forward, threw her arms around his barrel chest, and went down with him. As they were falling together, Vincent's hand caught the crystal on Catherine's necklace, and the clasp gave way.

By the time they landed on the floor together, Vincent's vital signs had ceased. Aware that he wasn't breathing, Catherine was desperate. "Vincent! Vincent!"

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She felt for the pulse on his neck, and there was nothing. His great heart had stopped beating. In despair Catherine cried out, “No! No! No!” She laid her head on his chest and listened carefully, but there was nothing.” She gently shook Vincent. “No! Vincent! You can’t! You can’t! Not without me! I won’t let you! I won’t let you! No!”

Catherine bent over and kissed Vincent’s mouth urgently and passionately as grief and anguish began to sweep over her.

The moment their lips met, Catherine felt herself being propelled by some unseen force into Vincent’s mind, where her thoughts merged with his in a powerful telepathic link. As Catherine entered his mind, she found herself still in the cave with Vincent, but she was standing at the back of the cave, and Vincent was walking away from her toward the mouth of the cave from which brilliant light was emanating. Catherine could feel that she was just about to lose Vincent to the eternal realm and be separated from him in mortality.

Catherine called out to him in heartbreaking desperation. “Vincent!” He stopped and turned around to face her, but he looked confused. She pleaded with him in the anguish of her grief. “Vincent, you can’t leave me alone! I need you! I need you!”

Vincent smiled softly and opened his arms to receive her. Catherine ran to Vincent and leaped into his arms. Vincent caught her and clasped her against his body as he kissed her deeply with hungry passion and sank to the

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floor with her. The vision ended and Catherine was back on the floor in the cave kissing her beloved husband. Vincent was unconscious, but he was breathing and his heart rate was restored and steady. Catherine closed her eyes in ecstatic relief and a prayer of thanksgiving as she gently lifted his head onto her lap. His fever had finally broken, and he slept.

A few hours later, when Father decided to venture into the cave to check on them, he found Catherine sitting on the floor with Vincent's head on her lap. Vincent awakened and they took him back up to his chamber. This illness had severely impaired his memory, and everything seemed unfamiliar to him. Vincent couldn't remember his chamber, and he was struggling for words and names missing from his damaged mind.

Catherine was the only person he recognized. He knew that she was the woman that he loved, but he felt lost because he couldn't remember her name. When she reminded him, and he whispered "Catherine" for the first time since his illness in the caressing tone that she loved so much, he smiled with happiness to have that most important word restored. The memory of their marriage, however, was completely gone. Then Vincent began the long, slow process of recovery as his brain struggled to create new pathways to his lost memories.

Vincent soon came to realize, though, that this illness had taken more than just his memories. It had also taken

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his connection with Catherine, and he felt an acute sense of loss because of that. Catherine had wanted to tell him something, something important. However, when she arrived in his chamber, he was distressed that it had taken a sentry to tell him that Catherine was coming. Before, he would have felt her approach. When Catherine realized that Vincent was also devastated over having to actually see her need to talk to him on her face, rather than feeling it, she had simply hugged him and told him not to worry instead of telling him what was troubling her. Later, Vincent had received a note from Catherine telling him to come to the tunnel access under her building, because she had something very important to tell him. Catherine never came. She was kidnapped by Gabriel's henchmen before she could tell him.

Six months later, as Vincent lay in bed resting for a few hours before resuming his search of the city for his lost Catherine, he felt an heartbeat. Vincent followed that heartbeat, convinced that it was Catherine's, to the old Battery Arms building. There, he broke down every barrier Gabriel had erected, slaying Gabriel's armed guards in the process, until he finally arrived on the roof. Vincent watched in agony as Gabriel stared at him out of the window of the helicopter that had just left the helipad, taking someone precious away from him.

Vincent yelled out an heartbreaking, "**Catherine!**"

Then behind him, Vincent heard a woman's soft voice

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call out his name, "Vincent!"

Vincent whirled around. Catherine had climbed up the steps to the roof and was swaying before his eyes. He rushed forward and caught her in his arms as she collapsed, "Catherine!"

Tears started streaming down Vincent's face as Catherine smiled softly at him. She struggled to speak as her strength was ebbing. "We loved. There is a child."

Vincent looked confused, "A child?"

Catherine spoke more softly. "He is beautiful!" Then as she began to fade she said, "*Though lovers be lost....*"

Vincent finished the line. "*Love shall not.*" Catherine lost consciousness, and Vincent quoted the last line of Dylan Thomas' poem as he pulled her body against him, "*And death shall have no dominion.*" Then Vincent realized that the heartbeat he had been following was his son's, and that the man he later found out was Gabriel, had taken the baby away in his helicopter after murdering Catherine.



When the vision closed and Vincent found himself back in the present, the journal he had started to read had fallen to the floor. He bent over to pick it up, but then he felt something—an heartbeat. He sat bolt upright,

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startled and confused. It wasn't Little Jacob's heartbeat he was feeling. This heartbeat was much slower, but the feel of it was beginning to fill his entire being.

Suddenly, Catherine's face, eyes closed in death, appeared before him, but this time he didn't feel the pain that image usually evoked. He heard her voice clearly. "Vincent, where are you? I love you, and I'm lost without you! Please find me!"

Then he remembered Narcissa's words to him. "Follow your heart, Vincent, and find your woman! She needs you! Your connection to her is healing, and love is holding her in this world still."

A woman's voice spoke softly to his mind. This was the same voice that had told him that he was a Tandin when he had the vision of the attack on his family by Adrian's men when he was a baby. "Vincent, it is time for you to find your Catherine. She needs you desperately. Look into your heart!"

She was gone from his mind as quickly as she had come. Vincent closed his eyes and let the heartbeat sweep over him. He thought, "How can this be?" He took a deep breath, relaxed, and concentrated on the heartbeat. The lines from Dylan Thomas' poem went through his mind. "*Though lovers be lost; Love shall not.*" In an exhilarating rush, his connection to Catherine was completely restored. He saw her clearly in an huge hospital bed, propped partly up, her eyes closed in—sleep, not death! Light was streaming down on her from a large overhead

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skylight, and it looked like an halo shining off her light brown hair.

Vincent's eyes flew open, and he said out loud the last line of the poem, "*And death shall have no dominion!*"

Vincent knew exactly where Catherine was! He left everything as he stood up, ran to the threshold of the cave, and leaped up the eight-foot ledge to the tunnel floor. With his powerful feline-like vision, he didn't even need the lantern. Vincent began to run, and he picked up speed as he went. He thought his heart might actually burst with the joy he was feeling as all of the inconsolable grief and the pain of separation he had suffered over the loss of his beloved Catherine vanished.

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Chapter VIII

The Day of Vines and Roses

When Tony walked into Father's Council chamber, he found Joe, Diana, and Father all seated at the Council table hovered over Gabriel's two small crime notebooks. Tony knew that what they were working on was extremely important to the safety of Father's world as well as the world above, so he didn't interrupt them as he sat down across the table from them.

Joe was holding a legal pad full of Diana's notes, and he was shaking his head. "So, this is everything?"

Diana nodded, "Every illegal business enterprise, every location, every business associate, every dirty cop, lawyer, and government official, and every bank account! This information will shut Adrian down completely."

Joe was visibly relieved by Father's and Diana's

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triumphant success deciphering Gabriel's notebook.

"Since a few more of Adrian's corrupt plants may have infiltrated our legal system since Gabriel's death, I'll call in the FBI to help us clean this up. Maybe that way we can avoid alerting Adrian, and we can put all of his enterprises out of business simultaneously. Greg Hughes managed to figure out which Manhattan mansion is Adrian's, so we are all set to move against him now."

Then, all three of them turned their attention to Tony, and Father asked him, "Tony, did you need to tell us something?"

Tony nodded his head and smiled at them. "I needed to deliver a message from Vincent. He wanted me to tell you that he has gone to do what he should have done a long time ago to figure out what his dreams and visions about Catherine mean."

Father raised his eyebrows at Tony. "I knew that he sought out and talked to Narcissa yesterday. Are you telling us that he has gone someplace else today?"

Tony nodded at him. "Yes, he has gone to the Crystal Cavern."

Father looked questioningly at Tony. "The Crystal Cavern?" Tony nodded again, and Father commented, "That is a long way to go for answers. Did he take anything with him?"

Tony answered, "Yes, he gathered up what looked like an armload of journals off his bookshelf, and he put them into his backpack and took them."

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Father continued to ask questions of Tony. “Tony, did he take the journal on his nightstand?”

Tony shook his head. “Actually, he didn’t. After he came back from seeing Narcissa, he picked it up and opened the cover, but then he laid it back down and gathered up the ones off his bookshelf instead.”

Father nodded, “Then, he is looking to the past for his answers. He hasn’t even opened any of those journals since his illness before Catherine was kidnapped. I think he simply couldn’t bear to know how many of his memories that illness had taken from him.” Father looked at Diana and Joe. “This may be it. We have been waiting a long time for his connection to Catherine to be restored. If he finds what he is looking for, it may finally happen.” Father looked back at Tony again. “Tony, where is Little Jacob?”

Tony smiled, “Mary and Brooke have taken him to Catherine to nurse. Someone always takes him once a day to nurse directly from Catherine when Vincent thinks he is just gone for a bath. Mary figured that since Vincent would be gone at least two days to the Crystal Cavern and back again, that Little Jacob could spend more time at Peter’s with Catherine. I’m going to stay camped out in Vincent’s room, so I can watch for him and see what he does.”

They all looked toward the door as William came into the Council chamber and frowned at all of them. “Everyone is eating breakfast in the kitchen chamber just

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now. I came to see why none of you are there. Are you aware that Vincent came to me this morning to get some food and drinks, so he could take a trip to the Crystal Cavern?"

Father smiled at William. "Actually, Tony was just telling us about Vincent's trip. I'm sorry we are late for breakfast, William. We were distracted by our success with breaking Gabriel's code. Joe is going to be able to take action against Adrian now, since we have finished translating his brother's notebook."

William beamed and said, "Well, that is a really good reason to be late for breakfast!"

Diana looked at Father. "Father, I have a very strong feeling that Vincent is going to end up at Peter's. Why don't I go with Tony and pack some of his clothes and bath supplies for him? I can take them to Catherine's room after breakfast."

Father smiled at her. "I think that is an excellent idea, Diana. I have the same strong feeling you do."

Joe got up from the table. "Well, it sounds like you two have important things to do. I'm really glad that you were able to finish translating Gabriel's notebook, so you can now turn your attention to Vincent and Catherine. The timing couldn't be more perfect! I'm going to take this legal pad with Diana's code key and the translation, but I'm going to leave the notebooks here for safe keeping until we actually bring these criminals to trial. That way, no one can destroy the evidence. I have the photos that

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Diana took of all of the pages of Gabriel's notebook, and that is evidence enough for now."

Diana looked at Joe. "Joe, I think I'm going to stay at Peter's now until Vincent returns. I can help take care of Little Jacob until we see what Vincent does. Come and see me there when you get the criminal roundup under way. I really want to know how that progresses."

Joe smiled at Diana. "I'll do that, Diana. The sooner we can get Adrian locked up, the safer you will be. Well, William, take me to your kitchen. Breakfast sounds terrific right now!"

Father spoke up. "Wait and I'll go with you." William stopped, and Joe walked ahead to leave the chamber. Then Father looked at Diana. "So, we'll see you and Tony in a little while then?"

Diana put her arm across Tony's shoulders as they started out of the chamber together. "Yes, we'll be along shortly, Father." As she was talking to Father, Diana's eyes were following Joe as he walked out of the chamber ahead of her. Father and William noticed and smiled. Father took the notebooks to his bedroom chamber and put them into his dresser drawer. Then he went out into the passageway.

Diana and Tony went to the left down the tunnel toward Vincent's chamber while the others were going to the right to go to the kitchen chamber. Joe stopped, turned around, and watched Diana and Tony until they had rounded a corner and were out of sight. Father and

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William stopped and turned around to watch Joe watching Diana. They looked at each other and grinned. Joe was completely oblivious to everything except Diana.

William whispered to Father, "How long has that been going on?"

Father shrugged his shoulders and chuckled softly, "Your guess is as good as mine!"

William smiled, "Well, it looks to me as if they're more confused than we are!"

Father was still smiling as he nodded. "I guess we shouldn't just leave the poor boy standing there." William chuckled as they went back to Joe and turned him around. Father said, "Come on, son. It's time to go eat breakfast." Joe snapped out of his reverie and grinned at them.

Two days later, in the mid-afternoon, Vincent was racing through the tunnels on his way to Peter's home to find his Catherine. She was alive! Vincent didn't care how that miracle was possible. He just ached to hold her in his arms again. Vincent's joy over being able to feel her in his mind and being again was beyond what any words could describe. Being severed from Catherine empathically had left such a dark and hopeless vacuum where she had once been.

It had taken Vincent a full day to walk to the Crystal Cavern, but it took him only a few hours, with his amazing speed, to return. When Vincent ran into his chamber,

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Tony looked up from the book he was reading on Vincent's bed. "Vincent, you're back!"

Vincent didn't even seem to realize that Tony was there or had spoken to him. He quickly grabbed up Catherine's crystal necklace from around the conk shell on his nightstand, and then he ran back out the door without saying a word to Tony. When Tony saw Vincent's expression of single-minded determination, he realized what had occurred. He rolled off Vincent's bed, ran to the nearest pipe, and sounded the alarm.

Zach was in the pipe monitoring chamber, and he passed the alarm on. "The King is awake!" rang out over the pipes. Just after the community had been made aware of Vincent's trek to the Crystal Cavern, Pascal had ordered an "all quiet" on the pipes effective until they knew the result of Vincent's quest for answers. Pascal had then gone to monitor the pipes below Peter's home, so he could warn them if Vincent was reconnected to Catherine and showed up on the run to her.

As Vincent ran through the passageways headed for Peter's home, it barely registered at the back of his mind that the tunnels were curiously vacant. Also, a message he had never heard before, "The King is awake!" was echoing over every pipe. All that mattered right now was getting to Catherine.

When Vincent arrived at Peter's elevator, he could hardly contain his impatience waiting for the car to come down. When it finally arrived, and he stepped into it and

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hit the third floor button, he paced like a caged wild animal until it arrived at Peter's hospital wing. When Vincent walked off the car, he ran down the hallway to Catherine's room and stepped inside. Stars were now shining through the skylight, but Vincent saw only Catherine. She looked like an angel in the glow of the soft light from the shielded night lamp behind the bed. He didn't even notice Father, Mary, Peter, Diana, Pascal, Jamie, Devin, and Charles who were seated at the table to the far right of the large room watching him anxiously but silently. Vincent was also completely oblivious to Rolley's performance of the *Grieg Piano Concerto* that was drifting through Peter's home.

As tears rolled down his cheeks, Vincent walked quickly to Catherine's bed and sat down on the edge of it beside her. He laid his head on her breast and closed his eyes in a silent prayer of thanksgiving as he listened to her heartbeat. He sat up again, pulled Catherine's crystal necklace out of his shirt pocket, gently lifted her head, and put it around her neck.

"Catherine," Vincent whispered as he picked up her hands and kissed each one. It gave him immense joy to see her beautiful wedding rings on her finger. He laid her hands gently down again, and then he ran his finger softly over the angular scar in front of her left ear. Catherine had shocked her plastic surgeon when she refused to let him remove that last remaining scar a year after the vicious attack which had left her near death in Central

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Park for Vincent to find. She had told the surgeon that the scar was a reminder of the most wonderful year of her life—thus far. Vincent kissed the scar, and then he kissed Catherine's lips. Her soft hair had grown longer over the last four months, and Vincent stroked it as he gazed into her face. He slid his left arm under her neck, hooking his huge hand under her left arm, and then he slid his right arm under her left side and wrapped it around her waist, lifting her onto his lap. He laid her head gently on his chest and kissed the top of her head. Vincent sighed, "My sweet, beautiful Catherine!" He held her tightly in his arms and gently rocked with her on the edge of the bed.

Seeing the agonizing grief Vincent had silently suffered for so long replaced by such ecstatic rapture, had his family and friends who were blessed to witness this moving reunion shedding quiet tears of joy for him. They silently arose and crept out the door. All of them breathed a sigh of profound relief as they left Catherine's room. When they were out in the hallway with Catherine's door closed, Father said, "Eventually Vincent is going to have lots of questions."

Peter nodded, "There are plenty of rooms for all of you to stay here until we can answer those questions for him."

Pascal spoke up. "All of you stay here. I'll go back to the tunnels and tell everyone what has happened. You don't need for me to be here too."

Father smiled at Pascal. "That is a really good idea, Pascal, thank you. I know that you are anxious to get

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back to your pipes.”

Pascal chuckled, “There is nothing as sweet to me as the sound of those pipes!”

Diana giggled at Pascal. “It is a really good thing you feel that way, Pascal. This miracle wouldn’t have been possible without that new ‘chess King code’ of yours!”

Just then, Tony stepped off the elevator still breathless from running through the tunnels. “Is Vincent here? Did he come to find Cathy?” Rolley was coming down the hallway as Tony asked the questions.

Peter smiled at the boy. “He did, indeed, Tony. He is in there with Cathy now.” Tony smiled happily, and Rolley closed his eyes and smiled with relief as they joined the group.

Tony almost had his breathing back under control. “Where is Little Jacob? I can stay and watch him for them.”

Devin answered Tony as he smiled at him. “Little Jacob is in the nursery next door to Catherine’s room. Susan is with him now. There is an extra bed in there if you want to stay with him for tonight.”

Tony nodded, “I’ll do that.”

Father was shaking his head. “I know sleep is the last thing on Vincent’s mind right now, but he looks like he probably hasn’t slept since he left to go to the Crystal Cavern two days ago this morning. If so, that means that he has been up for three days and two nights, and he wasn’t sleeping well even before that. Exhaustion is

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bound to take him down before too long.”

Diana smiled at him. “Don’t worry, Father. I’ll check in on him shortly and stay close by until I can get him tucked in with Catherine.”

Jamie looked at Father and said, “I’ll stay with Diana, Father, and we will both be sure that they are settled and comfortable when Vincent falls asleep.”

Father nodded and smiled, “Thank you both.”

Pascal then took the elevator back into the tunnels to go tell an anxious community that the miracle they had all been praying for had finally occurred. Tony went into Little Jacob’s room to go to bed. Diana and Jamie got chairs and sat in the hallway outside Catherine’s room to begin their vigil while waiting for Vincent to finally fall asleep. Peter took everyone else to their rooms, where for the first time in nearly a year, they were able to sleep peacefully.

Inside Catherine’s room, the concept of time had vanished from Vincent’s mind. Nothing outside of Catherine existed for him. He had stood up with her in his arms and was aimlessly walking around the room while gazing down at her. Vincent could feel that Catherine had lost weight over the months she had been in this coma. She was less than one-hundred pounds, and she felt as light as a child in his arms. Vincent began humming the melody of a lullaby he had heard Catherine sing to Eric’s elder sister, Ellie, just before the child had

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died of the pneumonic plague which had swept through their community a couple of years earlier. The words of Catherine's lullaby came to Vincent's mind, and he began to sing softly to her:

Sleep my pretty one.

Rest now my pretty one.

Close your eyes.

The day is nearly done.

Rest your head.

Tomorrow will surely come.

When Vincent began singing to Catherine, Diana and Jamie looked at one another and smiled with wonder. Diana said in awe, "Listen to that beautiful bass voice of his! I didn't know Vincent could sing!"

Jamie was just as incredulous. "Believe me, none of us did either! As far as I know, he has never sung before. I am definitely telling Paul about this. He won't want to let that hidden talent go to waste!"

Diana shook her head. "Well, unless we can help Vincent wake Catherine up, and she is in his line-of-sight, I don't think anyone will ever hear a performance like this one again! That is pure love he is expressing with that pretty lullaby."

Jamie smiled, "You should have seen the look on Vincent's face as he watched Catherine singing that lullaby to Ellie. Their relationship has always been an

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inspiration to all of us.”

Diana asked Jamie about the lullaby. “I’ve never heard that piece before. What is it? Did one of your people compose it?”

Jamie smiled at her with sadness. “Actually, that is Catherine’s lullaby. I haven’t heard it since she sang it to Eric’s sister, Ellie, just before she died. There was a Russian stowaway, Dmitri, who came to America desperately seeking his childhood sweetheart, and we tried to help him. What we didn’t know, and neither did Dmitri, was that he was carrying pneumonic plague, and it quickly swept through our community, killing Dmitri and Ellie. Peter sent down medicines for us, and Catherine insisted on bringing them down herself, although we begged her not to. She said that Peter had inoculated her against the plague when she took a trip overseas a few years earlier, but she had not had any boosters since then. She really took her life in her hands coming down to help us. Vincent was completely immune to it, so she and Vincent were able to treat and nurse the rest of us who became sick. She told Vincent that the lullaby she sang to Ellie was one her mother had sung to her when she was little. Cathy thought that her mother must have made it up, because after her mother’s death, Cathy never heard it again.”

Diana smiled, “Well, it is perfectly lovely, especially with Vincent singing it to her.”

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Finally, the effects of sleep deprivation and the emotional roller coaster Vincent had been on for the past year took their toll. Vincent was both relieved and elated, but he was also thoroughly exhausted. He carried Catherine back over to the bed and gently settled her back on her pillow, covering her carefully and softly sweeping her hair from her face. Then Vincent lay down on the extra pillow on the huge bed, scooped Catherine into his arms, and pulled her against his body, giving her a lingering tender kiss on the lips as he did so. When Diana and Jamie heard Vincent stop singing, they waited a few minutes and then quietly opened the door to check on the couple. They both heard the deep, soothing rumble as Vincent purred until he fell asleep, finally, deeply asleep, with his beloved Catherine safely tucked against him in his arms.

Diana went to the bed, and she gently removed Vincent's boots. Jamie got a blanket out of the cabinet and covered Vincent up with it. Catherine was already securely wrapped in blankets and in Vincent's arms. Then, the women left the room, carefully shutting the door behind them, and they both went to their rooms, to bed, and to peaceful sleep.

When Vincent awakened, he was confused to find himself lying on the sandy bank of a very wide raging river. Storm clouds were gathering overhead, and then the air was split by a frightening clap of thunder as

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lightning struck a tree close to the bank, bringing it crashing down. Vincent jumped up, frantic over how he could have left Catherine and ended up here. Had he been sleepwalking? Darkness descended because of the gathering storm clouds, and rain began pouring down in torrents. He was quickly drenched. Then he saw Catherine. She was standing on the other side of the river, and she looked terrified. Vincent finally saw what was frightening her. An enormous cobra had risen up in front of her, with its hood spread, ready to strike. Catherine was frozen with fear.

Vincent quickly pulled his boots and socks off and shed his shirt. Then he heard a woman's voice speaking softly to his mind. "Vincent!"

He answered her telepathically this time, "Elisia?"

She continued, "Yes, Vincent, listen to me carefully. You are still asleep. Catherine is still safe in your arms. You are caught up in her nightmare. It would be best for her if you participate, but let it play out. She needs to work through her fears with you. Just be aware that this is a dream. When this fear of hers is resolved, you will wake up."

Vincent asked Elisia, "Will Catherine also wake up?"

Elisia replied, "Perhaps not this time, but eventually, when she finally feels safe and overcomes all of the emotional traumas that have caused these nightmares, she will."

Vincent nodded and felt hope surging through him

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that he would be able to save his Catherine from her nightmares after all. "Thank you, Elisia."

Elisia responded softly, "You are very welcome, my dear brother." Then she was gone from his mind.

When Vincent looked back across the river, Catherine had managed to climb up onto an huge boulder away from the menacing snake. She was dangerously close to the edge, though, which jutted over the raging torrent of water.

She hadn't seen Vincent, and he tried to yell a warning to her, "Catherine! Stay still! Don't back up! I'm coming to you!"

Vincent's voice was carried away by the noise of the storm. He watched in horror as Catherine lost her footing and fell into the river. She struggled against the current as Vincent let out a mighty shout of fear for her, "**No!**" and dove into the water.

Vincent kept his eyes on Catherine's location as he swam with powerful strokes toward her. He could see that she was tiring as she tried to keep her head above the water as the rapids carried her along. She slipped under the water several times before he could reach her. When Vincent finally got to Catherine, she had lost consciousness and had disappeared under the surface. He dove for her, saw her body slipping deeper, and sliced through the water, wrapping his arm around her and then bringing her to the surface. Vincent quickly swam for shore with his precious little wife limp in his arm. When

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he got to shore, Vincent gathered Catherine up in his arms and carried her out of the river and onto the bank. The storm cleared as quickly as it had come, and the sun came out.

Vincent thought, "Catherine must still have a fear of drowning left over from when the stalker locked her in the trunk of his car and pushed it into the lake. Elisia said to participate in her nightmares, so I guess it is time to resolve this fear." He laid her gently on the grass, kneeled down beside her, tipped her head to straighten her airway, and then performed CPR until she coughed up the water in her lungs.

When Catherine finally opened her eyes, Vincent smiled at her. "That's my Sweetheart!"

Catherine began crying, "Oh, Vincent!" She threw her arms around his neck as he sat back on the grass and pulled her onto his lap. "You came for me!"

Vincent held her tightly. "You always came for me when I was in trouble too, Catherine. You bravely faced coming to me when I was suffering from the effects of Paracelsus' hallucinogenic drug, even after I had injured Father in that delusional state. You took a chance that you would get lost in the tunnels when Father and I were trapped in the cave-in, and you saved us by going to Elliott Burch for help. You knew there was the possibility that I might kill you when Paracelsus drove me into a maddening illness, and you went into that cave anyway to save me from myself. You were even willing to sell

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yourself in marriage to Elliott Burch, to stop him from building Burch Tower, the foundation of which threatened to destroy our world. You wouldn't allow me to stop you from sacrificing yourself like that to save us. Thank goodness that building meant more to Elliott than you did, and you were able to finally stop him, using legal means. Your selfless love has always been like a shield protecting me and my world. I will always come for you, Catherine, always!"

Catherine looked up at him in surprise and smiled. "Vincent, you remember all of that?"

Vincent smiled softly at her. "I remember everything now, Catherine, and my bond with you is fully restored. Know that I am with you again, no matter where you are or what is happening. Know that!"

Catherine sounded very sleepy. "Vincent, I love you deeply, and there is so much I want to say to you, but I am so tired. I don't think I can stay awake!"

Vincent spoke softly to her. "Then don't try to, Catherine. Just sleep now, my Love."

As Catherine drifted off to sleep in Vincent's arms, Vincent woke up in her hospital bed. Catherine was still asleep, but she was safe in his arms, and he sighed with relief and happiness. There was the soft scent of roses in the room, and when he looked over Catherine, he saw her rosebush under the window on the other side of the bed. It was in full bloom with its pretty white and red flowers,

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and he realized that Diana had moved it from her loft for them.

Vincent carefully pulled his arm out from under Catherine and gently settled her back on her pillow. He sat up on the edge of the bed just as Diana and Sarah were coming into the room with fresh towels and bed clothes.

Sarah smiled at Vincent. "Well, Vincent, would you like to help us get Catherine bathed, and then we will take care of her while you get a shower? Next, I assume that you are going to want to learn the routine we have worked out for her care. After that, we can answer any questions that you haven't already figured out the answers to!"

Vincent nodded as he smiled at Sarah and Diana. "You assume correctly. Please teach me what to do, ladies. I don't plan to leave here until Catherine is awake and well again. Is Little Jacob here too?"

Sarah went on into the bathroom, and she started to draw a bath as Diana nodded, "Yes, Vincent. He is still asleep in the nursery next door. We can prepare some of Catherine's frozen breast milk for him until we get you oriented with Catherine's routine. Tony slept in Little Jacob's room last night."

Vincent closed his eyes and shook his head as all kinds of strange things finally made sense to him. "I guess I'm going to need some clothes and bath supplies."

Diana smiled at him. "I took the liberty of packing your bag for you the other day when you left for the

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Crystal Cavern.”

Vincent smiled as he looked at Diana. “You knew!”

Diana nodded, “We all figured that you would end up here after that trip. Now, if you want to carry Catherine into the bathroom, we’ll get her taken care of first. Then, your toiletries are in the bathroom, and your clothes are in the dresser and wardrobe.”

When Catherine was bathed, dressed, and back in her freshly remade bed, Vincent felt a pang of anxiety to be leaving her even for the short period of time it would take for him to shower. Diana put her hand on Vincent’s arm and looked up at him. “I promise she will still be here when you get out. We never leave her alone, Vincent.” Vincent looked down at Diana and smiled. Then he went to the dresser and wardrobe, picked out his change of clothes, and went into the bathroom.

When Vincent came out of the bathroom, he put his dirty clothes into the hamper he had seen by the wardrobe. Mary had come in and was sitting in the rocking chair by Catherine’s bed with a notepad on her lap. Vincent sat on the edge of Catherine’s bed, and Mary gave him the notepad which had Catherine’s care schedule written on it. He looked at it, and Mary said, “This is the routine we have worked out which seems to work well for Cathy. We were pumping her breast milk regularly, but now that you are reconnected to her, and Little Jacob can stay here with the two of you, his nursing

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needs can be taken care of on his own hunger schedule. That will naturally regulate her milk production for him.”

Vincent asked Mary, “I seem to remember from Father’s medical textbooks that there is some kind of a technique to nursing?”

Mary smiled at Vincent. “Yes, Vincent, I’ll show you how to help Catherine nurse Little Jacob until she wakes up. She is able to swallow, so we have been feeding her William’s special soups and herbal teas. We also have her baths scheduled, and Peter examines her every day. He does a brain scan every two weeks. Vincent, we will be available anytime you want a break or need help with Catherine. In fact, you are not going to be able to get rid of us!”

Vincent smiled at Mary. “I know that, Mary, but I won’t need any breaks from Catherine’s care. I have already had a long agonizing break, and I don’t ever want to be away from her again! It will give me great joy to be involved in every detail of her care.”

Just then, Kipper came into the room with a covered bowl of soup from William’s kitchen. Vincent chuckled when he saw the boy, as another strange occurrence now made sense. Kipper was accompanied by Geoffrey and Samantha carrying a tray of food and a thermos for Vincent as well. Diana had been sitting at the table while Mary was explaining Catherine’s care to Vincent. She now got up and went to the dorm-size refrigerator and took out a pitcher of herbal tea. She poured some into a paper cup

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from the cup dispenser on the wall, and she got a plastic spoon out of the box of them on top of the refrigerator. She put the pitcher back into the refrigerator. Then she took the tea and spoon to Catherine's bedside table.

Kipper handed the soup to Vincent just as Peter was walking into the room. Vincent smiled at the boy. "Thank you, Kipper. You have logged a lot of miles walking back and forth between here and William's kitchen chamber, haven't you?" Kipper smiled and nodded, and then he went and sat down at the table with Geoffrey and Samantha, who had laid Vincent's meal on the table.

As Vincent began feeding Catherine her soup and tea, Peter talked to him about Catherine. "Cathy's condition is very perplexing from a medical standpoint, Vincent. She was in a deep coma for three months which required an IV, a feeding tube, and a catheter. Cathy finally came out of that, and she is now just deeply asleep, according to her brain scans. Even in her deep sleep, though, she responds to feeding and even being taken to the bathroom on the schedule we have worked out for her care. There really is no physiological reason for this state. She should be awake. I assumed that the reason had to be emotional trauma. We had hoped that if your connection to her was restored, she would then wake up. It looks like it won't be that simple, though."

Vincent looked at Peter and shook his head. "It isn't that simple, Peter. You are right that it is psychological trauma, though. My sister, Elisia, has been in contact

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with me telepathically, and she concurs. Elisia is of the opinion that I need to help Catherine work through all of the fears that have her trapped in this nightmare state, and that as soon as she feels completely safe, she will wake up. Elisia just doesn't know how long that process may take."

Peter went on with Catherine's medical report. "The other concern you need to be aware of is the deteriorating condition of her muscles. People survive lifetimes in comas, so she is not in mortal danger at this point. However, the longer she is unconscious, the longer and the harder it will be for her to regain her former physical condition and mobility. We have her on a daily physical therapy regimen of muscle exercises and massage. Sarah will show you what to do. It is helping to slow down the deterioration, but it can't arrest it. Only her own physical activity when she wakes up can reverse the loss of strength."

While Vincent and Peter were talking, the room began filling up with many of those who had been taking care of Catherine for Vincent. They all sat down at the table with the children, to wait for him to finish feeding her, so they could answer his questions. Peter went to the table and sat down with the others. When Vincent was finished feeding Catherine, he held her hand for a moment, and then kissed it, before standing up and going to the table.

Vincent looked at everyone, smiled, and said, "My dear friends and family, words alone can't express my love for

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you and my appreciation for what you have done for Catherine!” Then he looked at Devin. “When did you stop wandering around and come home, Devin?”

Devin stood up and hugged Vincent. “It has only been a couple of weeks, Vincent. I finally received Peter’s letter about what had happened here with you and Catherine.”

Vincent looked at Charles. “Charles, is that really you?”

Charles chuckled with delight that Vincent recognized him. “It is, indeed, really me, Vincent. Do you like what Dev did for me?”

Vincent smiled at him. “Oh yes, Charles, you look very handsome, and you look very happy too.”

Charles was beaming. “I am very happy, Vincent. Dev has been showing me the whole world. It doesn’t scare me anymore!”

Vincent looked at Isaac and asked, “Should I know you?”

Isaac smiled and shook his head. “No, Vincent, but I think that Cathy probably told you about me. I’m Isaac Stubbs, Cathy’s self-defense instructor.” Vincent smiled and nodded as Isaac continued. “Father and Diana brought me into this secret to aid as a bodyguard for Cathy. I can’t tell you how happy it made me to know that she was still alive!”

Vincent spoke to Isaac again. “You helped Catherine to find me when the Silks injured me with their pipe bomb, and I was blinded and lost, didn’t you?” Isaac

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nodded his head. Vincent smiled, “Thank you!”

Vincent walked back over to Catherine’s bed. He gently picked her up from the bed, walked to the loveseat near the table, and sat down with her cradled on his lap. Vincent looked at Father with an expression of pain on his face as he asked, “How could I have left Catherine alone, Father? How could I have not known that she was alive? I heard her voice calling to me in the tunnels, and I thought it was just my grief speaking to me! I should have known!”

Father responded gently, “Vincent, experts were unable to tell that Catherine was alive. It was David Marx who noticed that she was sweating, but her respiration and heartbeat were so slowed from her coma as to be nearly imperceptible. That was the only reason we were able to hide her and have everyone above believe that she had died, so we could protect her from her assailant, who turned out to be Gabriel. Remember, Vincent, your empathic connection with Catherine was completely severed, and you were not well. You had not fully recovered from that illness that nearly killed you, and you had not taken the time to sleep properly for months. Your senses were as severely impaired as your connection to Catherine was.”

Peter spoke gently to Vincent as well. “Vincent, you saved Cathy’s life by taking her to her warm apartment. Gabriel had that doctor of his shoot Cathy with a nearly fatal dose of morphine right after she gave birth to Little

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Jacob. It slowed her body down, so that she never delivered the placenta. That was what was causing the infection that made her sweat. In a way, it also saved her life, because if she hadn't been sweating, David would not have seen the sweat at her hairline and realized that she was alive. If you hadn't taken her to her apartment when you did, she would have died of infection and exposure. We were able to do a D & C to clean her uterus out, start her on a round of antibiotics, stimulate her heart and respiration, and stabilize her until she finally pulled out of the coma."

Father then added, "At first we weren't sure we could save her, and we knew that it would devastate you to lose her a second time, especially when your own condition was so precarious. I was also afraid that if you knew prematurely that she was alive; your desperation to save her might impede your own full recovery and reconnection to her. The distraction would also surely have led to your own death when you were determined to go after that assassin, Snow, to save us. Then, you would never have been reunited with Catherine."

Vincent smiled softly at Father and Peter. "It is no wonder Little Jacob's bottles were evoking visions about Catherine. It was her milk."

Father nodded at Vincent. "Besides being better for Little Jacob, I was hoping that handling Catherine's milk might help to restore your connection to her."

Vincent then looked at Diana and grinned, "Semantics,

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huh, little Brat?”

Diana tossed her head at him. “Don’t look at me like that, you big Monster! You were not making it easy for me to think on my feet!”

Vincent smiled at Rolley. “Have you been giving piano concerts for Catherine every night, Rolley?” Rolley smiled and nodded his head.

Isaac spoke up and said, “Vincent, this is the best job I’ve ever had in security. I never even knew that I liked classical music until I started staying here, and I was treated to Rolley’s nightly piano recitals. His music is straight out of Heaven!”

Vincent smiled and nodded at Isaac, and then he looked at Jamie and chuckled. “That was some performance you put on with that so-called illness of yours! I should have known something was amiss when Mouse told me he needed to move a table, because he couldn’t think with it where it was!”

Jamie giggled at him. “I really did have cramps, Vincent. I just usually refuse to go to bed with them. Mouse was doing his best to figure out how to delay you, so I could get changed into my nightgown and hop into my bed, after I landed on his bed from his express chute. I had just finished eating supper when you caught Kipper coming out of the kitchen chamber with Catherine’s soup.”

Vincent raised his eyebrows. “How on earth did you manage to eat that whole bowl of soup after eating supper

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too, little one?"

Jamie giggled again. "I didn't. My canteen ate it!"

Vincent laughed at her. "Well, that explains why your floor was strewn with clothes that you vigorously objected to my picking up! OK, so tell me, who was the mastermind behind that elaborate charade?" She pointed at Tony, who was holding Little Jacob at the table, and he grinned sheepishly and shrugged his shoulders at Vincent.

Father spoke up at that point. "You should also know, Vincent, that Tony was the one who was primarily responsible for protecting you from knowing about Catherine until you were reconnected to her. He had stowed away in the coroner's van when we rescued Catherine, and he insisted that he needed to repay his Gypsy debt to you and Catherine for restoring him to his grandparents. He has kept track of you this entire time for us."

A look of realization passed over Vincent's face, and he smiled. "I was that king piece that was all over the tunnels! That was the new code that Pascal was working on, a code to keep track of me, wasn't it?" They all nodded at Vincent. Vincent chuckled and shook his head as he remembered the message echoing over every pipe as he was running from his chamber the previous evening. "Tony, you sounded the alarm, 'The King is awake,' didn't you?" Tony smiled and nodded his head. Then Vincent went on with his realizations. "I wondered why the

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tunnels were so empty!”

Diana laughed, and the others joined her as she said, “No one wanted to get run over by you when you figured out where Catherine was!”

Vincent shook his head and smiled at all of them. “Well, I can’t argue with the results. That the entire community could protect me from knowledge of this while I healed is truly a miraculous labor of love. Thank you—all of you!” He paused and then asked, “I saw the pictures of Catherine’s funeral on Diana’s crime-work-wall. What did you bury in that cemetery?”

Father laughed as he answered, “That’s exactly what Joe wanted to know too. It was a flour sack loaded with one-hundred-five pounds of sand.”

Vincent laughed as he said, “Well, from what I saw in those pictures of Diana’s, that poor sack-of-sand had a really lovely funeral, and everyone looked truly devastated to have to say good-bye to it!” They were all nearly in stitches laughing with Vincent over that comment.

Everyone got up to leave, and Vincent was filled with additional joy to see Father put his arm around Mary as they left together. Mary had gone to Vincent in distress a couple of months ago. She was heartbroken over nearly losing Father to another woman. Mary had felt that it was somehow selfish to be in love with him, and therefore, she had never told Father how she felt about him. Vincent was glad to see that Mary must have taken steps to fix that mistake.

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When Diana got up to leave, Vincent stopped her.
“Diana, would you please stay for a few minutes? I need to ask you about something.”

Diana smiled and sat down on the loveseat by Vincent and Catherine. “What did you need to ask me, Vincent?”

Vincent looked at Diana and said, “This may sound really strange to you, Diana, but Catherine’s scent is not right. I mean, she smells like herself, but something is missing.”

Diana nodded her head as she remembered Vincent’s dream about the flowers in his grandparents’ solarium.
“You mean that she doesn’t smell of honeysuckle vines and roses.”

Vincent was really grateful that Diana understood.
“Exactly! Catherine always smelled so wonderful, familiar, like a forgotten happy memory trying to surface which I couldn’t quite grasp. Until I had that dream about the pink rosebush with the honeysuckle vines growing up through it in my grandparents’ solarium, I never knew why that scent made me so very happy, other than the fact that it was also Catherine’s scent. Scents are powerful doorways to memories, just like her scent was for me. Perhaps that scent would help to bring her mind forward to consciousness again. I was hoping that you might have seen what perfume she was using when you were profiling her at her apartment.”

Diana nodded her head and smiled at Vincent.
“Vincent, I have just what you need in my bedroom. You

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need to take Catherine to the bathroom now anyway. I'll be back in just a few minutes."

When Diana returned a few minutes later, Vincent had Catherine settled back on her bed. He was seated at the table eating the meal William had sent for him. He looked expectantly at Diana, and she came to him with a small notebook in her hand. "Ever since Father told me that Catherine was alive, and that they were all waiting for you to be reconnected to her, I have kept this notebook with me. It is the notebook that I used to record everything I discovered about Catherine when I was studying her life and profiling her. I actually have a shopping list of sorts of the scented toiletries she used. Do you want to see it?"

Vincent was ecstatic. "I do, please show me!"

Diana handed him the notebook, open to the page Vincent needed, and he read her notes:

Catherine Chandler had the following scented toiletries in her bathroom:

Mountain Meadows brand Honeysuckle Creamy Bath & Shower Soap

Aubrey Organics brand Honeysuckle Rose Shampoo & Conditioner

Crabtree & Evelyn of London brand Evelyn Rose Body Lotion

Eco-Beauty Organics brand Organic Rose facial products

Farouche Perfume by Nina Ricci

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(The perfume contains rose and honeysuckle notes which draw all of the others together.)

Vincent shook his head with wonder. "You really are thorough when you profile people, aren't you?"

Diana nodded and smiled. "People are like puzzles to me. If pieces are missing, I get an incomplete picture. Catherine likes using a signature scent. That, in itself, is a small statement about the type of person she is. It helps to define her as an individual."

Vincent looked at her as he asked, "Do you know where these things can be found?"

Diana smiled and nodded at him. "Actually, I checked out every cosmetic boutique and health food store she shopped in to find where she bought all of these things. I know right where to get them."

Vincent shook his head. "Diana, you can't go shopping for these things yourself. It isn't safe for you until Joe can arrest Adrian."

Diana smiled at his concern for her. "I know that, Vincent, but I'm sure that Susan would be thrilled to go shopping for Catherine. I'll give her this list and tell her where to find these toiletries for you. I'm sure that she can have them in time for Catherine's bath tomorrow."

Vincent smiled happily. "Thank you so much, Diana."

As Diana was leaving to take the list to Susan, Joe was coming into Catherine's room. Vincent saw Diana color up, and Joe looked completely flustered. Diana scooted

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quickly out of the room, and Joe just stood there watching her leave. It was all Vincent could do to keep from laughing out loud at them.

Joe finally turned around and faced Vincent, but he seemed to have difficulty remembering what he was there for. Finally, he said, "They told you that they finished translating Gabriel's notebook, didn't they?"

Vincent smiled as he replied, "Actually, no, I've been a little distracted."

Joe chuckled, "I can't imagine why! I met Peter out in the hallway when I got off the elevator, and he told me that you ended up here, like we all figured you would, last night. I am so happy for you, Vincent!"

Vincent nodded, "Thank you, Joe. No words can describe how wonderful it feels to have my bond with Catherine restored. It is a feeling beyond joy!"

Diana came back into the room, and the electricity between her and Joe was tangible, but they both avoided looking at one another. Vincent smiled and shook his head. Diana looked at Vincent as she blushed again. "I just gave Susan the list, and she is going shopping right now." Then she finally looked at Joe and asked, "What is going on with your criminal roundup, Joe?"

Joe glanced at Diana, and then he looked at Vincent as he answered her question. "The FBI helped us to move quickly with arrests and indictments of everyone working for Adrian. We have raided and shut down every illegal business on the list. That's the good news. The bad news

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is that Adrian Vlas, Jonathan Pope, Steve Palmer, and several of Adrian's hit-men are missing. With all of his offshore accounts, the FBI's theory is that he has probably escaped the country, and he is living high and causing trouble somewhere else by now." Joe finally looked straight at Diana. "Until we know for sure, though, it still isn't safe for you in the city, Diana. Adrian was bent on revenge. I'm not convinced he is really gone yet."

Diana met Joe's eyes for a brief moment, and then she looked at the floor. "Oh, stop worrying, Joe! I'm not going to wait until you are gone, and then escape out the door into the city!"

Joe was firm. "Please see that you don't, Diana! If you do, I swear I'll paddle you!"

Diana couldn't help giggling, and then a smart-Alec retort escaped before she could stop it, "Promise?" Diana couldn't believe she had actually said that. She turned red as a beet and practically ran out the door.

Joe stared after Diana, and then he turned to Vincent. "Did she really just say that?"

Vincent chuckled, "She really did!" Vincent was amused to see a far-off smitten look come over Joe as he wandered out the door without another word.

After Joe and Diana left the room, Mary came in with Little Jacob. She asked Vincent, "Are you ready for a nursing lesson, Vincent?"

Vincent looked overjoyed. "Nothing would make me happier, Mary." Vincent took Little Jacob from Mary and

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gazed down into his bright and alert little face as he said, "You kept Mommy's secret too, didn't you?" The baby smiled up at his father.

Mary ran the bed up to a sitting position, and then she took Little Jacob from Vincent. Vincent settled on the bed with Catherine cradled in his arms, and then Mary showed him how to help Little Jacob to nurse from Catherine. It gave Vincent a profound sense of peace and satisfaction to know that Little Jacob was being nourished by his own mother's milk.

Mary sat down in the rocking chair next to the bed, and while Little Jacob was nursing, Vincent talked to her. "It looks to me like you have taken steps to correct that 'terrible mistake' you told me about a couple of months ago. You and Father looked very happy together, and I was so glad to see that."

Mary smiled at Vincent. "Yes, I finally decided to tell Father how I felt. Vincent, he was overjoyed to know! He told me that he had just thought that I wasn't interested in him that way. We have wasted so much time!"

Vincent shook his head. "Then your time together now will be that much sweeter. Have you noticed the avoidance dance that Joe and Diana are doing?"

Mary giggled, "The entire community is talking about those two. They really are confused, aren't they? Neither one of them seems to have a clue how the other one feels. It looks like Father and I all over again, only funnier!"

Vincent chuckled, "It really is funny! That all started

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when they came out of Gabriel's mansion, after we retrieved Dr. Vlas' journals and the videotapes. I don't know what happened in there, but they are head-over-heels in love with each other now. Something has them stuck in reverse, though. I think I might just have to step in and do some interfering."

Mary laughed, "Please do, Vincent. It is almost painful to watch them!"

The next morning, when Diana returned to Catherine's room with the toiletries, Vincent surveyed the products, and then he gave her a look of dismay. "I don't know what to do with most of this! I have seen the women of our community going into the pool chambers and our bathrooms looking like street urchins after an hard day's work, and afterward, they magically reappear looking like angels. I've always wondered how they could transform that way."

Diana laughed at his bewildered look. "You didn't think I was going to leave a big Monster like you alone with her and all of this stuff did you? There's no telling what she would end up looking like!"

Vincent looked vastly relieved as he chuckled. "Well then, little Brat, show me!"

Vincent was fascinated by Diana's help with Catherine's feminine grooming. They bathed Catherine and shampooed and conditioned her hair, and Diana taught a delighted Vincent other mysterious female

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grooming tasks. Diana also showed Vincent how to blow-dry her hair and style it simply. Catherine was then creamed, perfumed, and dressed in a fresh nightgown. When Vincent had carried Catherine back to her freshly made bed, Diana asked him, "There, is that better?"

Vincent sat on the edge of Catherine's bed and closed his eyes, as he breathed in her scent deeply. "Oh, yes, so much better! Thank you, Diana. Life is really complicated for you women, isn't it?"

Diana laughed, "Yes, but it is so very worth it to see the effect our efforts have on our men." Diana shook her head. "You really are an unusual man, Vincent!"

Vincent looked at her and asked, "Why is that, Diana?"

Diana giggled at him. "Most men are only interested in the results, not in how those results are achieved."

Vincent smiled at her. "When Catherine wakes up, I don't want her to feel neglected. She always took the time to look and smell the way she did. It is a small thing for me to take care of that for her while she can't do it for herself."

Diana smiled at him, and then she changed the subject. "I feel like a bird beating its wings against a cage. Thank goodness I don't sleepwalk, or I would be out in the city every night. I sure wish Joe could catch Adrian!"

Vincent understood her restlessness, because he had felt that throughout his life. "Diana, why don't you go below, and visit the Waterfall Cavern? That always helps me when I feel trapped."

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Diana nodded, "Oh that is such a good idea, Vincent. I think I'll do just that right now. That should help me to settle down." She left Catherine's room then and headed for the tunnels.

Later in the day, ten-year-old Eric knocked softly on the door, and Vincent looked up from eating another delicious meal William had sent to him. Vincent smiled at the boy. "Come in, Eric! What brings you all the way here?" Then he saw the book under Eric's arm, and he chuckled, "As if I need to ask! Did you want to read to Catherine?"

Eric was tall for his age and slender, with straight blond hair and huge grey eyes, which looked even bigger behind the thick lenses of the glasses he wore. He broke into an happy grin and nodded. "Cathy saved my life when she rescued Ellie and me from that horrible Ridley Foster Home. Father told us that it would be better if we didn't come here until you found Cathy, but now I want to do something for her. Tony told me that Cathy had told him that her father used to read Rudyard Kipling's stories to her when she was a little girl. So, I brought *The Jungle Book* to read to her. I thought I could read a little of it every afternoon to her."

Vincent remembered how Eric had not been frightened by his appearance when Catherine had brought the child to him for protection, and he was warmed by Eric's thoughtfulness now. "I know that Catherine will really

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enjoy having you read to her. Even if she doesn't seem to hear it, her subconscious mind and her heart will hear it. Thank you, Eric."

Eric added, "Vincent, Tony asked me to tell you that he and Jamie have gone together to the Crystal Cavern to get the things you left there."

Vincent smiled, "That was thoughtful of them. Thank you for telling me, Eric."

Eric settled on the rocking chair by Catherine's bed. Then he opened the book and began reading to her. It brought tears to Vincent's eyes to see how much unselfish love Catherine had inspired in everyone.

Vincent had finished eating and brushing his teeth, and Eric had just finished reading to Catherine, and he was going out the door when Joe stepped in. Vincent looked at Joe in surprise. "You are back! Has there been some new development in Adrian's case?"

Joe smiled and shook his head. "No, I'm just worried about Diana. I wanted to make sure that she doesn't decide to go traipsing around the city yet."

Vincent chuckled, "Don't worry, Joe, although I'm sure you will anyway. She does have cabin-fever, so I sent her below to the Waterfall Cavern. I think that should calm her down. She doesn't have a lot to occupy that active mind of hers since she and Father finished translating Gabriel's notebook. I know that she won't go running off up top, though."

Joe still looked worried. "I really hope you're right,

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Vincent. I can't tell you how much it scares me not knowing where Adrian is."

Vincent decided this was as good a time as any to "interfere" in Joe's and Diana's stalled love life. So, he changed the subject. "You know, Joe, for two law enforcement professionals trained to study and profile people, you and Diana are amazingly obtuse about each other."

Joe was startled out of his train-of-thought. "What do you mean, Vincent?"

Vincent answered him. "She is in love with you."

Joe looked confused. "Who is in love with me?"

Vincent chuckled at Joe's clueless look. "Diana is!"

Joe wrinkled his forehead and objected. "I know who she's in love with, and it isn't me!"

Vincent suddenly realized what was going on with Joe and Diana. He remembered Diana's comment that Joe loved Catherine too when she had asked for permission to bring Joe to the tunnels. "You think Diana is in love with me, don't you?"

Joe nodded his head emphatically. "I think it's very obvious she is. Of course, she would never act on that feeling, because you are married to Cathy."

Vincent couldn't help laughing. He shook his head and sat down at the table, and Joe gave him a completely bewildered look as he sat down too. Then Vincent said, still chuckling, "She loves me all right, and I love her. Our pet names for each other are 'Monster' and 'Brat.' I don't

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think you even need to guess which name belongs to whom! Now, does that sound like a romantic relationship to you?"

Joe was shaking his head. "Hardly! That sounds like a bullying over-protective big brother and his obnoxious feisty baby sister." Realization dawned on Joe's face, and he chuckled as he continued, "And all of the playful banter that involves!"

Vincent nodded his head. "I rest my case. You think Diana is in love with me. She thinks that you are in love with Catherine. But I see the way you two look at each other whenever you each think the other won't notice."

Joe shook his head and frowned. "Diana tried to tell me that I was in love with Cathy once before, and she wouldn't believe me when I told her we were just great friends! I love Cathy, but I'm not *in* love with her. What makes her think that I love Cathy as more than that?"

Vincent explained to Joe his observation of the situation. "Diana is a special crimes investigator, Joe. Her world involves looking at evil people and events outside of herself. She then must carefully protect herself from the horrors she discovers. She is asleep to the feelings you have for her, and can only see your friendship with Catherine, which has become exaggerated in her mind. If you don't wake her up, someone else will, and you will lose her."

Joe felt his heart soar. "Thank you, Vincent. By the way, what made you decide to tell me this?"

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Vincent told him, "Two people I love nearly lost each other because of perceived misconceptions about their relationships with each other and those around them. They have lost a lot of precious time with one another as a result of that, and I didn't want to see that happen to you and Diana."

Joe smiled and asked, "Are you talking about Father and Mary? They sure are happy together lately!"

Vincent nodded, "Yes, Mary has been in love with Father for years, but she stayed silent and almost waited too long to tell him. In the beginning, there were his unresolved feelings for his first wife, Margaret, standing in the way. Father had come to the tunnels heartbroken when he was blacklisted above by the medical establishment, and his father-in-law even had his marriage to Margaret annulled. Then Margaret found him and came below when she was dying of pancreatic cancer. Father was able to spend the last seven days of Margaret's life reunited with her, and that made him very happy, although it was sad to have so little time with her.

"When Father was finally beyond his grief, Mary still stayed silent about her feelings for him; because she thought that it was somehow selfish to want Father for herself in a marriage relationship. Then a woman, Jessica, who had once lived in the tunnels and had been close friends with Father, came back into his life. She and Father fell in love, and Mary came to me devastated, because she had also convinced herself that Father could

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never fall in love with anyone after Margaret. She admitted to me that she had made a terrible mistake by not telling Father how she felt about him. As it turned out, Father couldn't bear to leave the tunnel community he had founded to go above, and Jessica couldn't bear to leave her career as a world-renowned photographer and come back below. Each wanted the other to be happy, so the two didn't pursue that relationship any further. Mary has now corrected her mistake, and she and Father are very happy at last."

Joe jumped up and headed for the door. Vincent asked, "Where are you off to now?"

Joe turned around and grinned at Vincent. "I think I'm going to go find Sleeping Beauty and see if I can wake her up!"

Vincent chuckled, "I hear a kiss works well!"

Joe laughed, "I just might try that!"

After Joe left, Vincent went to Catherine and sat on the edge of the bed. "I wish that was all you needed, my Beauty." On impulse, he bent over and kissed her lips. Then he gazed at her unresponsive features. "Just checking," he said softly as he gently stroked her cheek.

When Joe finally arrived at the Waterfall Cavern, Diana was seated on the rock ledge overlooking the water. Her legs were hanging over the edge, and she was just gazing at the numerous waterfalls crashing down. Diana's long auburn hair wasn't in its usual ponytail, and it was

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cascading in soft waves over her shoulders and down her back. She looked very feminine and vulnerable. Joe struggled to maintain his composure as a strong desire to take her in his arms and never let go swept over him. He didn't want to startle her, so he called out to her from the mouth of the cavern. "Well, I finally found you!"

Diana stayed seated but turned her head to look at Joe. He saw her blush and smiled to see clear evidence that Vincent was right. Diana tried not to look as flustered as she felt as she spoke to him. "You needed to see me?"

Joe walked toward her as he answered. "Yes, I needed to get something cleared up!"

Diana gave him a puzzled look. "What, did I forget to cross a 'T' in my report?"

Joe was trying to keep a straight face while Diana looked more and more rattled by his approach. He said in a very serious tone, "Oh, no, it was much worse than that!" She blinked up at him, completely speechless. He reached down and grabbed her wrists, lifting her to her feet. Her eyes became huge as he pulled her arms up around his neck. Then he wrapped his arms around her, pulled her body against his, and stifled Diana's little yelp of surprise as he kissed her with an intense hungry passion. Diana closed her eyes as she relaxed in Joe's arms and returned his kiss with equal enthusiasm. The fire in that kiss sent thrills sweeping through her body. When their lips parted, Joe continued to hold her, and she

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laid her head on his chest. Diana had wanted to be in Joe's arms again ever since he had held her on top of the rafters in Gabriel's mansion.

Joe whispered, "I'm in love with you, Kiddo! Is that clear enough?"

Diana giggled and said, "Perfectly! I'm in love with you too, Joe."

Joe's left arm was wrapped tightly around Diana's waist, but he was running his right hand through her soft, thick hair. "You have the most beautiful hair, Diana. I have wanted to get my hands on it again ever since we were in Gabriel's mansion in those rafters together."

The imp in Diana couldn't resist, and she looked up at him and said, "Oh, I'm completely straightened out now! It's my hair you're in love with!"

Joe knew she was teasing him, but he tried to look exasperated. "Oh, shut up!"

"Make me!" She challenged him. With that, he took her breath away with another passionate kiss.

When their lips parted again, Joe chuckled, "Vincent's right. We are two of the stupidest profilers on the planet!"

Diana looked up at him in surprise and giggled. "Did Vincent actually say that?"

Joe smiled down at her. "Actually, Vincent called us obtuse."

Diana laughed, "Well, he's right! But I am going to have to kill him! Come with me. I want to show you something."

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Diana took Joe's hand, and she began leading him toward a wonder he hadn't seen yet, Elizabeth's Painted Tunnels. As they were walking, holding hands, they passed other community members who smiled happily at the couple. After a few minutes, Diana stopped and cocked her head as she heard her name relayed on the pipes. She stepped over to the pipes along the wall and listened. Then she started laughing.

Joe gave her a quizzical look, and asked, "What is it?"

Diana was still giggling as she answered him. "It seems that we have been the subject of many concerned conversations down here. The message being relayed over the pipes is, 'Vincent finally fixed Joe and Diana!' Nothing gets past these people!"

Joe was laughing too. "That is just too funny! Until I talked to Vincent this afternoon, I didn't even know we could be fixed!"

Diana gave Joe an amused look. "Oh, is that so? Tell me about it!"

Joe explained, "Well, Vincent was astute enough to figure out that we were both entertaining a delusion that the other was suffering from unrequited love."

Diana looked puzzled. "Unrequited love, both of us?"

Joe went on. "Yes, you thought that I was—"

Diana finished, "In love with Catherine."

Joe continued, "Yes, and I thought that you were in love with Vincent."

Diana laughed and shook her head. "With Vincent?"

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He is like a brother to me!”

Diana was still giggling as Joe laughed himself and added, “Yes, Vincent explained the Monster and Brat dynamics of your relationship to me.”

Joe put his arm around Diana’s shoulders, and she put hers around Joe’s waist. They then continued onward through the lower tunnels, then up a winding stone stairway, and then across the catwalk bridge over the Whispering Gallery. Next, they climbed up an elaborate wrought-iron circular stairway through two more levels of tunnels, until they finally came to a secret door accessing a section of abandoned manmade tunnels, where Elizabeth lived and painted the smooth walls with an history of Father’s world.

When they arrived in the Painted Tunnels, Elizabeth was busy with new drawings, as usual. She greeted them cheerfully. “Come here, children. See what I am working on now!”

Diana took Joe to her. “Elizabeth, this is Joe Maxwell. This is his first visit to see your murals.”

Elizabeth took Joe’s hand and led him to her latest project. “Welcome, child! I have your story on down the tunnel over there. But see what I am preparing to paint now!”

Joe shook his head as he gazed in awe at the fascinating stories she was telling with her paintings on the tunnel walls. He could see that these works of art

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were a complete history of Father's world together with stories of what was occurring at the same time in the world above. It was an exquisite depiction of how everything and everyone was connected in one world. Elizabeth's current project was the pictorial account of Vincent's reconnection to Catherine, and he was very moved by the majesty with which she was capturing that poignant reunion. She had a charcoal sketch of the scene nearly completed, and that sketch alone was impressive, even without adding paint.

Joe turned to the lovely elderly white-haired woman and said, "Elizabeth, these paintings are magnificent! You have created such a beautiful gallery here. I have got to come back when you have this scene with Vincent and Catherine completed and painted. Just the sketch is very moving!"

Her eyes sparkled at the compliment. "I'm glad that it gives you pleasure, Joe. Everyone visits me with their stories of what is going on in Father's world and in the world above, and I paint them on these smooth manmade tunnel walls. These upper tunnels, which have been abandoned by the city, are the only surfaces I can paint. The lower tunnels, with the natural rock walls, are too rough for my paintings. I really love doing this."

Joe was truly amazed. "That is very apparent! I haven't seen you in Peter's home. Did you visit there in the last couple of days to see the details you have sketched here?"

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Elizabeth's eyes crinkled with humor. "No, I don't leave my tunnels here. Vincent marveled once about how I could paint these pictures without having seen the events myself. I told him that it wasn't magic. I do see the events in a way. Mouse brings me my paints and newspapers with photographs from the world above. William brings me meals from his kitchen and tells me stories. Sarah comes to check on my welfare regularly, and she tells me stories. Everyone makes it here once in a while, and they all tell me stories. Then, I paint those stories. It is my gift to turn stories into pictures, and it makes me happy to do it."

Joe smiled with wonder at her. "It is truly an amazing gift, Elizabeth!"

Diana took Joe on a complete tour of Elizabeth's Painted Tunnels from the beginning of her historical murals. He saw the pictorial account that Elizabeth had mentioned of his introduction to the tunnels by Diana and meeting Vincent for the first time. Diana told Joe, "Vincent told me that Elizabeth is a mystery to everyone in Father's world. No one knows why she came to the tunnels or from where. She refuses to talk about that."

Joe paused in front of an imposing painting of Vincent whom Elizabeth had portrayed as their protective warrior. There was a great crack across the tunnel wall marring the portrait. "What happened here?"

Diana explained, "There was a time when Father's world was threatened with destruction when Elliott

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Burch's Burch Tower was being constructed. It was going to be so tall, that its foundation threatened to break through and collapse the tunnels here. Vincent said that Elizabeth was in the most danger of a possible collapse which would have killed her, but she refused to leave her work. She insisted that she had to finish what she had started. Fortunately, Catherine was able to prove that Elliott had paid thugs to discredit a lawyer who was filing a class action lawsuit against Elliott on behalf of the neighborhood the tower would displace. Catherine filed an injunction and was able to stop Elliott's tower permanently before the foundation was even laid. After that failure, Elliott did an about-face with a change in priorities, and he really tried to become a better person."

Joe commented, "I remember that case against Elliott Burch. Cathy was extremely angry with him over the tactics he used to push that construction project. Elliott's failure to complete that tower nearly toppled his empire, but I think that it made him realize that he didn't want to do business that way anymore. How did Elizabeth paint me so accurately when she had never met me before?"

Joe realized that there was nothing wrong with Elizabeth's hearing when he heard her laugh, and she came to him with the newspaper account of his success in winning the election as the District Attorney. His picture was on the front cover; mystery solved. Elizabeth said, "I told you it isn't magic!" Diana and Joe laughed with her as she walked back to her work.

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They stopped in front of Elizabeth's painted account of the rise and fall of Burch Tower. She had painted a picture of Elliott's imposing tower as it was supposed to look when it was completed. Beside it she had painted the reality of the huge empty hole in the now abandoned construction site. Joe chuckled, "Boy, she really captures every story in intricate detail. She makes them come alive with her talent. Well, I hate to kiss and run, but I had better get back up top and check on how things are going with our criminal roundup." He took Diana in his arms and kissed her again. He smiled as he gazed into her lovely green eyes and said, "We'll continue this discussion again later!" She giggled and nodded.

After Joe left to go back up top, Diana went back to Peter's home. She practically danced into Catherine's room as Vincent was settling Catherine back on her bed. Vincent turned around and chuckled when he saw the happy look on Diana's face. Diana ran to Vincent and threw her arms around his neck as he caught her with an hug. He asked, "What's this all about?"

Diana exclaimed in mock anger, "Meddler!"

Vincent laughed, "Oh! You're welcome!"

Diana pulled away from him and put her hands on her hips. "You know I'm going to beat the tar out of you!"

As a fleeting picture of a tiny chick pecking at an elephant's foot ran through Vincent's mind, he had to stifle a laugh. "I've got a king-size picture of that! Now

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run along before I decide to spank you!"

Diana danced out of the room and tossed over her shoulder, "Monster!"

Vincent chuckled again as he called after her, "Brat!"

Vincent had quickly learned Catherine's schedule, and it gave him tremendous pleasure to be able to take care of her. He had settled into an happy routine with her and Little Jacob during the day, and every night, he joined Catherine in her terrifying nightmares. She no longer evaporated from sight, and he was always able to help her resolve each fear, but she still remained in the dream-world.

One afternoon, as Vincent lay on Catherine's bed, snuggled against her back while she was nursing Little Jacob, he felt a combination of joy and sadness. He was thrilled to have his little family in his arms, but he was also sad that Catherine still wasn't awake to enjoy it too. He was very concerned about the length of time that she had been in this unconscious state and what it was doing to her physical body. Vincent reached out to his sister telepathically, "Elisia?"

Elisia spoke to his mind. "I'm here, Vincent."

Vincent asked her, "Elisia, is there anything else I need to do for Catherine to help her to wake up? I can feel her body weakening. She has been trapped in this nightmare state for too long. I have been exercising and massaging her muscles for her, but she is still losing

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strength.”

Elisia comforted Vincent. “We are aware of that, Vincent. You are doing everything you can do alone. Try to stay calm and positive. I promise you that Catherine will be all right. We are getting ready to come to you. We have a treatment method that we believe will help her. We will be there soon.”

Vincent was relieved as he hugged Catherine and Little Jacob tighter. “Thank you, Elisia. It will be wonderful to finally see you again.”

Elisia counseled Vincent, “Just keep participating in Catherine’s dreams until we arrive, Vincent. It helps her more than you realize.” Then Elisia was gone from his mind.

Three days later, in the late afternoon, everyone began trickling into Catherine’s room. Pascal was the first to arrive, and Vincent looked surprised. “Has something happened, Pascal? You almost never leave your pipes!”

Pascal replied, “I was hoping you could tell me! I received a strong prompting to come here, and I couldn’t resist it. So, I’m here, and I have no earthly notion why!”

Vincent chuckled as others began arriving with the same bewildered explanation for their visit. Besides Pascal, the others who showed up were Peter, Susan, Devin, Charles, Diana, Joe, Isaac, Rolley, Laura, Jerry, Father, Mary, Mouse, Jamie, Rebecca, Sarah, Brooke, and Tony.

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They all looked expectantly at Vincent, and he said, "I think what you have all experienced is a Tandin roll call!"

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Chapter IX

Exodus to Zion

When Vincent informed everyone that they had been summoned by the Tandins, they all smiled with expressions of both relief and curiosity. Father spoke for the group when he said, “Well, I guess all we can do now is relax and wait!”

Father put his arm around Mary and guided her to the loveseat, where they sat down and held hands. Mouse went to the other side of Catherine’s bed and stood looking out of the window over the rosebush. Charles sat down in the rocker by Catherine’s bed and held her hand, while Devin leaned against the bathroom doorway, with his arms crossed, softly smiling at his big friend’s tender concern for Catherine. Restless Pascal paced around the room, unconsciously tapping his metal baton, which he used to tap messages on the pipes, against his thigh.

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Jamie had laid her bow and quiver of arrows on the table, and then she sat down on the end of Catherine's bed. Joe was leaning against the wall just inside the door, and he had his arms wrapped around Diana, who was leaning with her back against him. Peter and Susan had been the last to come in, and they sat down with the remaining eight, Laura and Jerry, Isaac, Rolley, Tony, Sarah, Brooke, and Rebecca at the big table. Vincent was standing by Catherine's bed between Charles in the rocker and Jamie on the end of the bed. Vincent had moved Little Jacob's crib into Catherine's room soon after he had found her, and the baby was sound asleep in it.

They had all been chattering about the strong feeling that had brought them to Catherine's room as they had arrived and had then found places to wait. Rebecca and Diana had been signing a chat with Laura and Jerry. Now, they had all settled down and lapsed into contemplative silence, and the expectation in the room was palpable. All heads turned toward the doorway, and even Pascal stopped pacing when the elevator doors down the hall opened, and they heard footsteps approaching.

The Tandin man and woman who entered Catherine's room looked truly mythical, as if they had just stepped out of a fairytale. The Tandin man was a little taller than Vincent but not quite as big-boned. His once-black mane of hair, as well as the fur on his face and hands, was now streaked with white. He still looked vigorous and powerful, though. He was dressed in comfortable heavy

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khaki clothing, hiking boots, and an hunter green hooded cloak.

The small Tandin woman was not much bigger than Jamie. She was stunningly beautiful, with a flowing mane of jet-black hair, which had the softness of angora, down to her hips. Her upper black eyebrows were narrower than Vincent's, beginning at her temples and then curving up over her eyes and coming together in a point over the bridge of her feline nose, like the curves at the top of a pretty black heart. A second pair of separated narrow black eyebrows was under those, positioned where human eyebrows are. Unlike Vincent, who had fur on most of his face, including down the full length of his wide feline nose, her delicate feline-featured face, with the exception of the extra set of eyebrows, was completely hairless. The backs of her artistic hands and the tops of her arms to the elbows were covered with short soft black fur which made them look like she was wearing long, fingerless, black velvet gloves. Unlike Vincent's, her long, slim fingers were hairless, with slender tapered claws at the tips, which were longer than Vincent's. Her skin was a lovely flawless olive color. Her thick mane was partially pulled up, fastened in place at the crown of her head with a gold hair clip studded with heart-shaped rubies, revealing slightly pointed pixie-like ears, pierced with ruby heart-shaped earrings. She was wearing a simple black calf-length dress, with elbow-length sleeves, and a rounded neckline with a narrow red collar. Around her tiny waist was a red

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braided silken rope, the ends of which were sealed with gold leaves. Her dainty feet were shod with low-heeled red velvet knee-high boots. She was wearing a fine gold chain, with an heart-shaped ruby pendant at her throat. Over this outfit she was wearing a black velvet hooded cloak with a red satin lining.

Devin was mesmerized by her, and he unconsciously dropped his folded arms and stood up and away from leaning against the bathroom doorway. Her head turned toward him, and she stopped, frozen in her tracks, as her almond-shaped deep-grey eyes pierced clear to his soul. She paused, momentarily surprised and fascinated by him, and then she smiled softly. There was instant chemical magnetism between them, and everyone in the room could feel the electricity. Vincent had caught the connection between them and watched in fascination as an instant bond was formed.

She spoke nonverbally to Devin's mind, "You have been restless all of your life."

Devin found himself thinking in answer to her, "That's because I've been looking for you!"

She spoke to him telepathically again. "Well, you have found me now, but I must complete this mission first." A look of peace came over Devin's face which Vincent had never seen before.

Then she spoke in a soft, lilting tone to everyone in the room. "I am Vincent's sister, Elisia. Uncle Tanimus and I have come here to bring all of you, together with Vincent

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and Catherine, to our Tandin World. Once we are there, we will use our combined mental abilities, together with yours, to help Vincent to bring Catherine home from this nightmare she is trapped in. We have a special place there where we will perform this treatment. From a medical and scientific standpoint, it can't be explained, but it is a method which we haven't seen any need to change over the centuries, because it continues to work so well for serious cases which don't respond to conventional treatment."

Tanimus removed his cloak, and then he took Elisia's off her shoulders. Diana extricated herself from Joe's arms and took their cloaks from Tanimus. She walked to the table and laid them on it. Then she and Joe sat down together on the sofa near the door. Diana smiled at Tanimus and motioned for him to join them on the sofa, and he did so.

Elisia walked over to Catherine's bed, beside Charles, and laid her delicate hand on Catherine's forehead. She looked at Vincent and said, "This one has such a wonderful mind! When we felt her bravery in facing the mental storms caused in your mind by both attacks on you by Paracelsus, we were able to help strengthen her mind, so she could bring you back."

Elisia then put her hand on Charles' shoulder and smiled into his ecstatic face. "You have a kind and compassionate soul, Charles. That is powerful medicine for Catherine." Charles face broke into an happy smile at

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her compliment. Elisia stepped around Charles and went to Vincent. She looked up at him with a soft smile, "My dear brother, you have certainly grown!" Vincent smiled down at his petite twin, and they embraced. Elisia then told him, "I think that you have already figured out that we waited to come, because we didn't want to distract you and interfere with the process of your recovery and the repair of your connection with Catherine. Your family and friends were very wise to handle this the way they did. As I felt your mind healing and becoming stronger, I was able to help you by stimulating your memories."

Vincent hugged her more tightly and said, "Thank you, Elisia!"

Then Elisia broke away from Vincent, stepped over to Little Jacob's crib, and picked him up out of it. He opened his eyes and smiled up at his aunt. "My sweet little nephew!" she cried as she kissed him and then carried him to Tanimus. Elisia exclaimed as she put Little Jacob into his arms, "Isn't Little Jacob adorable, Uncle Tanimus?"

Tanimus looked down into Little Jacob's face with an expression of pure joy and said, "Oh, yes, he is wonderful!" He looked up at Vincent and added, "You have a beautiful family, Vincent. I have no words to express how happy it makes me to see what these people have done for you." Tanimus looked around at everyone and said, "Thank you for taking care of my nephew and for loving him!"

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Elisia turned to everyone in the room. “I know that you are all curious about the way we called you here. We had specific reasons for choosing the nineteen of you. Actually, we called twenty of you, but one hasn’t arrived yet. In order to most effectively treat Catherine’s condition, we needed people who had both very strong emotional attachments to Vincent, Catherine, and Little Jacob, as well as at least partially developed empathic abilities. You would not have been able to respond to our summons if you were not empathic. There are many others in your community who also have these attributes, but we didn’t want to cripple your community by taking people we can’t replace temporarily. We can’t effectively replace everyone that your children depend on for continuity in their lives. We brought a Tandin team with us to leave in Father’s world to help take care of your community in your absence. The team consists of a doctor, a nurse, a midwife, two engineers, and six sentries.

“We will be traveling through the tunnels to the northern region of The Bronx. Our world is far lower than yours, where the pipes you use for communication don’t reach. That is one reason we brought our people to leave here, so we can be in communication with them telepathically. It is a long journey below ground, so you will need provisions and either flashlights or lanterns.”

Pascal spoke up and asked, “Why do you live below the pipes? How can your human population communicate

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without them?"

Devin answered, "They don't need the pipes when they are living with telepaths, Pascal."

Pascal frowned and shook his head. "That's no fun!" Elisia turned to Pascal with a brilliant smile, which revealed dainty pearl-white upper fangs, giving her the appearance of a gorgeous vampire. Pascal melted, and he said in a dreamy voice, "But, then again, who cares about fun?"

Elisia spoke telepathically to Pascal's mind, "You have been these people's first defense with your communication system. You are very brave, with a generous heart."

Pascal couldn't take his eyes off Elisia as he exclaimed, "I'm converted!" Everyone chuckled at his enraptured look.

Elisia continued aloud, "Actually, Pascal, your question is a good one, because we do have many humans in our community who aren't living in chambers with Tandins. We do also have our own closed telephone system. We use land lines, because we don't want to take any chances that wireless transmissions might be picked up by those living in the world above."

Pascal was awestruck. "You have telephones?"

Elisia smiled at his surprise. "Yes, but before you start thinking that it is too miraculous, just remember that Father has only been developing your world for the past forty years. We have been developing ours for the past two-hundred years! Now, I need to test my telepathic

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link with each of you. I know that I have a telepathic connection with Pascal and with Devin, but I need to test it with the rest of you. This is a safety precaution. You all need to be aware of the risks involved in traveling to our world. Unfortunately, there are still some of Paracelsus' followers living in the tunnels along the way. Also, I have felt anxiety from your community over the threat that Adrian still poses." Elisia looked at Joe. "You still haven't incarcerated him, have you, Joe?"

Joe nodded at her. "That's correct. We don't have any idea where he is, and he was determined to kill Diana. I don't believe he would skip the country without attempting to follow through with his threat first."

Elisia shook her head sadly. "Well, that is why I need to test my telepathic communication with each of you now. If you should get separated somehow from the group, or if you get into any kind of trouble, you can send me a telepathic message. I can then communicate telepathically to whoever of my people is close enough to help you. We have sentries posted along the way back waiting for us."

Elisia looked first at Laura, and Laura's eyes became huge with excitement. Vincent translated the conversation as Laura signed enthusiastically to Elisia, "I heard you in my mind! I don't know what I heard, but I did hear!"

Elisia smiled at Laura and signed back, "There is nothing wrong with your mind, just with your ears. If you

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get into trouble, just scream in your mind, and I will know it is you. Do you understand?"

Laura smiled happily and signed again. "I understand. After Catherine is awake and well again, can you teach me how to use words in my mind, so I can speak telepathically with you?"

Elisia signed in reply. "It would be my pleasure to teach you!" Then Elisia tested her telepathic ability with each of the others, and they all lit up as they each replied to her in their minds. She spoke last to Tony's mind. "You are very wise for one so young, Tony. I perceive that loss and hardship have made you strong."

Tony replied telepathically. "I guess that is just part of being a Gypsy!" Elisia smiled at him and nodded her head.

Brooke spoke up and asked, "Elisia, how is it that you already know all of our names?"

Elisia replied, "That is actually a two-part question. When I was little, Uncle Tanimus patiently taught me how to use my empathic and telepathic abilities. However, just like Vincent, I am half human. When Vincent became very sick after the incident with Lisa as a teenager, I was clumsy in my attempts to help him. Vincent and I were sixteen, and I was also suffering from the effects of raging teenage hormones. It was difficult for me to concentrate, and my efforts to support Vincent's mind were too invasive. I ended up reading his mind pretty thoroughly, and I learned everyone's name that he was closely

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associated with then. During that illness, when he came so close to death, I practically climbed into his mind and screamed at him to wake up. Fortunately, he did!”

Vincent was shaking his head as he remembered her voice in his head, and he chuckled. “I remember that now. You really were screaming! That is why I didn’t recognize your voice when you spoke to me in the dream about the attack on our parents. You spoke to me very softly that time.”

Father spoke up at that point. “I am so grateful that you saved him, Elisia. Vincent’s vital signs had completely stopped, and I thought that he was dead. I never could understand how he came back and recovered so quickly after that.”

Tanimus raised an objection. “Elisia doesn’t give herself enough credit for her efforts with Vincent. She wasn’t clumsy in my opinion. She hasn’t taken into account the fact that, just like Vincent, she suffered terribly from the sudden loss of her empathic connection to her parents when they were killed. There was also the handicap of the remote separation from Vincent. She was the one with the closest biological link needed to effectively treat Vincent, and what she accomplished as a child, in helping him was remarkable even by Tandin standards.”

Elisia then went on as she smiled at her uncle. “Uncle Tanimus is lovingly biased in his thinking. Anyway, the second part of that name issue is the fact that I had to be invasive when Vincent became dangerously sick the last

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time that Paracelsus attacked, and I learned the rest of your names then. The first time Paracelsus attacked Vincent with the drug he was manufacturing, I had felt Vincent's empathic attachment to Catherine, but I didn't know her name. I was, though, able to link with her empathically through my link with Vincent. I helped to support her mind when she went to Vincent and pulled him out of that hallucination which had made him so dangerous. The second time Paracelsus attacked Vincent with his deception and lies, I learned Catherine's name as I was trying to help Vincent. I was with Vincent telepathically when he fled to the lower cave, but he was just too sick for me to help him by myself remotely. We thought that we might have to come to you then. When Catherine arrived, I was able to support her mind without invading it, so she could help Vincent when she went into the cave after him."

Pascal then asked, "Can you read all of our minds?"

Elisia giggled as she answered him. "No! We cannot read anyone's mind with whom we are not either emotionally or biologically connected, unless we are invited into that mind. We can project telepathic thoughts into your mind, but beyond that, unless you open your mind and reply to us telepathically, our power is mostly empathic. Even among those we can read the minds of, we don't invade unless there is some very compelling reason to, which there was when Vincent was dangerously sick."

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Jamie spoke up and asked, "How do you keep from reading people's minds? If I had your ability, I'm sure I would be reading minds even if I didn't want to. I don't understand how you can control that."

Elisia smiled at her. "The Tandins' mental abilities have been developing over many centuries, so using and controlling them is as natural to them as breathing. It is a little more challenging for those of us who are not purely Tandin, but with patient teachers like Uncle Tanimus, we do eventually learn how to control our abilities."

Uncle Tanimus added to Elisia's explanation of their empathic and telepathic abilities. "Dr. Dominik Vlas was an heartbreaking example of the necessity of being let into people's minds in order to help them. Dominik was being tortured mentally, unable to forgive himself for allowing Adrian and Gabriel to bring such great sorrow and destruction into the Tandin World. He wouldn't allow us to help him, and he wouldn't forgive himself. Then he disappeared from us altogether. Dominik didn't feel that he deserved the healing help we could have provided him with our mental abilities, so he wouldn't allow us into his mind. We never knew what happened to him after that, and it broke our hearts to lose such a dear friend. His ancestors helped to bring our people here from Romania."

Diana filled in the missing piece of history for Tanimus. "I am so sorry to have to inform you that Gabriel ended up murdering Dr. Vlas by strangling him in his sleep." Tanimus' eyes filled and overflowed with tears.

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Vincent told his uncle, "We have all of Dr. Vlas' journals of his work with the Tandins. We even have the one in which he explains what happened when our parents were killed."

Tanimus smiled through his tears, "I would really enjoy seeing those after we get your Catherine healed."

Isaac expressed the curiosity everyone felt. "Elisia, we have all been told the brief history of the Tandins from Dr. Vlas' journal. I would love to hear the account from you."

Rebecca had been signing for Laura as everyone spoke. Now, as Elisia began telling the story verbally for everyone else, she also signed for Laura. "Well, the Tandins were refugees from Romania two centuries ago. They stowed away aboard vessels sailing from Europe, escaping from vampire and werewolf hunters, for which they were mistaken because of their appearance. You can see by our appearance why. Because our women have nearly hairless faces and only an upper set of canine fangs, it was the women who were most often mistaken for vampires. The men, with their extra body and facial hair and their double set of canine fangs in both jaws, were most often mistaken for werewolves. I said that our people stowed away on board those vessels, but in reality, their passage was paid for by their human friends. Those human friends simply kept them hidden in their cabins on board. The Tandins had made many wonderful human friends over the centuries, but the vast majority of humans were afraid of them, and would have destroyed

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them altogether if they had stayed in Romania.

“Dr. Vlas’ ancestors were among the friends who protected the Tandins. Some members of his family were archaeologists. They had discovered the natural underground tunnels and caves under New York, and they had realized that the tunnels would be a safe sanctuary for the Tandins. It was then that the Tandins were hidden aboard the vessels by the Vlas family and other human friends who had paid for passage from Romania to New York. They found these tunnels to be a very safe refuge and began building up a civilization under the city.

“The Tandins are artisans, botanists, craftsmen, engineers, doctors, and scientists, with many who are also skilled in the fine arts. We still have descendents of some of our Romanian human friends living with us. We have also offered sanctuary to many human castoffs from the world above, like your people do. We live symbiotically with them, and it is an arrangement which has worked extremely well over the last two-hundred years. We have human community members who take the credit in the world above for scientific and medical discoveries, books, inventions, artwork, fashion clothing, and other products that we produce in our Tandin world. In exchange, they are provided with a safe home, either below or above, an education, medical care, and the sharing in common of the proceeds and products. The homes and businesses that we own in the world above are equipped with access doors to the tunnels below them. We also have electrical

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lines from those homes and businesses which have been extended down into our tunnels.

“We have conquered the mystery of cold fusion, so we have unlimited power from sea water. We haven’t revealed that technology, among others, to the world above, because it would have devastating consequences to the world economy in its present form. It would also endanger anyone bold enough to reveal it prematurely. The world simply isn’t ready for some of the technology we have developed yet.”

When Elisia paused, Jerry asked, “Elisia, if you have cold fusion available as an unlimited power source, why do you also use electrical lines from above? It seems like that would be unnecessary.”

Elisia smiled at him. “That is a really excellent question, Jerry. We continue to need a conventional power source to manufacture electrical products that are sold in the world above. They have to operate using the power that is currently available there.” Everyone smiled and nodded as the logic of that became obvious. Then Elisia continued, “Our humans and Tandins often intermarry as Vincent’s and my parents did. Ours was a case where two Tandin brothers married two human identical twin sisters.”

Susan looked at Tanimus and asked, “Tanimus, were you and your brother also twins?”

Tanimus smiled at her and replied, “No, when we married, I was twenty-six, and Gaylin was thirty-one. My

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Letha and their mother, Loren, were twenty. One year later, Gaylin and Loren had Vincent and Elisia.”

Everyone had been so engrossed in this fascinating story, that none of them had heard the elevator doors open and close down the hall. As Tanimus was speaking, Narcissa showed up at the door, and she immediately went to Tanimus. Diana took Little Jacob from him, and then Tanimus quickly stood up and grabbed both of Narcissa’s hands. Everyone was shocked that she had left her sanctuary and had come up here.

Narcissa exclaimed smiling, “You are the one who led me to our dear Vincent! I felt your powerful mind pulling me here. I have to thank you for allowing us to keep him. He has been the glue that has held us all together, and he is the only one who doesn’t think I’m crazy!” They all chuckled over the joy on both of their faces and at Narcissa’s unique way of expressing herself.

Tanimus then responded, “It is I who must thank you, Narcissa, for rescuing my brother’s child for us. I was desperate to save Vincent, and I was grateful for your receptive mind!” Diana and Joe squeezed over some more, and Tanimus seated Narcissa on the sofa beside him.

Vincent looked at Elisia and smiled. “I assume that Narcissa makes twenty?” She nodded and smiled back at him. Then he spoke to Narcissa. “Narcissa, do you feel up to a trip to the Tandin world?”

Narcissa lit up, “Why Vincent, child, what a very silly question! You know perfectly well that I love exploring

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new places in the tunnels.”

Vincent chuckled at the elderly woman. Then he looked at Tanimus. “Uncle Tanimus, we know what happened to our parents from Dr. Vlas’ journal and from Narcissa’s account. Even though it is painful, I would really like to know what happened from your perspective.”

Tanimus then began to explain everything that happened when Loren and Vincent were nearly kidnapped. “I was still in the tunnels on my way to your maternal grandparents’ home when I received the telepathic message from Gaylin that Loren and Vincent had been attacked. Gaylin showed me that he was being shot in the solarium, and he showed me the door out of which Loren had escaped with Vincent. The last thing he was able to do before he died was to help Loren to connect with me telepathically, so I could track her in the city and try to get to her and rescue her and Vincent. My wife, Letha, was carrying Elisia, and my parents-in-law were with her, as I passed them running through the tunnels. They were terrified and in shock, but I was relieved that they were safely headed for our world. When I arrived at the solarium, Gaylin had already bled to death.

“I couldn’t even get a third of the way to Loren before she had already put Vincent’s clothes on a discarded baby doll, had wrapped Vincent in trashed linen, and had laid him in the window-well behind St. Vincent’s hospital. Then she decoyed the men who were chasing them. I knew that I couldn’t get to both of them in time, and the

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weather was severely cold, which made me worry that Vincent would die of exposure if I didn't find someone closer to rescue him. Our people have known about your world from the time Father first organized it, and we knew that you had high ideals and also took care of people lost by the world above, so I began searching among your people for a receptive mind. Narcissa's mind was very open and receptive, and she followed my promptings flawlessly.

"While I was prompting Narcissa, I was also tracking Loren. It broke my heart when the men caught up with her before I could. She absolutely refused to reveal where she had put Vincent. The last thing I saw was what she did, Adrian's cruel and furious expression as he strangled the life out of her. Then he just left her body lying in the alley. My brother and I could always tell the difference between our wives, but it was severely heart-wrenching to carry Loren, who looked so much like my Letha, back home to our grieving family. Of course, we closed that home down immediately, sealed up the tunnel access, and sold the property."

Vincent was sober as he told his uncle, "Thank you Uncle Tanimus. That now gives us a complete picture of exactly what happened."

Elisia then asked Vincent, "Vincent, you have now spent about a week participating with awareness in Catherine's dreams since you found her. Before that, you didn't realize that she was alive, so you couldn't really

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make sense out of what you were seeing in the visions. What have you learned now about the fears she is facing?"

Everyone's eyes turned to Vincent, and he felt their concern for Catherine as he answered Elisia. "Catherine's fears are fueled by an overwhelming combination of emotions stemming from the events that occurred following my illness. Part of her problem is a sense of guilt. Catherine blames herself for not telling me that she was pregnant and not staying below with me. She was trying to protect me from burdens that she thought I was still too weak to trouble me with. Catherine knew that I was already distressed that our connection was severed. She just wanted to wait until I was stronger and more emotionally stable to tell me we were expecting a child, especially when I didn't even remember that we had married, let alone conceived a child together.

"Her nightmares are a strange combination of symbolic terrors and straightforward frightening memories. There have been recurring images of various venomous snakes. I am convinced that they represent Gabriel with his shots of first truth serum and then the nearly fatal dose of morphine. Catherine endured an horrifying ordeal during the time that she was missing. With the time I have spent participating in her nightmares, I think that I have finally pieced together most of what happened to her."

Elisia said softly, "Go ahead and tell us, Vincent. The more we know about what has trapped her in this state, the easier it will be for us to help you to free her from it."

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Vincent then went on with the account. “The last time I saw Catherine before she was kidnapped, she had wanted to tell me something. When she saw how distressed I was over not being able to feel her need to talk to me, because I had to wait to actually see it on her face, she just hugged me and told me not to worry about it. I now know that she had wanted to tell me then that she was pregnant. Later, she decided to go ahead and tell me, and she sent a note down with Bennie asking me to meet her at the tunnel access in the basement of her apartment building. When she left work and walked down into the parking garage to go home, so she could come down to me, she was betrayed by the corrupt District Attorney, John Moreno, and he handed her over to Gabriel’s men.

“Catherine had given Gabriel’s crime notebook to Elliott Burch for his cryptographers to decipher, and that was what Gabriel wanted to know. Gabriel imprisoned Catherine in an abandoned warehouse, and he had his doctor injecting truth serum into her, trying to get her to tell him where the notebook was. She refused to tell him. Catherine was emotionally spent from dealing with my illness. She was pregnant and suffering with morning sickness. She was cut off from me empathically, and she was being drugged and subjected to psychological torture. At that warehouse, Catherine found some pipes that she was able to tap out an S.O.S. on, and our Helpers relayed the message to Pascal. I tried to rescue her then, but Gabriel’s men managed to get her moved to the old Battery

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Arms building before I could reach her. Since I still couldn't feel her, I didn't know where she was being held after that failed rescue attempt.

"When Gabriel saw that I was the one coming for her, his goal changed. He was no longer interested in the notebook. Instead, he was obsessed with taking our child. The torture for Catherine then became excruciating as she was imprisoned in a small room, isolated and alone, with the knowledge that our child would be taken from her as soon as he was born. Gabriel lied to me when he locked me in the electrified cage in the basement of his mansion. He claimed that he had allowed Catherine to hold Little Jacob after he was born before he killed her. Catherine was never allowed to even touch her baby after he was born. Gabriel immediately ordered his doctor to administer what should have been a fatal dose of morphine, and then they took our baby out of the door and left Catherine to die alone.

"Catherine used the last bit of strength she had to break out of the restraints they had left her in on the delivery table. She had heard me tearing through Gabriel's barriers trying to get to her. So, she used her failing strength to come to me by climbing up the stairs to the roof. My little Catherine is so very courageous! Most women would have given up and died from that kind of brutal treatment. It sent her spinning into this traumatic nightmare, but she is bravely hanging on."

Father spoke to Elisia at that point. "Elisia, I am

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really intrigued by the treatment that you spoke of. I don't care if it can't be explained if it will help Catherine. We definitely believe in miracles in our world."

Peter added to Father's comments. "Did I understand correctly that we will get to help with this treatment?"

Tanimus answered them. "Yes, you will see first hand how it works, because you will be part of the treatment. It will be easier for you to understand when we get there. You will be joining in the combined mental strength of other powerful Tandin minds as we support Vincent, so he can go into Catherine's mind and retrieve her. There isn't an adequate way to describe it. You really have to experience it to fully comprehend how healing the process can be."

Father spoke up with a question. "Tanimus, obviously yours and Elisia's mental powers are quite advanced. Can the two of you not simply wake Catherine up yourselves now?"

Tanimus smiled as everyone looked expectantly at him for his explanation. "Father, let me ask you a question first. What is Vincent's physical condition?"

Father had concern in his voice as he replied. "Actually, Vincent is still not fully recovered from the ordeals he has endured. He has had two serious illnesses in his life, both of which severely taxed his heart. I have also had to remove bullets from his chest on a few occasions. Vincent still hasn't caught up on the sleep he needs for his body to repair itself. Peter and I are both

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very worried about him.”

Tanimus nodded his head as he continued. “We have felt both Vincent’s impaired condition and your community’s concern for him. To answer your question, yes, it is possible that Elisia and I could just wake Catherine up ourselves, but her condition is not simply physical impairment. Catherine’s psychological health is also compromised. Her mind and spirit need healing, and Vincent is the one best qualified to accomplish that by rescuing her from the nightmare she is trapped in. She has convinced herself that she failed both Vincent and her baby, and she desperately needs Vincent to pull her out of this and wake her up.

“Given Vincent’s current physical condition, it would be best to perform this procedure in our world, where we have an advanced monitoring system to scan both Vincent’s body and Catherine’s when he attempts to enter her nightmare and wake her up. The chamber there has been prepared to enhance this process and make it more conducive to relaxation and faith. Over the centuries, we have also found that this method works far more effectively when family members participate with their added love and support. This is especially important in this case, because Vincent himself is not completely well and strong. We have family members in our world with far stronger spirits than bodies who want to help wake Catherine up. They weren’t physically able to make the trip here, but they are waiting to help us there. The trip to

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our world will give us the greatest chance for success, and it will help to heal two worlds. Our world has been in pain ever since we lost Vincent, and if we are successful in waking Catherine up, your world will be healed by her restoration.”

Peter looked at Father and grinned. “I guess we’re going to Tandin medical school!”

Father chuckled at him and nodded, and then he said, “Well, I suppose we had better get packed up and get a good night’s sleep, so we can be well rested and ready for tomorrow’s trip.”

Elisia made a final comment before everyone left. “Bear in mind that it took us about three days to get here. With a larger group, as well as the necessity of taking time to nurse and change Little Jacob along the way, it will probably take about four days to get back to our world. So, pack accordingly.”

Susan approached Elisia. “I have rooms for you and your uncle, if you would like to stay with us here tonight.”

Elisia smiled at her. “That would be wonderful! Please take Uncle Tanimus to his room. He is a lot more tired than he would ever admit. I’m going down to our Tandin replacements for Father’s people, who are waiting in the tunnels to go on to Father’s world. I’ll get our bags from them, and I’ll be back up shortly.” Susan smiled and escorted Tanimus from the room.

Elisia looked at Jamie and said, “Be sure to pack your bow and arrows, little Huntress. The way may be

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treacherous, because we must pass through tunnels and passageways which have not been used and secured for many years in order to reach our world. Have everyone bring whatever weapon they can safely handle for protection.”

Jamie smiled at her and said, “Mouse made a new crossbow for me, which is much more powerful than my bow.”

Elisia smiled back at her warmly. “The crossbow may be more powerful, but you prefer your traditional bow.”

Jamie looked at her in surprise. “You *are* reading my mind!”

Elisia giggled, “Not your mind, Jamie, just your fingers.” Elisia took Jamie’s right hand in her left hand and compared their right hands together. Both were callused along the insides of their fingertips. Elisia then said, “You don’t like finger-guards either!”

Jamie laughed, “No, I don’t. They mess up my aim!”

Father had been listening to their delightful conversation. He broke in now with instructions for Jamie. “Jamie, Mary and I are going to stay in our bedrooms here tonight. When you take the Tandins to our world, please tell William and Angela that they will need to handle any Council decisions while we are gone.”

Jamie nodded, “I’ll tell them, Father.” Then she and the other community members left with Elisia to go into the tunnels.

Before she went out the door, Elisia turned and looked

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at Devin with a smile. He smiled back with a look of rapt devotion and watched her as she left the room. Devin strode quickly to Vincent and grabbed his arm. He exclaimed, "Oh, Vincent, that tiny sister of yours is so enchanting and beautiful and sweet!" Vincent chuckled at him, and Devin continued, "Vincent, we had never set eyes on each other before, but she looked right into me and through me, and she was able to sum up my life in one very accurate sentence! I am so in love with that little woman!"

Vincent smiled at his happiness. "Elisia is remarkable, Devin. She is also a little miracle-worker if she has cured you of your wanderlust."

Devin shook his head. "The only place I ever want to be now is wherever Elisia is!"

When Joe and Diana arose from the sofa, Diana took Little Jacob to Vincent and placed him in his smiling father's arms. Then the couple left the room hand-in-hand. Diana had expected Joe to stop and wait for the elevator to come back up, so he could leave through the tunnels to go back to his apartment and pack. Instead, Joe took Diana on down the hall a little farther to Peter's office. It was empty, and he took her inside and shut the door.

When Joe turned around to face her, he had a serious expression on his face as he took both of her hands in his. Diana raised her eyebrows, but she waited for him to

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speak. He said, "Diana, I don't know how you are going to feel about what I want to say to you."

Diana smiled up at him. "You can tell me anything, Joe."

Joe smiled lovingly down at her. "OK, then, here goes. Goodness knows I'm no virgin."

Diana broke in quickly. "Neither am I, Joe."

Then Joe went on. "It is taking every ounce of will-power I have to keep my hands off you! The desire that rises in me every time I lay eyes on you makes me want to drag you off to the nearest bed, tear your clothes off, and make wild passionate love to you. But—"

Diana finished for him, "You want something more!"

Joe looked relieved, "Yes! I have been watching these people, Diana, especially Vincent with Catherine, and Father and Mary. I want what they've got, and I want it with you. I could see that Cathy had something more with someone long before I ever knew about Vincent and the tunnels. It was something that was very special to watch. I can see that it is worth waiting for."

Diana smiled softly up at Joe. "I can't tell you how long I have waited to find a man who is on the same page with me! I feel as you do, Joe. Ever since I rescued Vincent, I have longed for what he has with Catherine. After meeting Vincent, I broke up with my boyfriend, because I realized that I would never have that with him. When we broke up, he told me that I had only given him small glimpses of myself, that I had never really let him in.

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I've never let anyone in, until now, with you, Joe. I have never really felt comfortable letting anyone in before. I never thought any man would ever truly be able to understand me. I am confident that you can."

Joe took Diana in his arms and whispered, "I sure do want to try!" He covered her mouth with his, and they both sighed in ecstasy as they expressed their passion for one another with that kiss. When they finally parted, he kept his arm around her as he opened the door, and they stepped into the hallway. "I have already put in for a long overdue vacation, so I can now leave without anyone wondering where I am. Everyone still thinks that you are missing, so we can just enjoy being 'missing' together." Diana giggled as they went to the elevator, and Joe then left to go pack at his apartment.

When the group met in the tunnels late the next morning, they were all wearing backpacks with sleeping bags attached, and they were all carrying lanterns, except elderly Narcissa who was nearly blind anyway, and they had packed additional flashlights. William had provided meals that were ready to eat and light for everyone to carry. Since there were ample water sources along the way for drinking and bathing, they didn't pack heavy beverages, just cups to drink from. Catherine was tucked in on a rolling hospital gurney, which Vincent had personally taken charge of. He put Narcissa's backpack on the bottom shelf of the gurney. Brooke was pushing

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Little Jacob in a stroller that could convert to a rolling bassinet for him when he needed to sleep. Years earlier, Mouse had fitted Peter's hospital gurneys with oversized pneumatic wheels to facilitate rolling them with ill patients from Father's world over uneven tunnel floors more comfortably. Recently, he had done the same with Little Jacob's stroller.

Devin's heart began pounding with excitement when Elisia approached him, looked up into his eyes, and held out her hand. The thrill that went through him, as he took her slender hand in his, was evident in the expression on his face, and everyone smiled. They were all in high spirits as they followed Tanimus and Elisia, with her devoted Devin in-hand, on their journey to the Tandin world.

In traveling through the tunnels that Father's people were familiar with under Manhattan, they climbed carefully down the Serpentine Stairwell over The Abyss, through the Chamber of the Winds, past the Crystal Cavern, and around the Burial Catacombs. Then they had to take turns being ferried across an underground river. When they came to that obstacle, they folded up Catherine's gurney, and Vincent carried her onto the raft.

When they began traveling through the steam tunnels and caves at the outer edge of Manhattan, they entered a large cavern between the tunnels. As they approached the

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center of the cave, they were suddenly beset by eleven of Paracelsus' leftover followers who rushed in from several of the tunnel openings. These were large simple-minded men over whom Paracelsus had ruled with an iron fist. They were disorganized and without purpose since Paracelsus' death, but they were ruthlessly violent, and they wanted the women. The terrifying roars of Tanimus, Vincent, and Elisia didn't deter these men as they rushed the group.

The men struck so unexpectedly that there wasn't time to get the women into the center to protect them. One of them grabbed terrified screaming Brooke by the arm and tried to drag her away. Charles was closest to her, and he tackled the man to the ground. Brooke bit the thug's hand, and he released her. Then Charles was in mortal combat with him as they rolled on the ground with fists flying. The man was nearly Charles' size, but Charles finally got the upper hand and snapped his neck.

Meanwhile, Joe, Diana, and Jerry had pulled their guns out and shot three more of the ruffians. Joe's victim fell dead with a bullet to the center of his forehead. Diana's and Jerry's victims fled the cave with serious wounds. At the same time, Jamie shot one man through the heart with her crossbow, but then she was snatched off her feet by another towering man who knocked her weapon out of her hand and started to run off with her as she screamed in panic. Jamie kicked and beat on the brutal determined man, but it had no effect on him. Isaac

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rescued Jamie when he picked up a good-size rock and threw it at the man, hitting him on the back of his head. The assailant dropped Jamie and crashed to the floor of the cave. Jamie ran back to her crossbow, loaded it with one of her scattered arrows, and shot the man who had nearly made it to one of the cave openings with Rebecca, who was screaming, kicking, and biting him, also to no avail. He fell with Jamie's arrow through his neck, and Rebecca ran crying back to the group.

The moment the men attacked, Tony grabbed Little Jacob out of his stroller. He raced to Catherine's gurney, laid the baby beside his mother, and threw his body across them to try to protect them. Rolley, Mouse, Pascal, Father, and Peter formed a circle around Mary, Susan, Narcissa, and Laura to protect them while the chaotic battle took place.

As Devin ran to put himself between Catherine's gurney and the two men trying to get to Catherine, Pascal called out to him, "Devin, take this!" Devin turned around and caught Pascal's pipe baton as he threw it to him. Devin stood ready to protect Catherine, Little Jacob, and Tony, brandishing the baton, while Vincent was snarling and raking his claws across the two men. They were maniacally determined to get past him and grab Catherine, and they ignored the serious wounds Vincent was inflicting on them. Suddenly the biggest one leaped on Vincent, and then they were locked together in a fight to the death. The other man took that opportunity to run

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past Vincent.

Devin saw him coming, and the rush of adrenalin gave him superhuman strength. When the thug rushed Devin with his arm raised, Devin crashed the baton against the man's arm, breaking it with an audible crunch. Then he hit the man across his head with the baton, but he still didn't go down and stumbled forward with his limp broken arm hanging at his side.

Meanwhile, Vincent's panic over losing the man he knew was headed for Catherine, Little Jacob, and Tony caused the anger of his Demon to explode. With a furious roar, Vincent sank his fangs into his combatant's neck, and he dropped to the floor of the cave mortally wounded. Tanimus and Elisia had stunned two more of the men with their weapons. As Vincent whirled around snarling and ready to attack, Tanimus quickly turned and stunned the man still swaying in front of Devin.

In less than fifteen minutes it was all over, and the entire group was in a state of shock. Charles was holding Brooke, who was shaking and crying. Isaac was holding Rebecca who was also hysterically sobbing. Jamie was furiously pacing around the group watching the cave openings attentively. They now had five dead bodies and four unconscious villains to deal with.

Vincent surveyed the group, doing an head count to be sure everyone was accounted for. He asked, "Is everyone all right?" They all nodded at him, and he said, "We need to leave this area as quickly as possible."

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Pascal spoke up as Devin was handing his pipe baton back to him. "What are we going to do about these unconscious men and the bodies?"

Tanimus answered him. "It is more important to get Catherine to the Tandin world for treatment than it is to take care of these villains. For the moment I suggest that we leave the bodies for the unconscious men to deal with when they wake up. I have already sent a telepathic message to our sentries posted further ahead to come and secure the area and bury the dead, if necessary."

As they quickly left the tunnel world under Manhattan and traveled into the tunnels under the southern end of The Bronx, they began to descend lower into the earth. The group was two days into their journey when they encountered more trouble.

Narcissa spoke ominously, "The evil one is here!"

Vincent could feel it too, and he said, "Something is very wrong here."

Jamie cried out at the back of the group. "Vincent, Joe is hurt, and Diana is gone!"

Everyone ran back to where Jamie was kneeling beside an unconscious Joe. She had her hand pressed against a gushing head wound trying to stop the bleeding. There was a bloody rock about the size of a soft ball near him on the tunnel floor.

Peter and Father shed their backpacks and retrieved their medical bags. Then, Peter and Father, along with

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Susan and Mary, knelt on the tunnel floor with Jamie to begin treating Joe's wound, while Vincent once again did an head count to be sure everyone else was accounted for. The only one missing was Diana.

Elisia looked worried as she spoke. "Diana must be unconscious. I can feel her, but I am getting no communication back from her."

Father spoke up. "There is a faint smell of chloroform here. Whoever took her must have had at least two people to knock Joe out and chloroform Diana simultaneously so it wouldn't alert us."

Tanimus then spoke. "Narcissa is right. We are not alone. Adrian is here with a small army of men, but so are thirty of our people. The other Tandins are telling me that Adrian has about fifty heavily armed men who have the appearance of vicious mercenaries. We are going to have to eliminate this threat, once and for all, before we can go any further."

Joe was still unconscious as Father began stitching the now clean wound. When Father finished stitching, Susan helped Mary dress the wound. Peter then gave Joe a shot of antibiotic.

Jerry had also knelt down beside Joe as a thought occurred to him. His fear was confirmed when he checked Joe's shoulder holster. "Joe's gun has been taken, and they now have Diana's as well."

Vincent was having a terrible struggle keeping his avenging Demon under control as he worried about what

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was happening to Diana. He hadn't felt this helpless since he had lost Catherine and Little Jacob to Gabriel. He paced continually around his beloved family and friends as Peter and Father worked on Joe.

Elisia approached Vincent and put her hand on her brother's arm as she felt his Demon rising. "Vincent, don't worry. We will be able to get Diana back, and I hope that it will be without any more bloodshed. We have a weapon against Adrian, which Dr. Vlas gave us before he left us, and we have been prepared for this final confrontation with Adrian for a very long time."

Father looked up at Vincent from where he was kneeling beside Joe. "Vincent, you are not alone now in defending us against dangerous predators. A weapon is not all you are to us anyway. You no longer have to feel that it is your fate to shoulder that responsibility alone. You don't have to be our avenging Demon."

Vincent looked down at Father. "Thank you, Father, but I told an enemy once before, and I will say it again; all men are demons when their homes and families are threatened."

Tanimus addressed the group. "Our people have secured a large cave up ahead where we can more easily protect everyone while we try to figure out how to deal with Adrian and his army. We need to move everyone there."

Joe was still unconscious, so Vincent and Devin lifted him to his feet. Then, Charles gently put Joe over his

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shoulder, and the group moved on down the tunnel to the more defensible refuge the Tandins had secured. They entered a massive cavern with numerous stalactites and stalagmites. It had many ledges and outcroppings around the perimeter along with smaller caves. To the left of them, there was a very large Tandin man in his late forties, with a red mane of hair, standing at the mouth of one of those caves which was larger than the others.

Tanimus took the group over to him. "Hello, Gideon!" He shook the Tandin's hand and then spoke to the group. "Gideon is one of our sentries, and he is going to stay with all of you while we see if we can locate Diana."

Vincent spoke to the group, and they quietly followed his instructions as he picked Catherine up off her gurney. "Take your backpacks off, and find spots for each of your things in the cave. I don't know how long we will have to be here, but if it becomes necessary to flee, I don't want you slowed down by what you are carrying now. Try to get some rest, so that you are alert if the situation becomes worse."

Vincent could have just rolled Catherine into the cave on her gurney, but he felt the need to place her in the hands of someone specific rather than just leaving her in the care of the group as a whole. He walked to Isaac with Catherine, and he put her into his arms. "Catherine is my life, Isaac, and I need for you to keep her safe and out of harm's way while Uncle Tanimus and I deal with this threat. She trusted you with my life once, and now I trust

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you with hers.”

Isaac nodded, “I promise you no one will lay a finger on her, Vincent.” Then Isaac looked at Tony. “Tony, please grab the gurney for Catherine.” The boy nodded as he rolled the gurney with Narcissa’s things on the bottom into the cave.

Rebecca was holding Little Jacob as Vincent continued and looked at each one as he addressed the remaining bodyguards. “Devin; Charles; Jerry; please make sure you have everyone else in sight at all times until this is over.” They all had very serious expressions as they nodded at him. Rebecca took Little Jacob to Vincent for a kiss before taking him into the cave with her.

Gideon could see that Vincent was reluctant to leave his beloved wife, family, and friends to go hunt for Adrian and Diana. He put his hand on Vincent’s shoulder as he said, “I promise you that I will look after them, Vincent. They will be safe here. I have checked every inch of this cave. We may be pinned down by Adrian’s army, but your family will be safe. We have sent for fifty more of our troops from our world. They are running and will be here in just a little over a day. There is even a fresh spring bubbling up at the back of this cave which makes it ideal if we have to be stuck here for awhile. West of our location we found a smaller cave with an hot spring in it which we can use when this is all over to bathe in. In fact, if it wasn’t for Adrian, this would be a relaxing vacation spot to camp in.”

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Vincent smiled and nodded at him. “Thank you, Gideon.”

Mouse walked up to Vincent holding out an huge Kevlar vest and said, “Packed this for you. Knew you’d need it!”

Vincent chuckled and replied, “Thank you, Mouse! That was very smart of you.” Vincent took off his outer shirt and handed it to Mouse as he put the vest on. Then he took his shirt back from Mouse and put it on over the Kevlar vest.

Jamie planted herself firmly in front of Vincent and said, “Vincent, I’m climbing up to that ledge to the right of the cave, so I can see any of Adrian’s men who might try to get to it.”

Vincent started to object. “No, Jamie, it is too dangerous.”

However, Elisia grabbed his arm and smiled up at him. “Let her go, Vincent. I promise you that she will be all right.” He looked down at Elisia with a worried expression for a few seconds, and then he smiled and nodded at Jamie. Jamie handed Mouse her backpack and shouldered her crossbow and quiver of arrows as she walked to the cavern wall to start climbing.

After they got everyone safely hidden in the cave, and Jamie was on her way up the cavern wall, Vincent, Tanimus, and Elisia shed their backpacks as well, handed them to Gideon, and then went hunting for Diana. They went back down the tunnel they had come from to see if

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they could track whoever took her. Vincent noticed that Elisia had put her hand on what looked like a small gun of some sort that was in an holster around her waist.

Vincent asked Elisia about it. "Is that the weapon you used against Paracelsus' followers, Elisia?"

Elisia smiled at Vincent as she answered. "Yes, we call it an ion-tet stunner. It is a non-lethal weapon we have developed, which has an effect similar to a taser gun. It uses a combination of laser ionization and a tetanizing high-voltage frequency to stun the victim without causing any permanent damage. It renders them helpless for at least an hour."

While Tanimus, Vincent, and Elisia were hunting for Diana, Jamie was climbing up the cavern wall to the ledge she had seen from below. That position was halfway up, and from it she could clearly see the mouth of the cave where they had left their precious charges. On the ledge, Jamie was only partially hidden between two large rock formations, with a small cave behind her, and she had her crossbow loaded and ready. She had laid her quiver of arrows down beside her. Suddenly, a large muscular arm wrapped around Jamie's waist from behind, while at the same time, an huge fur-covered hand clamped over her mouth, stifling the cry of surprise which rose in her throat. She was snatched back into the cave just as a bullet hit the rock formation she had been standing next to and ricocheted off it.

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Jamie found herself lifted off the ground with her back against a muscular torso, and her head held back against a broad shoulder. She looked up into the dark eyes of a very tall Tandin man with a brown mane in his late twenties. He took his hand off her mouth, but he still held her against him as he smiled down at her.

Jamie stuttered, "I—You—um—I'm—a—grateful?"

The Tandin's eyes were twinkling as he said, "I'm very pleased to meet you, Grateful! I'm Dresden."

Dresden's teasing snapped Jamie back to her normal feisty personality. She shook her head and said, "Oh, perfect! Cathy gets rescued by the smart Tandin, and I get rescued by the smart-Alec Tandin!"

Dresden whispered in her ear, "Sorry! You are just so adorable when you're rattled that I couldn't resist." He slowly lowered her to the ground. Feeling his hard muscles rippling against her back on the way down sent a thrill through Jamie's entire body that she had never felt before, and she closed her eyes and gasped in confusion. As Jamie turned around and stared at him, Dresden then said, "Now, stay put in the cave, little Princess, while I go dispatch these two bad guys."

Dresden then stepped out of the cave, leaving Jamie open-mouthed, and he leaped up onto a large rock. He had taken his ion-tet stunner out of its holster. Taking position and aiming his weapon, Dresden growled a warning to the two men creeping toward the cave where Father's people were hiding. They turned and fired wildly

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up at Dresden. Just as Dresden fired his weapon twice, stunning both of them into helpless unconsciousness, Jamie jumped out of the cave behind him and fired her crossbow. The man above and to the right of Dresden, who had a lethal bead on him with a gun, fell to a lower ledge, screaming in pain, with an arrow through his firing hand. His gun fell into the floor of the cavern bouncing several times before it landed.

Dresden whirled around and watched the injured man fall, and then he stared down at his petite rescuer. "I guess I was a little distracted." Then he smiled warmly at Jamie. "You saved me, little Princess!"

Jamie couldn't help but smile up at him. "It was my turn! By the way, my name is Jamie." She picked up her quiver and put it back on her shoulder.

Dresden jumped down to Jamie, and held out his hand, "Let's get back in the cave where it is safer, Jamie."

Jamie took his hand, and looked up at the screaming man. "What about him?"

Dresden looked up at him and said, "Don't worry about him. He isn't going anywhere. My people will retrieve him after they make sure there aren't any more snipers."

The moment Dresden said that, he heard loose rocks falling above them and saw the glint of a gun in the flickering lamplight. He tackled Jamie to the ground with his huge hand behind her head to protect it from the rock floor, shielding her body with his, as another shot was

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fired at them. Once again, it ricocheted off the boulder beside them. The arrows flew out of Jamie's quiver as the two of them hit the ground together. Once more, Jamie found herself staring up into the very worried eyes of Dresden as he hovered over the top of her, and she felt her head comfortably cradled in his huge hand.

"Are you all right?" Dresden asked her.

"Thanks to you, I'm just fine, Dresden." Jamie replied, and then she caught sight of his left sleeve which had a spreading stain of blood on it. She cried out in horror, "Oh, Dresden, you're hurt!"

Jamie scrambled out from under Dresden, dropping her quiver in the process, and then she knelt beside him. She reached for his arm, but he grabbed her wrist and said, "Not here, Jamie, we need to get back into the cave and under cover first." While Dresden was getting to his feet, Jamie collected her crossbow, quiver, and arrows. Dresden grabbed Jamie's hand with his good one and led her quickly back into the cave.

Once inside the cave, Jamie tossed her weapon down. She became all business, and Dresden was intrigued by her deliberate attempt to ignore his obvious interest in her. Both human and Tandin girls and women had thrown themselves at him his entire life, but Jamie was different. Dresden found that refreshing and completely irresistible. Jamie dragged a smiling Dresden to a boulder against the wall and seated him on it. She ignored his amused delight as she ripped his sleeve open to look at

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the wound on his arm. Dresden chuckled at her look of alarm. "It's just a scratch, Jamie. The bullet only grazed me. Don't worry so."

Jamie looked Dresden squarely in the eyes as she said sternly, "Oh, shut up, you big Brute! I've worked with Father and Mary enough in our hospital chamber to know that you don't ignore something like this. It needs to be cleaned and dressed."

Dresden did his best to look penitent. "Yes, ma'm, I'll try to behave."

Jamie retorted, "I doubt that you know how!"

She went to her backpack and pulled out her first-aid supplies and a flashlight. Jamie was doing her best to maintain control of this situation and stay calm. In reality, Dresden had Jamie completely off balance and rattled, and he was very aware of how flustered she was. He found it very charming and flattering, and he was having a thoroughly good time. He was surprised by what he was feeling for this girl, and his heart began pounding when she returned with what she needed to treat his wound.

Jamie had laid her first-aid supplies on the boulder beside Dresden, and now she stood in front of him holding the flashlight. She put it in his good right hand and said, "Here, make yourself useful, and hold the flashlight for me, so I can see what I am doing. The light from your lantern isn't sufficient to work by." He smiled at her, pointed it at his wounded arm, and turned it on.

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Jamie then poured disinfectant on some gauze and started to clean the wound. On impulse, Dresden pulled her onto his lap and said, "Sit down; you'll be more comfortable while you do that." Then he proceeded to wrap the arm he was using to hold the flashlight around her and pointed it at the wound again.

Jamie's eyes became huge, and she blinked at him a couple of times. She quickly regained her composure, though, and said, "I'm making allowances for you because you are hurt. Don't think you will get away with that all the time!"

Afraid that she might startle and run like a deer, Dresden sat perfectly still while Jamie worked on his arm. He thought, "What a lovely little spitfire! I've never seen anything like her before." Dresden watched her work with deft expertise as she gently shaved the fur away from his wound, cleaned it, pulled the edges together with butterfly bandages, and then dressed it. He was enjoying the thrill of her touch as her tiny hands gently handled his muscular arm.

When Jamie was finished, Dresden fully expected her to bolt from his lap without delay, but she just sat there. Then, he became aware of the distress she had been hiding under all of that feisty bravado. All of the frightening recent events came crashing down on her, and her lower lip began to tremble. Jamie burst into tears and started sobbing. Dresden turned off the flashlight and laid it down on the boulder beside him. He wrapped his

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arms around Jamie, pulled her against his chest, and just held her and let her cry as he gently rocked her. He was heartbroken to see Jamie so upset, but he realized that she needed this emotional release.

When the wracking sobs subsided, and she was finally quiet, Dresden put a large warm hand under Jamie's chin and lifted her face, so he could look directly into her tear-swollen eyes. "I promise you we will get Diana back unharmed, Jamie." Suddenly, as she gazed into Dresden's eyes, so filled with concern for her emotional welfare, a bond was formed between them, and she could feel his strength filling her entire being. She smiled up at him as Dresden gently brushed the tears off Jamie's cheeks and then took her hand and kissed it.

"Are you hungry?" Dresden smiled at Jamie as she nodded her head. He stood up with her in his arms and then set her carefully down on the boulder where he had been, as he went to his backpack and pulled out a meal for them.

Meanwhile, Diana was stirring back to consciousness. Fortunately, she became aware of her circumstances before opening her eyes. She pretended to still be unconscious, so she could reestablish her telepathic link with Elisia. Diana reached out to her. "Elisia, are you there?"

Elisia replied, "There you are! We were really worried. Are you all right?"

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Diana answered, "I'm not physically hurt, but I'm seated on the floor of what I assume is a cavern, and my hands are tied behind me around what must be a narrow stalagmite. I haven't opened my eyes yet, so Adrian still thinks that I'm unconscious. I can hear him talking to Jonathan Pope somewhere nearby. I'm sure they have my gun. They took me completely by surprise with chloroform. I didn't comprehend what was happening in time to alert you. Joe was with me. Did they get him too?"

Elisia explained what happened. "No, Diana, but he is still unconscious with an head wound from being struck with a rock. Apparently two men attacked you both simultaneously. Joe has been treated, and he is going to be fine, but they took his gun as well."

Diana then asked her, "Elisia, I remember that Tanimus told us that Gaylin was able to link him with Loren, so he could see what Loren saw when she was running away from Adrian and when he strangled her. Can you remotely view and hear what I do also?"

Elisia replied, "I'm sorry, Diana, my abilities are not that powerful. However, I think I can manage to link you with Uncle Tanimus, so he can see and hear what you do. Do you want to try that? It would involve opening your mind to him, and that is a type of mental intimacy that some people are uncomfortable with."

Diana was relieved. "Elisia, if Tanimus is comfortable trying that, I am definitely willing. It would be so much

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simpler for him to see and hear what I do rather than trying to relay it to you after I hear and see it.”

Elisia told her, “Give me a minute, Diana, so I can explain what is happening to Vincent and Uncle Tanimus. Meanwhile, just try to relax and open your mind.” After a few minutes, Elisia was back in Diana’s mind. “Diana, Uncle Tanimus is going to try to establish a connection with you now. This may feel strange to you. What we will do essentially amounts to a conference call. He will link with my mind. Then we will be together in your mind. After we are sure that you and he can hear each other, I’ll get out of your mind. Are you ready?”

Diana tried to stay relaxed as she opened her mind and tried to empty it. “I’m ready, Elisia.”

Elisia told her, “Now, just stay relaxed until you hear Uncle Tanimus’ voice. Then reply to him. I will definitely be able to hear you. If he does also, then I’ll back out.”

It was only a moment before Diana heard Tanimus. “Diana, can you hear me?”

Diana replied immediately. “Yes, Tanimus, I can hear you. Will you be able to also see and hear what I do now?”

Tanimus replied, “I can already hear the other men, and I know that your eyes are closed. Yes, we have an excellent link. You have a truly wonderful strong mind. When you open your eyes, just scan as much of where you are as possible. Hopefully, there will be something that will help us to locate you.”

Diana opened her eyes and straightened up. She had

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been right about the stalagmite she was tied to. It was slender enough that she was able to stand up as the ropes she was tied with slid up the formation. She scanned the entire sizeable cavern as she stepped in a circle around the stalagmite. Adrian and Pope were talking together at the back of the cave. Diana was tied up about ten feet inside the mouth of the cave near the middle. There were four armed mercenaries in this cavern, and they were all now leering at Diana. She stayed calm and didn't give them the satisfaction of appearing rattled by their obvious lust for her. She was grateful for her profiling skills which assured her that Adrian had other intentions which probably didn't include making her a party favor for his troops.

When Adrian became aware that Diana was awake, he approached her with a derisive smile. "Well, I see you are finally awake. I should have known a whole lot sooner that Vincent was hiding you in the tunnels. It never occurred to me, though, that Joe Maxwell was in on Vincent's secret. If he survives that blow to the head, he'll have a nasty headache which will make me smile!" Diana gave him a steady look and didn't reply. "What's the matter? Don't you feel like having a conversation with me?"

Diana replied calmly, "It isn't high on my list of priorities right now."

Adrian then used his commanding tone. "Tell me about the woman that was being transported on the

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gurney.”

Diana didn't allow her alarm to show as she answered. “That is Penny, a woman from Vincent's community. She has a brain tumor and is now in a coma. The Tandins think that they can help her, so we were taking her to their clinic.”

A look of pure fury came over Adrian's countenance, and he backhanded Diana with a vicious blow across her face, splitting her lip and cutting her cheek with his opal ring. Diana was seeing stars, but she stayed silent. His tone was acid. “You think you're really smart, don't you, you little witch! Catherine Chandler's face is one of the most easily recognized of all of New York's socialites. So, my brother managed to botch killing her. All of Vincent's family is alive, but you killed my brother.”

Diana realized that, at this point, she had better engage Adrian in conversation in order to keep him distracted from more diabolical thinking. He was obviously unstable, and she wanted to get his thoughts off Catherine. “Your brother needed killing, Adrian. He was certifiably insane, and he made a total mess of your plans. If Vincent hadn't stopped him, he would have smothered Vincent's child. Gabriel even sent Snow after Vincent to kill him, and I know that wasn't what you had in mind to do. Your plans were much grander and smarter. At least when I killed Gabriel, I left you a body to bury. If I hadn't stopped Vincent, when Gabriel tried to kill his baby, all you would have ended up with was an unrecognizable pile

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of hamburger.”

Adrian actually appeared mollified after Diana stroked his ego. What he said next Diana had been fully expecting, based on the conversation she had heard between him and Jonathan Pope when she was in Dr. Vlas’ secret office. “I was going to kill you for killing my brother, but I have decided that another use for you would be more profitable. You are young and healthy. You will make a perfect breeder for Vincent’s children. Obviously, Catherine Chandler is out of the picture, even if she isn’t quite dead.”

Diana kept him talking. “How did you find your way down here, Adrian?”

Adrian began gloating. “You left the blueprints for Gabriel’s mansion in the old man’s secret office, instead of taking them with you when you found and took his journals. What you didn’t realize was that among those blueprints was a map of the tunnels between the mansion and the Tandin world. I found the room, and I found the map. I figured that eventually Vincent would travel between worlds. What I didn’t realize was that I would end up with you as a bonus. You are the perfect bargaining chip. Obviously he cares about you a great deal, because you saved his infant. If he doesn’t cooperate, I’ll kill you, and I’ll detonate the plastik I’ve lined a parallel tunnel with. That would flood the tunnels here with water from an East River spur adjacent to these tunnels and kill all of you.”

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Diana tried not to look panicked as she asked, "And how will you escape the flood?"

Adrian gave her a gleefully evil smile. "We found an escape route to levels above this one before we ever set the charges."

Back in the large cave, Gideon had been keeping Father's people informed as he received information from Tanimus. They had all been very relieved that Elisia and Tanimus had established a link with Diana and that she wasn't in any imminent danger. Now, he informed them about Adrian's threat to flood the tunnels with plastik explosives in a parallel tunnel. Tanimus wanted them ready to flee at a moment's notice.

A few minutes later, Laura began signing frantically to Rebecca, and Rebecca cried out, "Where is Mouse?" Mouse had disappeared from the cave, and Gideon relayed that information to Tanimus.

Mouse had been named largely due to his ability to slip in and out of places undetected, and he used that ability now. When he heard Gideon say that Adrian had planted plastik explosives in a parallel tunnel east of their position, he knew that he had to disarm the devices. He was very knowledgeable about plastik, because he had used it with remote detonators to free Father and Vincent from a cave-in a couple of years earlier. Elliott Burch had supplied him with the explosives and the devices. He had

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only read about their use at that time, but he applied that knowledge in its practical use, and he was successful in saving Father and Vincent. Now, he had to save his family and friends from this madman, and he knew that he was the only one with the knowledge necessary to accomplish that. Having survived for years alone in tunnels like these as a child before Vincent caught him, Mouse was sure that he could travel around Adrian's men without being discovered.

Mouse had pocketed a small flashlight from his backpack before he left the cave. He didn't want to use it, though, until he actually found the explosives. His eyes were accustomed to dark tunnels, and he could see the flickering light from Adrian's men, who were stationed in several areas around the cavern, and the Tandins who were keeping surveillance on them. Mouse crept carefully from stalagmite to stalagmite, heading for the tunnel opening he needed to pass through, to go looking for Adrian's diabolical explosives. He finally arrived at the opening and looked carefully around the edges to make sure none of Adrian's men were in sight in the tunnel. It was empty, and Mouse was relieved to see that this tunnel had plenty of large crevices along the walls where he could duck and hide if necessary. Now, he just had to find the devices.

When Mouse finally located the explosive devices, he was surprised that they weren't being guarded. He figured that Adrian's men must have thought that, because they

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had everyone trapped in the cave, there was no need to keep watch here. Mouse turned on his small flashlight and stuck it in his mouth. Then he began systematically removing the detonator caps, leaving the plastik and relay devices in place. In these dark tunnels, only a very close scrutiny would reveal that the devices had been disarmed. He had just finished disarming the last device and pocketing the detonator cap when he heard an angry voice behind him.

“Get up now, and turn around slowly!” It was one of Adrian’s armed men.

Mouse stood up with the flashlight still in his mouth. He turned around slowly, and the flashlight shown in the man’s eyes, blinding him for a moment. Mouse took that opportunity to try to run past the man, dropping his flashlight in the process, but he didn’t make it. The big man grabbed Mouse with his free hand as he tried to run past and then shoved the gun he was holding into Mouse’s face.

“You aren’t going anywhere!” The ugly man snarled.

In desperation, Mouse knocked the man’s gun hand sideways, and he stomped on his foot. The man howled in pain and then screamed obscenities as Mouse broke free and began running back down the tunnel. Just as the man raised his gun to shoot at Mouse, there was a terrifying roar behind him, and Mouse turned around at the familiar sound. The gunman whirled around, startled, and Vincent pounced on him, knocked the gun from his

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hand, and raked him across the chest with his claws. The man fell screaming in agony, and Tanimus, who had been too far behind Vincent to save Mouse, shot the man with his ion-tet stunner, which rendered him unconscious and out of pain. Two large Tandin sentries arrived on the scene, picked up the mercenary, and carried him off to the cave where they had been gradually collecting Adrian's troops while they waited for their additional Tandin sentries to arrive.

Vincent picked up Mouse's flashlight off the tunnel floor and looked sternly at Mouse. "You nearly got yourself killed, Mouse! You should have asked Gideon to get one of the Tandin men to come with you. What you did was very stupid, but it was also very brave."

Mouse smiled at Vincent as he pulled all of the detonator caps out of his pocket. "Fixed them! Won't work now without these! Still look armed. They won't know."

Vincent smiled as he put his arm around Mouse and gave the flashlight back to him. "Can you get back to the cave the way you came?" Mouse nodded his head. "Good, we need to get back to Elisia. We found where Adrian is keeping Diana, and Elisia is hidden in a crevice in the tunnel where she can see Diana. We are hoping that things will not heat up until the Tandin troops can get here to help us."

Tanimus spoke to Mouse. "I have let Gideon know that you are coming back now and that you were

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successful in disarming the explosives. Be very careful going back, Mouse.” Mouse nodded, and they went their separate ways.

Back at the crevice in the tunnel, where Elisia was watching Diana through a crack in the cavern wall, she was so focused on what was going on inside the cave and concerned for Diana that she failed to realize that she had been discovered. By the time she smelled the big man, it was too late. He had grabbed her from behind, pinning her arms against her sides. Elisia screamed and tried to reach her ion-tet stunner, but he caught her wrist in a painful vice-like grip. He locked her wrist in the hand of the arm he had wrapped around her body, and then he took her weapon from her holster and put it into his own pocket. He pulled Elisia out of the crevice into the main tunnel, and then he turned her around to look at his prize.

Elisia tried to kick him, but he just pinned her against the tunnel wall with his body and legs. She was very strong for her size, but this ruthless man was nearly three times her weight and size, and she was no match for him. He wrapped one hand around both of her wrists and pinned her arms above her against the tunnel wall. He was breathing heavily, and his cruel lustful intent was obvious. Elisia tried not to show how frightened she was by this vile man.

Elisia cried out telepathically to her uncle. “Uncle

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Tanimus, I'm in trouble! Please come quickly!"

Tanimus' soothing voice reassured her that help was on the way. "Elisia, we are on our way at this moment. I love you!"

The man grinned with evil pleasure and said, "Well, a gorgeous mutant! Who would have thought? I've never had a mutant woman before. I'm really going to enjoy this!" Elisia was panic stricken, and she couldn't help but struggle against him. That just excited him even more. "Oh, that is so good! Struggle all you want to, honey. I like it better that way!"

An instinctive snarling growl escaped Elisia, and she bared her teeth. The man's attention was arrested momentarily by Elisia's fangs. Then he caught sight of her slightly pointed ears. She shrank with revulsion from his probing touch, but there was no place to go. Elisia had known only kindness from the men in her life as she had grown up, so she knew that this barbaric man was an aberration. She was aware that true evil existed in the world. She had survived its aftermath as a child when her parents were killed and her twin brother was lost. However, it was an intellectual knowledge. She had never actually faced true evil in her lifetime, but she could see the horror of it now on this brutal man's face, and it sent a cold shudder through her entire being.

Elisia was repulsed as the man ran a probing finger over the point on her ear. Then, he lifted her lip and ran his finger over one of her fangs. She turned her head

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quickly trying to escape his rough examination. He grabbed her chin brutally and jerked her head back, forcing her to look at him. "Well, so I've caught a wild little jungle-cat-vampire. This just keeps getting better and better!" He put his hand on her throat and ran it slowly downward as he took perverse pleasure in watching her panic turn to terror.

Behind him, he heard an approaching man's breathless voice. "Can I have her when you are done with her?"

The man's expression turned to vicious annoyance as he answered. "This one is mine! Go find your own! You can stick around and wa—"

The man's grip on Elisia was released as he crumpled and then crashed to the tunnel floor in front of her. Devin was standing over him with Pascal's pipe baton in his hand, panting from his desperate run through the tunnels to save his beloved Elisia. He said furiously, "She is my own, you moronic pervert!"

Devin held out his hand to Elisia, but she was in shock and just stood there staring down at the fallen assailant. Devin put the baton in his back pocket, walked around the man's body, and gently picked Elisia up in his arms. She was trembling uncontrollably as she buried her face in Devin's neck and began sobbing. Devin said softly, "I am so sorry that I didn't get here sooner, Elisia. The world above is the source of some unspeakable cruelty and violence. I promise that I will never let it touch you

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again!”

At that point, Tanimus and Vincent arrived also completely out of breath from running. They were devastated by Elisia’s sobs and their awareness of what had nearly happened to her. Two more large Tandins arrived shortly afterwards and collected this man to put with the others. Devin asked Vincent to grab Pascal’s pipe baton from his back pocket, and Vincent then gave it to one of the Tandins to return to Pascal at the cave.

Vincent looked at Devin. “How did you know, Devin? You had to have left the cave to come here before Elisia was even in danger.”

Devin shook his head. “I don’t know, Vincent. Maybe it was my connection with Elisia. Maybe it was growing up with you. Maybe it was a combination of both. I just knew that she needed me before she actually did. I got Gideon to replace me in the cave with another Tandin and ran here as fast as I could. I barely made it here in time as it was! I wish I could have gotten here sooner.”

Both Tanimus and Vincent put their arms around Devin and Elisia, and they both kissed Elisia. She could feel the combined power of the love these three men had for her, and her shuddering sobs quieted.

Tanimus spoke softly. “Thank you, Devin. We will stay here with Diana. Take Elisia back to the cave with you. Our people have secured the way between here and the cave. She will need to rest now.” Devin started to go when Tanimus thought of Elisia’s stunner. “Wait a

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minute, Devin.” Devin stopped and Tanimus walked to him and checked Elisia’s holster. Finding it empty, he said, “Apparently, that man took Elisia’s stunner. I’ll tell the sentries to collect it off him and return it to the cave for her.” Devin nodded and left with Elisia.

Back in the shallow cave on the ledge, Dresden had his hands full with Jamie. She was restless and pacing like a little caged animal. He had kept her informed about everything that was going on below, but that only seemed to make her frustration more acute. Jamie wanted to be down there helping defend her family, not trapped up here hiding from snipers. He decided to try something different.

“Jamie, show me how to shoot your crossbow.” She turned around and looked up at him in surprise. He smiled down at her. “Please?”

Jamie looked incredulous. “Surely you already know how to shoot a crossbow!”

Dresden shrugged his shoulders and patted his ion-tet stunner. “This is my weapon of choice.”

Jamie paused as she thought for a moment. “Well, all right.” She went to Dresden’s food stash and grabbed an apple. She took it to the boulder where she had treated Dresden’s wound, and she laid the apple on it. Then, she picked up her crossbow and an arrow and went to just inside the mouth of the cave with Dresden following her. Jamie handed him the crossbow and arrow, and he just

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stared at them. She couldn't help but giggle at his clueless look. Patiently, she showed him how to load the weapon.

Then, Dresden just looked at Jamie. "Now, what do I do with it?"

Jamie shook her head. "You point and shoot, silly!"

Dresden gave her another boyishly charming helpless look and said, "I guess you are just going to have to teach me how."

Jamie giggled and said, "I can't believe a big Brute like you doesn't know how to shoot a crossbow!" Little petite Jamie tried her best to reach her arms around Dresden from behind to show him how to hold and shoot the crossbow, but she was just too small.

Dresden chuckled, "Well, that won't do at all! Here, let's try it this way." He grabbed her hand and led her to another boulder just to the right of the cave opening. He sat down on it and pulled Jamie's back against his chest, so his arms were around her. Then she showed Dresden how to point and shoot the crossbow. Between them, the arrow went through the apple.

When Jamie turned around to face Dresden and congratulate him, she caught the mischievous delight on his face. "You are just trying to distract me!"

Dresden chuckled again, "Is it working?"

Jamie was thoroughly exasperated. "What am I going to do with you?"

Dresden couldn't resist. "You want a wish list?"

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Jamie blushed, and it made Dresden's heart flutter. She shook her head and tried to keep a straight face as she snapped. "Oh, shut up, you big Brute!"

As Devin carried his precious Elisia back through the tunnels, she had finally stopped trembling and had relaxed in his arms until he thought that she had fallen asleep. He realized he was mistaken when he heard her soft voice speak to him aloud, "Devin?"

Devin's voice was soothing as he answered, "Yes, Elisia?"

She spoke quietly. "I've never even been kissed by any man before."

Devin smiled happily as he answered her. "Then, we are equally unschooled, because I have never kissed any woman before."

Elisia looked up into Devin's face. Her eyes were huge, and her cheeks were flushed with emotion. "I want to kiss you, Devin, and I need for you to kiss me."

Devin saw a boulder a few yards ahead. He walked to it and sat down with Elisia on his lap. He returned her love-filled gaze as he said, "Elisia, I am deeply in love with you. Whatever you need is my sole purpose in life right now to provide."

Sensing her fragile emotional state, Devin waited for Elisia to initiate the kiss. His heart was beating wildly with anticipation as she wrapped her soft arms around his neck, and she gently touched her lips to his. Devin's eyes

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closed with rapturous pleasure as her tender kiss became more intensely passionate. His embrace tightened, and then he heard her sweet voice in his mind as their kiss deepened. “Devin, I love you so much!”

He answered her telepathically. “Oh, Elisia, this is heavenly!”

As they continued kissing, Elisia took Devin on a telepathic journey of the mind. He found himself floating with her locked tightly in his arms, high above the earth, surrounded by clouds of every hue of pink, blue, and purple. It was a sweetly intense intimacy that Devin had never imagined could be possible with a kiss. As he held his beloved Elisia in this passionate romantic embrace, he felt all of the terror and pain caused by the brutality of Adrian’s thug draining out of Elisia’s body. It gave Devin a powerful feeling of masculinity to know that this sensitive feminine little woman he was in love with really needed him, and that he was capable of healing her with the strength of his love for her.

When their lips finally parted, and they were seated quietly on the boulder together, Elisia gave Devin an angelic smile and said, “I’m so glad you gave me my first kiss! That fulfilled all of my fantasies about what a man’s kiss might be like.”

Devin hugged her tighter. “Elisia, that left all of my fantasies in the dust! I never imagined anything as wonderful as that kiss. It is a real treat to be in love with a sexy little telepath!” Elisia giggled. Then Devin asked

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her, "How is it that a little beauty like you has never been kissed before? Surely, men have been lined up throughout the tunnels all of your life waiting for that opportunity!"

Elisia answered simply, "Not one of them was the man I wanted!"

Devin nodded, "I didn't know what I wanted until I laid eyes on you!"

Devin stood up with Elisia still in his arms. Elisia was smiling, "Devin, I can walk now."

Devin gave her an enraptured look. "I'm sure you can, but I am really enjoying carrying you. Is that all right?"

Elisia giggled, "Perfectly all right!" She wrapped her arms around Devin's neck, laid her head on his shoulder, and nuzzled and kissed his neck. Devin sighed with pleasure as he held her tighter and carried his precious Elisia through the tunnels.

When Devin and Elisia arrived back in the cave, the women, except Mary and Susan, were all kneeled around Catherine's bedroll, and Sarah was helping Catherine to nurse Little Jacob. Charles was standing guard at the mouth of the cave as they entered, and he looked very relieved to see Devin. "Dev, I am so glad to see that you are OK. Is Elisia all right?"

Elisia gave Charles a warm smile, and he smiled back as he handed her the retrieved stunner. "Devin saved me, Charles, and I am just fine now!"

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Mary and Susan were kneeled beside a bedroll with Joe on it. They had been checking his vital signs regularly, and Mary had a small flashlight with which she had been checking his pupils every hour. Joe was still unconscious.

Gideon then announced, "Our troops have arrived!" Right away, they all heard a furious flurry of gunfire outside the cave in the larger cavern. The gunfire continued for about half-an-hour, and then there was silence. Gideon reported the progress of the Tandins. "All of Adrian's men in the cavern have been stunned and captured. After our newly arrived troops have eaten, they are going to comb the tunnels and collect the rest of Adrian's army with the exception of the four guards he has with him and Jonathan Pope in the cave where he is holding Diana."

Gideon paused for a few minutes, and Father's people had learned to recognize when he was communicating telepathically with the other Tandins. Finally, he continued. "Tanimus says that he and Vincent don't feel that it is safe to try to rescue Diana where she is. They say that Adrian has decided to come here looking for Vincent to complete his plans. So, Vincent and Tanimus are now on their way back here. The Tandin troops I originally had are going to shadow Adrian and try to pick off his guards from behind before he arrives here. Then, we will finish our plan to neutralize Adrian permanently."

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Dresden was faithfully providing his anxious little charge with updates as everything occurred. Jamie was tied up in knots while the guns were firing below, and Dresden kept a steadying hand on her shoulder as he stood behind her, while she was watching the battle scene down below them in the cavern from the mouth of the cave. When it was all over, and he informed her that the Tandins had prevailed, she whirled around with a joyful look on her face and threw her arms around him. Dresden hugged her tightly as a thrill swept through his body. All too soon, she pulled away from him and ran out to the ledge to look below.

Dresden stepped outside of the cave and stood beside her. He said, "Vincent and Tanimus are on their way back. The final conflict with Adrian is going to take place here, right below us. They have asked us to keep watch from up here until this is all over." Jamie gave him a look of fear that wrenched his heart. He put his hand back on her shoulder again. "It will be all right, Jamie, I promise you. They will be safe, and this will be over with very soon." Then Dresden took his stunner out of its holster and got down on his stomach to watch covertly over the side of the ledge.

Jamie ran back into the cave, came back with her loaded crossbow, and got down beside him to begin the vigil. She still looked worried as she said to Dresden, "I am so glad that Vincent put that Kevlar vest on!"

Dresden brushed Jamie's hair out of her eyes and

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swept it behind her ear as he replied. "Yes, I saw him put that on when you first got here."

When Tanimus and Vincent arrived, Vincent looked at everyone in the cave. "Tony, please stay with the women and help them protect Catherine and Little Jacob for me, OK?" Tony was bravely trying to control his fear as he nodded at Vincent and knelt down with the women by Catherine. Then Vincent looked at Charles. "Charles, please continue to guard the entrance here with Gideon." Charles nodded his head.

Vincent looked at Father and Peter, and Father said, "We'll take care of Joe. Please be very careful, Vincent. Adrian is clearly insane to be trying something this desperate when he is obviously outnumbered. It is evident that he isn't any more stable than Gabriel was. That makes him very dangerous and unpredictable."

Tanimus looked at Father. "Don't worry, Father. Vincent will not be in any danger. We have a plan that will take care of Adrian permanently, and no one will be hurt." Then Tanimus looked at Vincent. "Vincent, just keep Adrian talking and distracted. We will take care of the rest of our plan." Vincent nodded at his uncle.

Pascal approached them and put his hand on Tanimus' arm as he looked up at him. "Please bring them safely back to us! I don't even want to think about what life would be like for us without Vincent and Diana. We can't lose them!"

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Tanimus smiled and nodded at Pascal. "They will be safe, Pascal, I promise you!"

Just then, they heard a loud angry voice calling to them from outside the cave. It was Adrian. "Vincent, I've got one of your women out here, and she is dead if you don't come out here now!"

They all watched in trepidation as Tanimus and Vincent left the cave to face Adrian. Vincent felt a growl rising in his throat at the sight of Adrian. What he was horrified by, though, was the sight of Diana. Now, he understood why Tanimus had taken the position watching Diana through the crack in the tunnel wall, even though he could remotely view what Diana was seeing. Tanimus didn't want Vincent to see what Adrian had done to Diana. Diana's face was badly bruised, and her upper lip and cheek were cut and swollen. Her hands were tied in front of her, and Adrian had Diana by the hair with one hand and was holding a gun to the back of her head with the other hand.

Adrian spoke in his usual commanding tone. "You know what I want, Vincent. Maxwell made sure that everything I had built up in America is now destroyed, so I have nothing left to lose here. If you don't do what I want, this one dies. She should die anyway because of what she did to my brother. I'm willing to let her live, though, if you turn yourself over to me and my men. Your other woman is as good as dead, from what I saw, because of what Gabriel did to her. Well, this one killed Gabriel for you,

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and I know you care about her, or you wouldn't be hiding her here below with you. This doesn't have to be unpleasant, Vincent. This one will do to produce more of your offspring, and you will both live, if you cooperate. Obviously, when you mate with human women, it produces children who are genetically superior but still look human. That suits my purposes perfectly. Then, I can have my scientists isolate their enhanced immunity factor to market and raise those children to be loyal to me. Their superior intellect will advance and expand my financial empire dramatically. I have a ship waiting to take us out of the country."

Vincent felt the fury of his avenging Demon rising within him over Adrian's cruel and brutal treatment of Diana and his callous crude words describing her future fate at his hands. He was growling under his breath, but he also felt Elisia keeping a firm grip on his emotions. With her help, he managed to maintain control of his Demon—for the moment. Vincent stepped forward as if to surrender himself to Adrian. His eyes were locked on Diana's, and she showed no fear whatsoever.

Then Adrian raised his voice. "All of you can come out now." Adrian looked around, expecting all of his armed men to appear and back up his threats. Instead, around seventy-five very big Tandin men appeared, carrying Adrian's four unconscious guards and Jonathan Pope, whom they then deposited on the cavern floor around him. After putting the men down, they all looked at Adrian.

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Adrian gave Vincent a vicious look. What they had not seen until now was the remote detonation device that Adrian was holding in the same hand with which he was holding Diana's hair. With fury in his voice Adrian said, "Vincent, I have nothing more to lose! All of us will die now!" With that, he pressed the remote device—and nothing happened.

Mouse stepped out of the cave and walked over by Vincent. He pulled the detonator caps out of his pocket and held them up. "No kaboom? Too bad!"

Adrian yanked Diana back against him by her hair and put the gun to the front of her throat as he shouted, "Vincent! I'm warning you—"

Diana had finally had enough. She pulled her roped hands up sharply, knocking Adrian's gun hand away from her, while at the same time raking the heel of her hiking boot down the inside of his leg and then stomping his foot. Adrian screamed in pain as Diana broke away from him and ran toward Vincent. Adrian raised his gun again and pointed it at Diana. Vincent raced forward, wrapped his arms around Diana as she reached him, quickly grabbed her up, and whirled around with her shielding her with his own body. Adrian shot Vincent in the back, and Diana gasped as she felt the impact of the bullet through Vincent's body.

Vincent set Diana carefully down, and then he turned around to face Adrian. Adrian took aim again, and Vincent emitted a furious roar and charged at Adrian. He

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raked Adrian's arm with his claws which knocked the gun out of his hand, and then he raised his hand to deliver a fatal blow to the cowering man. Vincent heard two women he loved scream his name simultaneously, "**VINCENT!**" Diana screamed it verbally and Elisia telepathically. Once again, their gentle grip on the Beast's leash was enough. With great effort, Vincent regained control of himself and lowered his hand. He turned around to go back to Diana. Behind him, even though his arm was shredded and bleeding profusely, Adrian's malicious vengeful look returned as he took Diana's gun out of his jacket pocket and aimed it at Vincent's head.

Up on the ledge, Jamie screamed, "**No!**" She leaped to her feet and took aim at Adrian. Dresden jumped up and put his hand on her arm, and then she was amazed by what was happening below. She lowered her weapon and stared.

A look of absolute horror had come over Adrian's face. He began shaking, and then he dropped Diana's gun. His trembling hands dropped to his sides as his mouth dropped opened, and he began screaming. He threw his arms over his face as if trying to shield himself from some unseen monstrous threat. Finally, he collapsed on the floor of the cavern and curled up in a fetal position. He was now sobbing uncontrollably.

Tanimus had already untied Diana's hands. She had held herself together through the entire ordeal, both here and during the weeks of hiding from Adrian in Father's

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world. Now, as she witnessed Adrian being disabled by utter terror, she was overcome by relief. At the same time, she was sick with worry over Joe's injury and Vincent's bullet wound. Diana became dizzy, and the cavern started spinning. She felt herself falling to the floor when a pair of powerful arms caught her, and then everything went black.

Back up on the ledge, Jamie exclaimed, "Poor Diana!" She gave Dresden a stricken look as she said, "Adrian beat her, and now she has collapsed! Can you ask how she is, and make sure that the bullet Vincent was hit with didn't hurt him?"

Dresden had picked up Jamie's hand, and he kissed it as he spoke telepathically with Gideon. Then he looked into Jamie's worried eyes and smiled. "Gideon says that Diana's injuries are not serious and that she has only fainted. She will be just fine, and Vincent wasn't hurt at all by that bullet." Jamie closed her eyes in relief.

Now that the crisis was over, Jamie was anxious to get back to her family, and Dresden could feel that. He decided to collect his things later, so he could accompany Jamie down the cavern wall. Jamie went into the cave and retrieved her quiver of arrows and was attaching her crossbow to it with the strap Mouse had fitted her quiver with. Before she could put it on her shoulder, though, Dresden took it from her.

Jamie stared at him. "What do you think you are

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doing?”

Dresden smiled at her. “I’m not anxious to see you break that pretty little neck of yours trying to climb down with this on your shoulder.” Without waiting for her to give him permission, he shouldered her weapon and began climbing down to the floor of the cavern.

Jamie swallowed the protest that sprang to her lips, and instead, she found herself smiling at Dresden’s gallantry. She waited for him to get most of the way down, and then she began climbing down after him. Jamie was several feet above Dresden, who was now on the floor of the cavern when she lost her footing, and she yelped in alarm as she fell. Dresden whirled around just in time to catch her in his arms. Once more, she found herself looking up into his dark eyes, and she threw her arms around his neck, burying her face in his mane with relief.

Dresden thought, “Item number one on my wish list; Rescue the princess, so she hugs my neck!” Then Jamie looked into his smiling eyes again, and he just had to open his big mouth as he began walking with her in his arms. “Well, I guess I can carry you, if you insist!”

Jamie snapped back, “Put me down, you big Brute!” Dresden smiled mischievously, but he obediently put her down. Jamie shook her head. “I know! I’m adorable when I’m rattled. Well, I’m going to rattle you until your teeth shake loose, if you don’t stop teasing me!”

Dresden looked positively delighted. “That sounds like fun!”

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Jamie was both amused and exasperated as she attempted to look serious. "That happens to be a threat! Some Heathcliff you're turning out to be!"

With that, she whirled around and stomped off, with Dresden close at her heels, very pleased with himself for provoking another pretty tantrum out of this captivating little creature. He wisely decided, though, that he had better change tactics, or he was going to sabotage his own efforts to keep her interested. He thought to himself, "Heathcliff, huh! So, she likes the sober brooding sort."

Dresden's long strides quickly put him beside Jamie, and then he asked her, "Where did you learn to shoot a crossbow like that? You really are very good!" As he asked the question, he handed her crossbow and quiver to her, and she put them back on her shoulder.

Jamie eyed Dresden suspiciously, wondering if another onslaught of teasing was forthcoming, but his expression was serious. So, she explained, "When I was growing up in the tunnels, I was always a tomboy. Vincent used to read us the tales of Robin Hood. I was so fascinated by those stories, that it inspired me to make my first bow and arrows. They weren't more than just toys then, but as I got older, Mouse made more sophisticated weapons for me. I loved practicing with them."

Dresden was thrilled with his discovery that Jamie was truly passionate about archery. It wasn't just a means of defense to her. It was also an enjoyable sport. "Well, all of that practice has certainly made you a force to be

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reckoned with!" Jamie lit up with pleasure at the compliment, and Dresden thought to himself, "She is such a pretty little thing!"

Then Jamie asked him about his weapon. "Tell me about your weapon, Dresden. I've never seen anything like that before." Dresden proceeded to explain the weapon to Jamie as Elisia had to Vincent. Jamie didn't have a clue what Dresden was talking about, but she found herself enjoying listening to him explain it anyway.

Diana was brought back to consciousness by the acrid scent of smelling salts administered to her by Peter. When she opened her eyes, Joe was looking down at her as he held her in his arms, while he was seated on a boulder in the cave. She exclaimed, "Vincent was shot!"

Joe smiled at her as Vincent came up to them and said, "I'm fine, Diana. I don't even have a scratch."

Tears came to Diana's eyes as she then said to Joe, "You're all right! Were you the one that caught me?"

Joe smiled down at her. "You didn't think I was going to miss out on an opportunity like that, did you? The damsel-in-distress fainted, and I got to catch her so she wouldn't get a boo-boo!" He gently touched her face as he added with sad regret, "I wish that I could have prevented this too!"

Diana giggled as she sat up on Joe's lap and hugged him, "My knight-in-shining-armor!" Everyone had gathered around Diana as she came to. Father began

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treating the cuts on her face as she spoke to Vincent. "I know that Adrian shot you! I felt the impact of the bullet when you were holding me. How is it that you aren't hurt?"

Mouse spoke up and answered Diana's question. "Kevlar vest! Mouse found long time ago. Vincent wore!"

Vincent smiled and nodded. "I had put on Mouse's Kevlar vest before Tanimus and I went looking for you. It was a good thing that Mouse thought to pack it. I was afraid that Adrian might start shooting. I knew that he was unstable and had no self-control."

Diana then looked at Tanimus. "What did you do to Adrian? I almost felt sorry for him!"

Tanimus explained, "Before Dr. Vlas left us, he gave us a weapon to use against Adrian, if he ever threatened our world again. Dominik gave us a vision, from his own mind, of the one thing that Adrian is terrified of."

Diana shook her head as she suddenly realized what that was, "His abusive biological father in Romania!"

Tanimus nodded, "Yes, we simply flooded his mind with visions of that horrible man beating both Gabriel and Adrian, just as Dominik Vlas witnessed it happening in Romania, before he rescued the brothers. That was all we needed to cripple Adrian temporarily, perhaps even permanently. The psychological scars an abusive parent leaves on a child last a lifetime."

Peter then asked, "What are you going to do with those men now?"

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Tanimus looked at Joe. “Well, since they cannot be prosecuted and imprisoned without exposing our worlds, we will take them back to our world, and we will make sure that they never bother your world again.”

Diana spoke up at that point. “That’s a relief. Gabriel told me, before I killed him, that prison was a place to get stronger. He said that if he went to prison, he would just rule his empire from there. I’m sure that Adrian would have the same idea, if he wasn’t completely catatonic after this, and he has the means in offshore accounts to do just that if we sent him to prison.”

Joe chuckled as he looked at Tanimus. “Aren’t we under The Bronx now?” Tanimus nodded, and Joe went on, “Well, this is out of my jurisdiction anyway. If your people have a safe way of dealing with those criminals, so they can’t hurt anyone else ever again, then you will be doing the world a favor. What will you do with them in your world?”

Tanimus explained, “It is very rare, but on occasion, we do catch criminals in the tunnels whom we cannot send up top, or our world would be threatened like yours would. We keep them incarcerated in our world, in very comfortable facilities, and we are often able to rehabilitate them using our mental powers. Whether they can be helped or not we will care for those men. They will be blindfolded before being taken to our world, so even if they ever did manage to escape, they would become hopelessly lost in the maze of tunnels. We have never lost a prisoner

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yet, though, and some of them are now very productive and happy members of our community. Our prisoners cannot successfully deceive us by pretending to be rehabilitated, because the Tandins can detect changes in heart rate as well as emotional state, and we can smell the distinct perspiration odor of liars.”

Joe commented with awe in his voice, “Boy, what I wouldn’t give to have your people conducting my interrogations!” Tanimus chuckled.

The Tandin troops blindfolded a still-whimpering Adrian and his men, whose wounds had all been treated, and then they went ahead with their prisoners to the Tandin world. Now that they could finally relax, baths and a good meal were the group’s first priority. Then after a few hours of restful sleep, the group began gathering up their things to resume their journey.

Dresden was helping Jamie to put her backpack on when Tanimus came up to the couple. He chuckled as he looked at the completely moon-struck look on Dresden’s face. “Well, Dresden, it looks like you have finally been bewitched!”

Dresden’s eyes danced as he answered. “Isn’t she enchanting, Dad?”

Jamie stared at the two men in surprise as Tanimus replied. “She certainly is, Son!”

Jamie looked at Dresden. “Tanimus is your father?”

Dresden chuckled at her surprised look. “That he is!”

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Jamie then stated the obvious. “So, Vincent and Elisia are your cousins!”

Dresden nodded his head. “They are! I grew up with Elisia, though. She is really more like a sister to me. In fact, biologically, she almost is, since our mothers were identical twins, and our fathers were brothers.”

Before Tanimus left them, he caught sight of Dresden’s torn and blood-soaked shirt lashed to the outside of his backpack. He asked, “Dresden, is that your blood on that shirt?”

Dresden smiled at his father. “Don’t worry, Dad. I was only grazed by a bullet that ricocheted off a rock up on the ledge. This competent little nurse here patched me right up, and it has already started to heal.”

Tanimus looked at Jamie and smiled. “Thank you, Jamie!” Jamie smiled back.

Tanimus then went to help Vincent with Catherine’s gurney, and Elisia approached the couple. Jamie turned around to face Elisia. “I just found out that Dresden is Tanimus’ son.” Elisia smiled and nodded.

Dresden put his hands on Jamie’s shoulders, as he towered over her from behind, and he said to Elisia, “Jamie is going to give me archery lessons!” Elisia had a puzzled expression on her face for half a second, until she saw Dresden furiously shaking his head behind Jamie, and he told her telepathically, “Don’t you dare say anything!”

Elisia smiled and said, “That should be interesting!”

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Jamie was now the one who looked puzzled. "What's the matter? Is he hopeless?"

Elisia giggled and said, "Oh, he's hopeless, all right. I'm sure that you are going to have a great deal of fun straightening him out, though!"

When Tanimus arrived to assist Vincent by keeping the gurney still while Vincent placed Catherine on it, he said to his uncle, "I guess I need some tutoring to learn how to tap into and use the mental abilities my sister has learned how to control so well with your help."

Tanimus smiled at his nephew. "There will be plenty of time for that after we help you wake your little Catherine up. If you have room in your world for us, Elisia, Letha, and I could come to visit for awhile, so we can work with you. Your community is very anxious to get you both back. It wouldn't be wise to keep you away from them while we teach you."

Vincent chuckled, "I already miss them! There are plenty of extra chambers for you to stay with us as long as you like. It will be wonderful to see Aunt Letha again."

With light hearts, now that the last threat to their safety and happiness was eliminated, the joyful group continued their journey. Two days later, they arrived at the Tandin world. When they stepped into the enormous cavern at the threshold of the Tandin world, everyone from Father's world stopped and stared in childlike wonder.

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Chapter X

Into the Abyss

It took a few moments for Father's people to realize that they were still below ground. The spectacular cavern they had stepped into was filled with light that was as bright as being above ground at noon. They had, in fact, arrived there at about noon.

Mouse, who was quick to notice anything technological exclaimed, "Full spectrum lights!" Studying the ceiling of the cavern, he then said, "Fine mist sprayer heads." He looked at Tanimus and asked, "To simulate rainfall?" Tanimus smiled at him and nodded. Then Mouse added, "Love full spectrum lights! Use them at home—small scale—in William's kitchen for herb garden." He walked over to the complex timer inside the cavern doorway and studied it for a few minutes. "Set to adjust lights—simulate time of day and moon cycle!"

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Tanimus was enjoying Mouse's enthusiasm. "You are right, Mouse!"

Everyone else was completely speechless as they gazed in awe at this seemingly enchanted garden under the earth. Every beautiful flower imaginable was being grown here, all artistically arranged. They could all feel themselves relaxing from their long arduous trip as they breathed in the perfumed scent of the flowers. A thick carpet of lush dark-green grass outlined the flower beds, and there were polished stone paths throughout the cavern. There was an huge cascading fountain in the center of the cavern, and many lovely ice-green metal benches were everywhere. In the center of the far right cavern wall were six hives of honey bees.

Several Tandins were seated on the benches. They were obviously enjoying the reaction of Father's people to this introduction to their world.

Father finally spoke. "This is beyond my wildest dream of what your world would be like!"

Peter nodded and added, "This is as beautiful as any garden I've ever seen in our world above!"

Elisia then told them, "We have four botanical chambers. This one is obviously the flower garden chamber on the south end of our world. On the east end, we have our medicinal botanical chamber. On the west end, we have our food garden chamber, where we grow our fruits, vegetables, and dried beans. On the north end, we have our orchard chamber, where we grow apples,

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peaches, cherries, pears, oranges, grapefruit, limes, and tangerines. There are bee apiaries in each of them as well. We have a composting chamber where we produce our own fertilizer, and it also contains the earthworm farm for our gardens. Above, we own dairy and goat herds, so between what we grow down here, the honey from the hives, and our dairy farms above, we are self-sufficient for food production. After we get Catherine taken care of, we can take all of you on a tour of our world before you go back home.”

Pascal said, “Boy, William would love to see your food garden and orchard!” Everyone chuckled.

Tanimus then spoke to all of them as the Tandins who had been watching arose and approached them. “It has been a very long and stressful trip, and I know that all of you are fatigued. You need hot meals, soaking baths, and a good night’s sleep in real beds. These are members of our extended family. They are here to take you to their homes. They will also be the ones helping us with Vincent and Catherine tomorrow. You need to be well rested and relaxed in order to have the mental and emotional strength required to help Vincent with Catherine. Our family will establish telepathic connections with each of you, as Elisia did, in order to strengthen the mental support we will be giving Vincent tomorrow.”

Everyone nodded and smiled, and then they watched Vincent as his expression became one of pure joy, and he strode quickly to the only non-Tandin in the approaching

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group. The human woman he walked to had the ethereal beauty of a fairy-queen. She was small and fair-skinned with crystal blue eyes. Her most striking feature, though, was her waist-length snow-white hair. Although Vincent knew she was nearly fifty-seven years old, she hardly looked forty except for her soft white hair. Her smiling face was the face of his mother, and he engulfed her in his arms.

Tears rolled down Vincent's cheeks as he whispered, "Aunt Letha!"

Letha was crying softly too as she said, "I was afraid that none of us would ever see you again. I am so happy to see how well you are, Vincent!" She pulled back and looked up into his face as she smiled through her tears of joy. He clutched an handful of her lovely thick white hair. It felt like silk in his hand, like the way he remembered his mother's hair feeling. Letha smiled sadly and said, "When I woke up the morning after Loren and Gaylin were killed, and you were lost, my hair had turned completely white, and it stayed that way."

Vincent smiled down at her. "Well, I think it is absolutely beautiful!"

Letha giggled, "That is what your uncle is always telling me. I want to see your sweet family!" Vincent kept his arm around his little aunt as he took her over to his group.

He delivered her into the arms of Tanimus, who kissed his beloved wife passionately. Then he whispered into her

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ear. "I have missed you so terribly, Letha!"

Letha laid her head on Tanimus' chest, closed her eyes in relief that they were safely back, and said, "I've missed you too, Tanimus. I was really happy when the sentries arrived yesterday with Adrian and his men safely in custody. I was so frightened when you left here."

Tanimus kept his arm around Letha as he took her to Catherine's gurney. Tears were running down Letha's cheeks again as she picked up Catherine's hand. "Poor little Sweetheart, she has been through so much! Vincent, she is lovely. I'm glad that you brought her here, so we can participate in helping her. I can't wait to meet her when she wakes up! Elisia has told us about all of her selfless acts of kindness and love that have kept you safe."

While Letha was talking, Vincent had taken Little Jacob out of his stroller, and he brought the baby to his great-aunt. Letha was ecstatic as she took him in her arms and gazed into his alert little face. "Oh, Vincent, he is such an handsome little guy! He looks just like Catherine—except for his eyes. He definitely has your eyes." Everyone was chuckling, and Letha looked at them questioningly. "Did I say something funny?"

Vincent chuckled, "I think that everyone who has ever held Little Jacob has made the same comment about how all he got from me were my eyes. That actually is just fine with me!" Letha giggled at him.

Rolley, who was always fairly silent and thoughtful, hadn't said much during the entire trip to the Tandin

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world. Now he had been so happily distracted watching Vincent's reunion with Letha that he had failed to notice the pretty twelve-year-old Tandin girl, with the light-brown mane of hair and blue-grey eyes, who had slipped her hand into his. She was quite tall for her age, so Rolley didn't have to look down too far into her joyful face, and he smiled. She was quite excited as she spoke to Rolley. "You love playing the piano too!"

Rolley realized instantly that she was a kindred spirit, and he replied enthusiastically, "Yes, I do! You play also?" She nodded vigorously.

Tanimus noticed the two and broke into their little private conversation by saying, "Rolley, she is my grand-niece, Chrystal. She was very excited when we told her about you, and she has really been looking forward to having you come here. She is a savant pianist just like you, and no one in our world has the equivalent skill to be able to play duets with her on her level. She has been hoping that you will enjoy playing the piano with her." Rolley was all smiles as he nodded his head, and Tanimus went on. "Chrystal has played the piano by ear from the time she could pull herself up to the keyboard, even before she could walk. Our musicians taught her to read music just as soon as she could comprehend it. Before she was six-years-old, she was playing music they couldn't even attempt to learn."

Rolley smiled at Tanimus as he said, "Chrystal is very lucky that someone noticed her ability so young. If an

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Helper hadn't brought me to Father's world when I was ten, I would never have been taught how to read music by Ms. Kendrick. She was right when she said that before I learned to read music, I was just a music box with an empty gift. I couldn't understand or really feel the music I was playing, even though it was technically perfect. It will be my great pleasure to play the piano with Chrystal!" The little girl giggled happily.

Dresden had taken Jamie's backpack, crossbow, and quiver off her. Now, he watched her wander off to a bed of tulips as he put her things along with his backpack on the nearest bench. He enjoyed observing her look of little-girl pleasure as she fingered the pretty flowers.

Elisia walked over to Joe, who had his arm wrapped firmly around Diana. Elisia reached up and put her hand over Joe's forehead, and he closed his eyes. "Uncle Tanimus, we need to help Joe with his excruciatingly painful headache before we divide everyone up and send them home."

Diana looked up at Joe in alarm. "Joe, have you been in pain?"

Father spoke up, "Joe, why didn't you tell us you were in pain? We could have given you an analgesic for that!"

Joe replied, "I just didn't want to slow us down any more and delay getting Catherine here."

Tanimus looked at Diana. "Diana, bring him over to the bench here, and sit down with him. You stay in physical contact with him, and we will be able to stop his

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pain.”

When Joe was seated with Diana beside him, she put her hand on his leg, and he put his hand over hers. The Tandins gathered in a circle around the bench. Then Elisia said, “Both of you just close your eyes and relax. Try to empty your minds.”

Diana and Joe closed their eyes and relaxed while the Tandins quietly gazed at the two of them. The couple found themselves walking hand-in-hand along an ocean beach with the sun setting on the horizon. There was a gentle warm breeze, and the colors in the sky were a lovely combination of pinks, reds, and oranges. They could hear the waves crashing against the shore, and hear the cries of the sea gulls as they flew overhead. Joe felt warmth at the top of his head, which spread downward throughout his body, ending at the souls of his feet. Joe looked down into Diana's pretty green eyes as they were walking, and he realized that his head no longer hurt. Then, they were back on the bench in the Tandin garden.

Joe looked around at the smiling Tandins in gratitude. “The pain is completely gone! Wow! That was some preview of what we get to do for Catherine tomorrow. I can't believe the relief I feel! Thank you.”

Tanimus then introduced Father's people to the Tandins who would be taking them to their Tandin homes. An elderly Tandin couple with silver manes of hair stepped

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forward as Tanimus introduced them. “These are my parents, Vernal and Kaitlin. They are ready to take Father, Mary, Peter, and Susan to their home.”

Before those six left together, Vernal and Kaitlin went to Catherine’s gurney and kissed their granddaughter-in-law, then kissed Little Jacob, who was still in Letha’s arms, and then got big bear-hugs from their grandson, Vincent. Vincent was overcome with joy to know that his paternal grandparents were still alive. He asked Letha, “Are your parents also still alive?”

Letha nodded, “Yes, and they are anxious to see you. They are a little frailer than Tanimus’ parents are, so they don’t leave their chambers much any more. The stress of Gaylin’s and Loren’s deaths and your loss hit them much harder, and they had a difficult time recovering from it. It aged them just as it turned my hair white. We will go visit them after we wake Catherine up. It will make them very happy to be able to meet your entire family.” Vincent smiled and nodded.

Next, Tanimus introduced a blue-eyed Tandin man with a brown mane about Devin’s age. “This is my son-in-law, Nolan. He is married to our youngest child, our daughter, Nina. Their baby boy, Donner, is just a little older than Little Jacob. Nina and Donner are going to stay with us tonight, so Nina can try to establish an empathic connection with Little Jacob. Then, she can be his wet-nurse tomorrow while we go with Vincent and Catherine to the healing chamber. Nolan is ready to take Joe, Diana,

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Laura, Jerry, and Rebecca with him to his home.” He addressed Nolan. “Nolan, before you take them home, please take them to the hospital clinic, so Joe’s head wound and Diana’s cuts can be treated and redressed.”

Nolan nodded and said, “Dr. Bentley is on duty today. They will really like her.” Nolan began signing for Laura as he was talking to his group of Father’s people on their way out.

Tanimus then introduced a Tandin man with a golden mane, like Vincent’s, but who had dark grey eyes. He was about Vincent’s age. “This is my nephew, Tucker. He is Chrystal’s father, and he is prepared to take Isaac, Rolley, Sarah, and Brooke to his home.”

Isaac chuckled, “I am so glad that you put me in Rolley’s group. I have come to look forward to Rolley’s nightly piano recitals. I can’t even imagine how wonderful it will be to listen to Rolley and Chrystal playing duets together!” Everyone was chuckling as that group left.

An arrestingly beautiful tall Tandin woman with a dark-brown mane of hair and violet eyes approached them next. She was eight years younger than Tanimus, but the resemblance was unmistakable. She was accompanied by a tall Tandin man, who was older than Tanimus, with a light-brown mane of hair streaked with grey and dark blue eyes. “This is my baby sister, Marina, and her husband, Michael. Michael and Marina are Tucker’s parents, and Chrystal is their granddaughter. Marina and Michael will take Pascal, Jamie, and Mouse to their home.”

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Dresden quickly spoke up. "I'm going to go help them get settled in at Aunt Marina's and Uncle Michael's chambers. I'll be home later, Mom and Dad."

Tanimus looked at Dresden. "Before you come home, be sure to go visit Dr. Bentley and have her treat and redress your arm, Dresden."

Dresden nodded at his father. "I will, Dad."

Dresden looked toward the tulip bed, but Jamie was no longer there. When he looked around for her, he discovered that she had fallen asleep on the bench with her head on the bedroll attached to her backpack. Mouse had seen her too, and he was now standing beside the bench looking down at Jamie. He looked up when Dresden walked over. Dresden smiled at Mouse and said, "Don't worry Mouse. I'll carry her, so we don't have to wake her up." Dresden noticed that Jamie had a yellow tulip clutched in her hand. He chuckled as he gently extracted it from her hand and put it into her quiver. Then he gathered the sleeping girl up.

Mouse picked up Jamie's backpack and shouldered her weapon. He started to grab Dresden's backpack too, but Dresden stopped him. "Just leave that here, Mouse. I'll pick it up later when I go home." Mouse smiled and nodded. Dresden had been aching for a chance to get Jamie back into his arms, and he was very happy for this excuse to carry her. He looked at Mouse and asked, "Mouse, when is Jamie's birthday?"

Mouse smiled and replied, "Jamie turns twenty on St.

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Patrick's Day, March 17th." Then his expression turned serious and he told Dresden, "Hurt Jamie, I'll come after you!"

Dresden was equally serious when he answered. "Mouse, if I hurt Jamie, you won't have to come after me, because I will be jumping off the nearest cliff!" Mouse chuckled and nodded. Then Dresden added, "Please don't tell her that I asked about her birthday." Dresden and Mouse began following their group through the garden together.

Mouse smiled knowingly, "Secret?" Dresden nodded.

Dresden sighed happily as he gazed down at the pretty little woman-child in his arms. He whispered, "Well, little Princess, if this is what it takes to get you into my arms without a fuss, I'm just going to have to keep wearing you out!"

Tanimus looked at the remaining group consisting of Vincent, Catherine, Little Jacob, Devin, Charles, Tony, and Narcissa. "The rest of you get to be our guests! Come with us, and we will get you settled and taken care of." Tony took charge of the empty stroller.

Charles had been watching as Dresden picked Jamie up to take her to Marina's home. Now, he went to the bench and picked up Dresden's backpack. He looked at Elisia and asked, "Elisia, can you contact Dresden and let him know that I'm taking his backpack home for him?"

Elisia smiled and nodded. "That is very thoughtful of you, Charles. I'll tell him right now." Then she went to

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Devin and snuggled against him as he wrapped his arm around her. Devin was ecstatic as they began walking through the garden toward Elisia's home.

As Vincent was rolling Catherine's gurney through the garden, he paused by a pink rosebush with bloomless honeysuckle vines growing up through it, and the memory of his dream came to him. Elisia and Devin stopped beside him, and she said, "We have always made sure we had a pink rosebush with honeysuckle in the garden. We hoped that someday you would get to enjoy them again. The honeysuckle won't bloom again until summer, but the roses are pretty and fragrant."

Vincent smiled down at his sister and nodded. "It makes me really happy to see that bush in the waking world again!"

As Vincent's group chattered happily together, Letha, who was still wrapped in Tanimus' arm as she carried Little Jacob said, "Is it my imagination, or is Dresden finally smitten?"

Tanimus chuckled, "It isn't your imagination. Dresden is completely gone over that little Jamie!"

Letha giggled, "I wonder if she realizes that she is going to have her hands full with him."

Tanimus laughed, "Actually, from what I have observed and felt from them, I think it will be the other way around. I believe that Jamie is going to keep him hopping."

Letha smiled up at Tanimus. "That will be different!

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Every girl and woman anywhere near his age over the years has tried to get Dresden's attention and failed. I wonder how he will hold up under the reverse challenge."

Tanimus was still smiling as he looked down at Letha. "I think that he will thoroughly enjoy every minute of whatever delightful trouble she gives him!" Letha giggled.

On their way to the home chambers of Tanimus and Letha, they passed through wide beautifully decorated corridors. The walls were so brilliantly polished, they appeared to be glazed. There were lovely sconces giving off soft light all along the way. Tapestries and paintings were hung everywhere. The floor was covered with what appeared to be thick blue cushioned rubber of some sort.

Vincent asked about the floor. "What are we walking on, Uncle Tanimus? It is quite comfortable, but I've never seen anything like it."

Uncle Tanimus explained, "It is a rubber safety-padding we developed, which we spray on the floors in liquid form. We use a special process that eliminates the fumes that rubber usually produces. As it dries, it thickens into a nearly indestructible cushion on the floors. It is less fatiguing to walk on, and it prevents injuries to our children, if they fall while running through the corridors." Tanimus chuckled as he continued, "We found it to be much simpler to develop this safety-flooring than to figure out how to stop the children from running through the corridors!"

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They were all laughing as Father said, “We dealt with that problem by sewing thick knee and elbow pads into the children’s clothing. I seem to recall that Vincent was always the one wearing out his protective pads the most frequently.” Vincent chuckled.

Narcissa dropped back by Vincent and took his arm. He asked her, “Are you still holding up all right, Narcissa?”

Narcissa gave him a joyous look and said, “Oh, Vincent, child, I am so glad that you brought me with you, so I could see all of this! These people of yours have truly built Zion here!”

Vincent chuckled as he looked down at her. “I think that you are right, Narcissa!”

Devin spoke up and exclaimed, “Elisia, all of the artwork on the walls and tables in these corridors is exquisite! Where did it all come from?”

Elisia smiled as she replied. “Every piece of art you see anywhere in our tunnels as well as in our homes and other chambers is all original artwork produced by our own community members. The art pieces have been created by both humans and Tandins as well as both children and adults.”

Vincent looked at his sleeping Catherine as he said, “It will be wonderful to wake Catherine up so that she can see all of this.”

As they continued their enjoyable trek through the lovely art galleries of corridors, they passed both Tandins

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and humans. All of them showed their pleasure at seeing Father's people in their world. They felt a very warm welcome from everyone here.

A new wonder of architecture was revealed to them as they entered the home chambers of Tanimus and Letha. Their doorway was fitted with a smooth blue metal sliding door, which slid into the rock doorway when Tanimus pressed the button to the left of it. As the door opened, the magnificent crystal chandelier in the center of the huge living room inside automatically turned on, filling the entire chamber with brilliant light.

When Tony stepped inside, his mouth dropped open, and he left the stroller by the doorway, walked to the center of the chamber, and slowly turned in circles as he looked all around the beautiful room. Everyone else was equally amazed. A wide balcony had been cut out of the rock walls all the way around the top of the room, and the cascading chandelier lit it as effectively as the main part of the room. The balcony was lined with book shelves overflowing with books. A magnificent stone stairway had been sculpted from a giant stalagmite leading up to the balcony. The gold safety railing around the balcony and down the sides of the stairway had an intricate leafy-vine design. The room was filled with glass-topped wooden reading tables, brilliantly polished wooden furniture with comfortable thick cushions, and plush rugs. The table lamps were works of art, and there were vases of fresh

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flowers. As in the corridors, there were tapestries and paintings on the walls as well as other lovely pieces of artwork on some of the tables. A brightly polished grand piano was on the left side of the chamber. It was a truly inspiring as well as a relaxing room.

The elevator at the back of the room opened, and Nina stepped off the car with her baby boy, Donner, in her arms. Nina was a golden-blond slender Tandin in her early twenties with her mother's crystal-blue eyes, but she was quite tall. She was all smiles as she went to her mother, Letha, and said. "Mom, how would you like to trade babies?" Letha giggled as they exchanged baby boys.

Nina then approached Vincent with a smiling Little Jacob. She never took her eyes off the baby, and Vincent could see that Nina would have no trouble making an empathic connection with Little Jacob. Then, she looked up at Vincent and said with a giggle, "Well, Cousin Dear, I see that you have been very well taken care of!" He chuckled and hugged her. Then, she looked down at Catherine on her gurney. "Oh, Vincent, Catherine is absolutely beautiful! I can't wait to meet her when she wakes up."

Vincent smiled at his cousin. "She will be thrilled to meet all of you as well. I want to see your little boy, Nina." Letha brought Donner to Vincent, and he took him and smiled down at the blond baby Tandin. "He looks just like you, Nina. It is such a blessing that these two are so close

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in age. Thank you for offering to nurse Little Jacob while we work on waking Catherine up tomorrow.”

Nina smiled, “I am really happy to be able to help you and Catherine.” Then, she turned to Letha. “Mom, let’s take the babies up and get them settled in the nursery. I’ll give Little Jacob a bath, and then I can take him to Vincent and Catherine when he needs to nurse until tomorrow.” Letha took Donner from Vincent as Nina told the others while she was grabbing the empty stroller, “I cooked a meal for all of you. Dad will show you where the kitchen is, so you can eat before you go to your rooms.” Then, mother and daughter took the elevator up to the nursery floor with the babies.

Vincent picked Catherine up off her gurney and turned to his uncle. “Uncle Tanimus, where is the nearest bathroom? I need to take Catherine there before I feed her.”

Tanimus took Vincent to a door just past the piano, and Vincent went inside with Catherine. Then, Tanimus turned to Tony, who was still standing in the middle of the room gazing around in awe. “Well, young man, are you hungry?” Tony looked at Tanimus and grinned as he nodded his head. “Why don’t we all go into the kitchen and see what Nina made for us.” Tony, Devin, Elisia, Charles, and Narcissa followed Tanimus through the doorway into the kitchen chamber at the other end of the living room.

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The kitchen chamber was nearly as big as the living room, and it was equipped with every imaginable kitchen appliance for food preparation and storage. There were ample pretty marble counters over finely-crafted wooden cabinets and an elegant brass sink. Wooden cabinets lined the tops of the walls as well, and there was a long beautifully-crafted wooden dining table with matching chairs. Another large vase of lovely fresh flowers adorned the center of it. The room was filled with the wonderful smell of the delicious meal Nina had prepared, and the table was already set with beverages poured. When everyone was seated with their full plates in front of them, Tanimus prayed for a blessing on the food, and they all began eating with great enthusiasm.

When Vincent came into the kitchen with Catherine, Charles got up and pulled out a chair for him. Charles offered to help. "Vincent, you sit with Catherine, and I'll feed her for you. Then, I'll hold her while you eat. Nina made some marvelous soup for Catherine."

Vincent smiled at Charles. "Thank you, Charles. That would be very helpful."

Devin asked Tanimus about his home chambers. "Tanimus, how many levels does your home have?"

Tanimus replied, "Our home has a total of eight levels, and there are full baths on each level. There are five levels above this one, and there are two levels below this one. The bottom level is essentially a guest house equipped with an efficiency kitchen, a bedroom, a full bath, and an

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heated spa-pool. That is where Vincent and Catherine will stay. We figured it would be easier for Vincent to care for her there both before and after waking her, until she is strong enough to travel back to your world. The level above that one is a guest suite where Narcissa will stay.” He looked at Narcissa as he said, “We thought that you would probably like to be near Vincent.” Narcissa smiled and nodded. “The top level is our master suite, and the one just below that is the nursery. Nina is going to stay with Donner and Little Jacob in the nursery tonight. Elisia’s chamber suite is just above this one. The level above hers is a guest suite with two bedrooms. The suite level below the nursery has Dresden’s bedroom and a guest bedroom. There are wooden staircases leading from both Dresden’s suite below and our master suite above the nursery into the nursery in addition to access by the elevator.”

Tony spoke up excitedly, “Oh good, I would like to stay in the guest bedroom below the nursery, if you think that would be OK with Dresden. I’ll help listen for Little Jacob.”

Tanimus smiled at him. “That is what I thought you would like. That will put Charles and Devin in the guest suite above Elisia. There is an intercom system in our home. We rarely use it when we don’t have human guests. I’ll show all of you how to use it when I take you to your suites. You will be able to buzz any room you want to talk to someone in. There are also telephones in

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every bedroom. We have already put the phone numbers beside the phones for the home chambers where all of your other community members are staying, just in case you would like to call and talk to them while you are here.”

Charles had finished feeding Catherine and was now quietly holding her on his lap while Vincent ate. Vincent was practically wolfing his food down. He was anxious to get his beloved little wife settled and comfortable in their guest accommodations.

Vincent had just finished eating when Letha came into the kitchen. “Vincent, if you are ready to come with me, I will take you down to the guest level and help you get settled in down there.”

Charles and Vincent both stood up, and Charles gave Catherine back to Vincent as he said, “Don’t worry about the gurney, Vincent. I’ll load your bags onto it and come with you.”

“Thank you, Charles,” Vincent said as he carried Catherine out of the kitchen door to the elevator with Letha.

When the elevator landed two levels lower, they stepped out into the spa-pool chamber. The only lights on in the room were softly glowing shielded lights in a ring around the bottom of the pool. Letha pressed a button by the elevator, and full spectrum lights in the ceiling turned on, making it look like a sunny day. There was the

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soothing sound of water as it bubbled in the pretty sculpted rock pool. Smoothly polished rock ledges with body-shaped contours were in each corner of the pool submerged just under the surface of the water. Vincent closed his eyes for a moment and smiled at the thought of how easy it would be to bathe Catherine in this pool and how much good it would do her to have this type of water therapy.

Letha could see that Vincent was thrilled. "Vincent, this water is continually cycling as it flows from our waterfalls and then through our water purification plant, so the water is always fresh and clean. It passes through a geo-thermal heating system during that cycle, so the water is also always the perfect bathing temperature."

Vincent smiled at his aunt. "Aunt Letha, this will be so good for Catherine."

Letha then showed Vincent the full bath, the kitchen facilities, and the beautiful spacious bedroom which featured a king-size adjustable bed. She showed him how to use the intercom, and she showed him the telephone on the nightstand with the list of phone numbers beside it. Letha also showed Vincent how to lock the elevator doors to secure their privacy and told him that when they were locked, a "do not disturb" light would come on in the elevator when it reached his level. Then, she and Charles took Narcissa's backpack off the bottom of the gurney and went back up in the elevator.

Vincent settled Catherine on the big bed temporarily

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while he unpacked and put everything away. He smiled at the large vase of pink, red, and white roses on the reading table. He figured that Elisia must have contacted Nina telepathically when she saw Catherine's rosebush at Peter's home. He was putting Catherine's and his toiletries by the pool near one of the bathing ledges when his intercom buzzed. He walked to it and answered, and it was Nina. She said, "Vincent, why don't I nurse Little Jacob for tonight, so you can take care of Catherine undisturbed? Then, we can help her to nurse him in the morning before you go to the healing chamber."

Vincent was relieved by her offer. "Nina, that would be perfect. Even though Catherine is deeply asleep, I can still feel her fatigue from the trip. That would give me a chance to get her bathed and more relaxed, so she is resting better. By the way, thank you for the roses!"

Nina's cheerful voice replied, "Elisia told me about the rosebush with the red and white blooms in Catherine's room in your world. I thought those might make you feel more at home. I'll see you sometime tomorrow morning then. Sleep well."

"Thank you, Nina." Vincent turned the intercom off.

Vincent walked to the elevator and locked the doors. He turned off the overhead lights. Living in the tunnels all of his life, he wasn't used to bright lights, and he found the lights in the bottom of the pool to be more relaxing and romantic. Then, he went back into the bedroom and discovered that the overhead lamp there had a dial to

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adjust the brightness. He dialed it down to a soft glow.

Vincent laid out a set of clean pajamas for himself and a fresh nightgown for Catherine. He had seen huge plush bath towels and wash cloths in the bathroom, and he took a stack of four of the towels and two of the washcloths out to the pool chamber. He laid three of the towels on the table by the pool, and he unfolded one and laid it over the thickly padded chaise lounge, so he could lay Catherine on it after bathing her. Then he laid the washcloths on the edge of the pool. Vincent was overjoyed by Tanimus' and Letha's thoughtfulness in providing him with these beautiful and very private accommodations. He had been craving time alone with his bride.

Vincent went back into the bedroom and took his boots off. Then he shed his clothes and put them in the hamper in the bathroom. He gently undressed Catherine, took her crystal necklace off and put it on the nightstand, and then deposited her clothing in the hamper as well. It thrilled him to feel her soft skin against his body as he picked her up and carried her into the pool chamber and then walked carefully down the stone steps into the pool. Letha was right. The water was the perfect temperature, and he felt the tension draining out of both his body and Catherine's as it bubbled over them. The water level was just below Vincent's chest, and he enjoyed just standing there with Catherine in his arms as the water swirled around them.

Finally, he walked to the corner of the pool and laid

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Catherine on the bathing ledge. It was perfectly shaped, so she was comfortable, with her head above water, while the warm water continued to swirl over her body. Vincent just stood there and gazed at her, his heart bursting with love. Ever since he had been reunited with Catherine, Vincent had used the self-mastery he had cultivated over the years to carefully keep his sexual desire for Catherine in check. It would never have occurred to him to take advantage of his unconscious wife to satisfy his own carnal urges. It did give him warm pleasure, though, to feel the way Catherine responded to his tender caresses and kisses whenever he gently bathed, creamed, and massaged her fragile small body. She was always less fretful, and he could tell that her nightmares were less disturbing.

Catherine desperately needed the comfort that making love to her would provide, and Vincent needed that just as desperately. He smiled as a way to do that came to him. Ever since Uncle Tanimus and Elisia had made their appearance at Peter's home, Vincent had felt his own underdeveloped mental abilities growing. He could feel the potential power of his mind even more strongly since they had arrived in the Tandin world. Perhaps he could use that strengthening ability to control Catherine's nightmares long enough to make love to her in the dream-world. If he could, she would rest more peacefully, as would he, and they would both be in better shape to end her nightmares tomorrow.

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While Vincent was thinking, he heard the heavenly sound of a piano adaptation of *Schubert's Unfinished Symphony* being played on Tanimus' grand piano. It was being piped through the intercom system, and he realized that Rolley wasn't about to miss his daily piano performance for Catherine. Vincent became aware as he listened, that there were more than two hands playing. Rolley and Chrystal were performing the piece as a duet, and it was breathtaking. Vincent smiled thinking that it was the perfect music to take care of Catherine by.

Vincent quickly brushed his teeth, washed his face and hair, and then bathed himself. Then, he took plenty of time and great care with Catherine. Vincent's sole purpose at this moment was to satisfy Catherine's needs, and he always thoroughly enjoyed making sure that every inch of her pretty body was properly cared for. Vincent was always awed by the miracle that his beautiful Catherine could have fallen in love with him, and he took great pleasure in caring for her.

Vincent carefully brushed Catherine's dainty straight white teeth. Then, he gently washed her face with the loofah disk Diana had brought to him and shown him how to use with Catherine's special cleanser. Next, he washed and conditioned her hair. Vincent had been terrified of using a blade on Catherine's legs and underarms, but Diana had patiently taught him the correct technique to avoid nicking her soft skin. Susan had even found rose-scented shaving cream for Vincent to use on Catherine.

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When he finished with that grooming task, he smiled with satisfaction as he ran his hand over her silky-smooth shapely legs, knowing that Catherine would be pleased with the results. Then, he poured Catherine's scented soap on a washcloth and began washing her body with soft caressing strokes.

Vincent slipped an arm under Catherine's shoulders and lifted her against his chest so he could wash her back. As he started to lay her back down, Catherine's milk let down, and her breasts sprayed him with breast milk. Vincent was delighted to watch Catherine's pretty breasts erupt like small volcanoes with milk. He marveled at her motherhood and her body's capacity to provide nourishment for their child. He gently washed the milk off her body and then off his. When Vincent was satisfied that he had taken care of Catherine from head to toe, he lifted her in his arms and carried her back up the stone steps out of the pool.

Vincent laid Catherine carefully down on the towel on the chaise lounge, and he took one of the other towels and covered her with it. Then, he quickly dried himself off and laid his damp towel on the floor beside her chair. Vincent kneeled on it and started towel drying Catherine's hair with the fourth towel. When he began drying her body with the towel she was covered with, he discovered a problem. Catherine's breasts were swollen and hard from being heavily engorged with excess milk. He wrapped her up in the towels, carried her into the bedroom, and laid

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her gently on the bed.

Vincent knew that he had to relieve Catherine's engorgement quickly. From his own study and from what Mary had told him, he knew that this condition was very uncomfortable for women. The thought that Catherine might be in pain and unable to tell him she was, was unbearable to him. No one had thought to pack a portable breast pump, because it had not occurred to any of them that someone would be available to wet-nurse Little Jacob. Missing a nursing session was what had caused this, and he was sure that Nina figured he had a breast pump for Catherine. Vincent also knew that if he didn't empty Catherine's breasts for her, her supply would diminish from lessened demand. As much as he hated the thought of interrupting his precious private time with Catherine, her pressing need was more important. Vincent started to walk to the intercom to ask Aunt Letha to check on getting a breast pump from the clinic. However, he stopped when he realized that he could take care of Catherine's engorgement himself immediately in a way that would probably be more comfortable for her than a breast pump would be.

Vincent walked to the bed, knelt down beside it, and removed the towels from Catherine's body. He slipped one arm under Catherine, supported one of her tight breasts with his other hand, and began drinking the honey-sweet milk from it while being very careful not to injure her tender breast with his fangs. Vincent repeated this loving

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gentle operation on her other breast until the pressure was relieved, and both breasts were soft and empty. The experience left Vincent deeply moved. He was glad no one had packed a breast pump! Vincent kissed each of Catherine's breasts, kissed her throat, and kissed her lips. He gazed down at her angelic face with an expression akin to worship and said softly, "No wonder Little Jacob always has a smile on his face. I didn't realize what a treat he was getting. He gets to sip ambrosia nectar from the exquisite breasts of my beautiful little goddess!"

As Vincent stroked Catherine's cheek, he realized that in his concern over her engorged breasts, he had forgotten that her hair was still wet. He had seen an hair dryer already plugged into the outlet in the bathroom, and there was a big comfortable chair in there. So, he picked Catherine up and took her in to take care of her bathroom needs and dry her hair. When Vincent brought Catherine out of the bathroom, he sat on the edge of the bed with her on his lap, picked up her brush off the nightstand and began brushing her soft hair. When he was finally satisfied that her hair was tangle-free and shiny, Vincent stood up and laid her back on the bed.

Vincent then sat back down on the edge of the bed beside Catherine and picked up her bottle of scented moisturizer off the night stand. He poured a small amount onto his fingers and applied it to the porcelain skin of her face and neck. He thoroughly enjoyed running his fingers over those lovely contours. Vincent thought

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that no sculptor could ever create anything as inspiring as his Catherine. Then, he picked up her scented body lotion. Pouring some into his hand, he held it for several moments, giving it time to warm up before he applied it to Catherine's satiny skin. Once again, Vincent used slow, gentle, caressing strokes to moisturize Catherine's body.

Vincent still wasn't done with his joyous routine of caring for his beloved little wife, though. After gathering up all of the damp towels and washcloths and putting them into the hamper, he was back at the bed. He sat down beside Catherine again and began exercising her arms and legs, and then he deeply massaged those muscles the way Sarah had taught him. Vincent stood up and removed the pillow from under Catherine's head and gently turned her over on her tummy. Kneeling over Catherine on the bed with one leg on either side of her, he deeply massaged the muscles of her shoulders, back, narrow waist, and rounded hips until her skin was an healthy glowing pink from improved circulation. He climbed off the bed, carefully turned her on her back, and put the pillow back under her head.

When he had finished with her physical therapy session, he took a chair from the reading table and put it at the end of the bed. Then, he walked around and gently scooted Catherine with her pillow down until her feet were at the end of the bed. Soon after Vincent had found Catherine, Angela had visited Catherine's room at Peter's home, and she had taught Vincent how to massage

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Catherine's feet using an acupressure technique. When Vincent sat down on the chair and picked up one of Catherine's dainty little feet, he smiled as he always did with delight. He thought she had the prettiest little feet and slender ankles he had ever seen, and his huge hands dwarfed them. Once again, Vincent took his time with this loving task as he worked on massaging every inch of Catherine's feet. Afterwards, he scooted her back up on the bed. Then, Vincent put a little of Catherine's perfume on her and dressed her in the fresh nightgown he had laid out. Last of all, he put her crystal necklace back around her neck.

When Vincent stood up to get dressed, he decided to take preventive measures to protect Catherine from himself. He had never attempted to make love to her in her dream world before, and he wasn't sure what might happen when he unleashed his pent-up sexual energy. What he was very concerned about was that he might clasp her in a sexual embrace in the waking world, as he was making love to her in her dream world, and accidentally injure her weakened frail body. So, to prevent coupling with Catherine, Vincent set aside the lightweight pajamas he had laid out, and he got out a pair of briefs and a pair of thick pants and put them on instead. He then felt completely prepared to fulfill Catherine's emotional and psychological need for physical intimacy in her dream world using his increasingly powerful telepathic connection with her. Vincent had felt that mental power

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growing exponentially since arriving in the Tandin world.

After making sure that Catherine was comfortably settled on the bed, Vincent went into the kitchen to see what was available to feed her in the morning. When he opened the refrigerator, he found evidence that the Tandins who had stayed in Father's world had been communicating with Nina while they were traveling here. All of the ingredients for one of the soups that William had been cooking for Catherine were in there. When he smelled the pitcher of juice, he discovered that it was papaya juice, which would be very soothing for Catherine's delicate digestive tract. There was a slow cooker on the counter, so Vincent took out the fresh ingredients and began preparing Catherine's soup, so it could simmer overnight. He was really grateful for William's cooking classes that he had attended as he was growing up.

Now that the soup was prepared and cooking, Vincent was eagerly looking forward to finding Catherine in her nightmare world. He was determined to wage war, if necessary, to rescue her and make love to her there. This was a foray onto a new battlefield, and Vincent prayed for the mental strength and power he needed to be victorious. Vincent wasn't entertaining any illusion that he could wake her by himself, but he was determined to strengthen her spirit and relax her, even if only temporarily, so she could sleep more peacefully now and then be awakened tomorrow with the help of his family and friends.

Vincent turned on the night lamp in the bathroom,

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leaving the door ajar, and then he turned off the bedroom light. He climbed into bed and scooped Catherine into his arms.



Vincent pulled Catherine against his bare chest and nuzzled her neck, breathing her scent in deeply, as he closed his eyes and used the growing power of his connection with her to enter her nightmare world.

When Vincent opened his eyes again, he was in woods that looked vaguely familiar. He could hear Catherine crying with heartbroken sobs, and he followed the sound. When he came to a clearing, he realized why these woods looked familiar. His sobbing little Catherine was seated underneath the same large oak tree, where he had found her several weeks ago, before he knew that she was alive. Once again, her wrist was chained to the tree. She looked up at him with the same look of surprise and then joy that he had seen at that time.

“Oh, Vincent,” She cried, “You did come for me!”

Vincent ran to the tree, kneeled down, broke the chain from her wrist, and then picked Catherine up in his arms. She wrapped her arms around his neck, as he stood up with her, and looked into his eyes. He said, “Catherine, I will always come for you. Never forget that, and never give

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up hope!”

She had stopped crying, and she nodded. “I won’t, Vincent.” Then she buried her face in his neck, and he sat down on a nearby fallen tree trunk with her on his lap.

Vincent was on the verge of telling her that she was trapped in a nightmare and that none of what she was experiencing was real. However, a strong feeling came over him that this was not the right time for that revelation. Now, it would only serve to confuse and frighten her. He needed the mental support of the others before he explained what was happening to her. Instead, he decided to put an end to this particular torture that seemed to stem from her feelings of guilt.

Vincent stood up and gently placed Catherine on the tree trunk. He kneeled in front of her, took her small hands in his huge ones, and looked into her eyes as he said, “Catherine, Gabriel is dead, and our baby is safe at home with me. I have named him Jacob for Father. You are right. He is a beautiful baby boy!”

Catherine was struggling to understand what Vincent was telling her. “Gabriel is dead?” She said it with wonder in her voice. Then, she added, “Our baby is safe?” Vincent nodded. Her voice was still filled with wonder as she continued. “His name is Jacob! That is perfect!” Then she looked confused as she said, “Vincent, I feel so lost, and I can’t ever seem to find my way home to you. I keep ending up here. Where am I?”

Instead of trying to break through the nightmare fog in

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her mind, Vincent simply said, "You are with me!"

Catherine mulled that over for a moment and then said, "Oh, yes, I'm with you. That was a silly question, wasn't it?"

Vincent smiled at her. "No, Catherine, that wasn't silly at all. Now, watch me get rid of this little problem for you."

Vincent stood up and went to the offending oak tree. He knew that it was an illusion, and he could feel that he now had the power to control some of the elements of Catherine's nightmares. He put his booted foot up against the tree, and he pushed it over. The big tree crashed to the ground as its roots came up all around Vincent but didn't touch him.

He walked back over to Catherine whose expression was one of total amazement. She asked, "How did you do that, Vincent?"

Vincent bent down and picked her up in his arms again. "Do you remember the journal you brought to me as a gift after my illness?" Catherine nodded. "Do you remember the inscription you wrote inside the cover to me?"

Catherine thought for a moment, and then she said, "With love all things are possible."

Vincent nodded, "Yes, Catherine, the power of my love for you brought that tree down. Now, I want you to think about your special place that you told me about once. You said that it was a place you liked to go to be alone

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when your parents vacationed near it. Do you remember?"

Catherine smiled with delight at the memory. "Oh, I do, Vincent! It was a beautiful glen near a lake in Connecticut. It had tall lush grass, and if I lay very still, the deer would walk by. I thought that it was the most enchanted place I had ever seen. It was my special place, and I wanted to take you there, but I couldn't because it was too dangerous to travel above ground for you."

Vincent set Catherine down in front of him and put his hand under her chin as he tipped her face up and looked deeply into her eyes. "Catherine, I promised you then that someday we would see it together. We can go there now."

Her eyes widened, "How, Vincent?"

Vincent wrapped his arm around Catherine and turned her toward the fallen tree. He gestured toward it and said, "As you said in that inscription to me, with love all things are possible."

Vincent took Catherine into his arms and gave her an intensely passionate kiss, which she returned with equal hunger as they both surrendered eagerly to their need for physical closeness with one another. When their lips finally parted, Vincent was struggling to regain control of himself as waves of intense desire were sweeping over him. Catherine was smiling softly up at him, and her own overwhelming desire for him was apparent. He needed to change the setting, though. Vincent whispered, "Catherine, close your eyes." She closed them. "Now,

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think of your enchanted glen by the lake in Connecticut. Can you see it?" Vincent could see it in her mind, and he smiled as she nodded. "Now, open your eyes, Catherine."

When Catherine opened her eyes, she giggled with the delight of a child as she left Vincent's arms and slowly turned around in a circle. They were standing in her glen which was carpeted with tall soft thick grass. It was surrounded by beautiful trees beside a shimmering lake. There was a warm breeze blowing, and the sun was shining brightly. Eagles were flying overhead, and they could hear song birds in the trees. A small herd of deer was grazing at the edge of the woods. There was a large velour blanket laid out on the grass a few yards away.

Catherine's eyes filled with tears of joy as she looked up into Vincent's eyes. "Oh, Vincent, I have needed you so badly for so long. Please make love to me!" She held out her arms. "I want you! I need you desperately!"

As he took her in his arms, Vincent could feel Catherine's terrifying nightmares swirling all around them, and it was taking considerable mental effort on his part to keep her happily distracted in a protective bubble with her attention focused on him. His goal was to keep her awake in this dream and satisfy her every emotional need for love and physical intimacy. Afterwards, Vincent wanted to put Catherine into a profoundly peaceful sleep which would then strengthen her, so he could finally awaken her from her nightmares tomorrow. Then, they

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would truly be reunited in the waking world.

Vincent kept his arm around Catherine as he reached down and pulled his boots off, kicking them aside. He stroked Catherine's hair, kissed her neck, and then whispered in her ear. "Remove my clothing, Catherine."

Both of their hearts were pounding as Catherine removed the layers of Vincent's clothing. When he was finally standing before her unclothed, Catherine's eyes swept over his body, and Vincent felt her intense desire for him. He barely managed to maintain his control as she said in a breathless whisper, "Vincent, I had almost forgotten how magnificent you are! You have the body of a powerful mythical god!" Vincent closed his eyes in ecstasy as Catherine's delicate hands began gently stroking his fur-covered muscular body. She begged, "Please, Vincent, please undress me now!"

"As you wish, Catherine Love," Vincent whispered as he began removing her clothing, kissing each part of her body as it was exposed. Catherine sighed with pleasure at each kiss. When she was fully unclothed, Vincent lifted her into his arms and carried her to the blanket on the ground. He laid her on it and then lay down beside her. The grass underneath was so thick that it felt like a soft mattress. Vincent looked deeply into Catherine's eyes as he softly caressed her ivory skin. "You are my exquisitely beautiful goddess, Catherine, and I love you more than life itself"

Catherine was arching with pleasure as she replied,

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“Oh, Vincent, I can’t even express to you how much I love you! It is beyond description. My life didn’t truly begin until you loved me!”

With patience, tenderness, and great love Vincent spent hours on gentle foreplay with Catherine. He took his time with the same great care that he always took bathing her, and he was thrilled by every intensely exciting touch and kiss Catherine returned as she responded to Vincent’s slow sensuous lovemaking. Catherine’s expression was one of pure rapture, and watching the love and joy reflected on her lovely features intensified Vincent’s own pleasure.

Finally, Vincent caught and held Catherine’s gaze as he urgently whispered, “Catherine!”

Catherine responded with an equally fervent, “Vincent!” As their bodies finally merged in a sweet passionate embrace, Vincent was elated that he was still able to maintain control over himself and put Catherine’s pleasure and fulfillment before his own. It was a deeply satisfying feeling for Vincent, and his enthusiastically responsive little Catherine was making it well worth the enthralling effort.

When they were at last lying in one another’s arms, completely satiated and relaxed, the stars were twinkling overhead, and there was a full moon. Vincent managed one more illusion for Catherine’s enjoyment. Spectacular fireworks began bursting in the night sky, and Catherine giggled with delight as they watched them. Vincent could

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feel Catherine tiring, but he wanted to be sure that he put her to sleep with happy thoughts instead of having her disappear into another nightmare, so he ended the fireworks. Vincent pulled Catherine closer, kissed her deeply, and snuggled her against his chest. Then, he began singing her mother's lullaby to her.

Sleep my pretty one.

Rest now my pretty one.

Close your eyes.

The day is nearly done.

Rest your head.

Tomorrow will surely come.

Catherine sounded very drowsy. "Darling Vincent, you have the most wonderful bass voice! I didn't even know you could sing. Somehow, though, I'm not surprised. I have this feeling of déjà-vu, like you have sung my mother's lullaby to me before. Isn't that strange?"

Vincent didn't try to explain that he had sung it to her before. He simply said, "I'm glad you enjoyed that." Then, he began purring, and he felt Catherine relax into peaceful slumber. For the first time since Vincent had been entering Catherine's dream world after finding her alive, he felt that Catherine was not having a nightmare as she slept.

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With great relief that he had accomplished his goal, Vincent relaxed his mind and was back in bed with Catherine in the guest house. Vincent gave Catherine a tender kiss on the lips, slipped his arm out from under her, and settled her back on her pillow. He realized with a smile that he needed a shower, so, he got up and went into the pool chamber to collect his toiletries. He took them and his pajamas into the bathroom, leaving the door open to listen for Catherine, showered quickly, and redressed.

When Vincent came out of the bathroom, he paused at the vase of roses on the reading table and fingered the pretty blooms. He smiled as a revelation of sudden awareness ran through his mind. “Red and white make pink!” Vincent chuckled as he realized that making passionate love to Catherine and the exhilarating release of his sexual tension had made him giddy. He said softly, “I’m drunk on Catherine’s love!”

Vincent went into the kitchen and checked on the soup. It smelled delicious, and he turned the cooker down to a slow simmer.

Vincent knew that he needed to sleep, but he was too keyed up. The thought of actually being able to wake his sweet wife up tomorrow made it difficult to settle down.

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The anticipation of that happy reunion with Catherine fully awake was simply too exciting. He finally decided that he was just going to have to surrender to his need to hold Catherine and watch her sleep until he could relax. Vincent gathered Catherine up off the bed and walked to the huge plush recliner and sat down on it with her. He reclined the chair with Catherine curled up on top of him. Her face was tipped up toward him, and in the soft light glowing from the bathroom doorway, Catherine truly looked like an angel. Vincent sighed with profound happiness as he watched her sleep. Gradually, he relaxed himself, and sleep finally claimed him.

When Vincent stepped off the elevator into the nursery the next morning with Catherine in his arms, he was greeted by the happy sound of baby boys giggling. Tony was seated in the playpen, which was hilarious by itself, but he was also making funny faces at the babies, and they were thoroughly enjoying his antics.

Vincent chuckled as Nina got up off the rocker to greet him with a smile. He said, "I see things are under control here!"

Nina laughed and replied, "I've never seen a teenage boy with better instincts for knowing what babies like. Tony is a genuine phenomenon! I'll get Little Jacob, and we'll take Catherine into the bedroom to nurse him." Nina picked Little Jacob up out of the playpen, and Donner looked crestfallen. Tony picked the baby up and began

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talking to him. Donner was then perfectly happy with that arrangement.

Vincent followed Nina into the bedroom, laid Catherine gently on the bed, and then he settled on the bed himself snuggled against Catherine's back. He unbuttoned the front of Catherine's nightgown and supported her breast with his hand, so Little Jacob could nurse. When Nina put Little Jacob to Catherine's breast, she looked at Vincent and said, "Thank goodness! I was a little concerned that Catherine might be uncomfortably engorged this morning from not nursing. I half expected you to call me or Mom to bring a breast pump for her. I guess that you must have had one with you?"

Vincent smiled at her. "You're looking at him!"

Nina giggled at him. "Well, what a smart and thoughtful husband you are! I'm not sure any other man would have thought of suckling the milk from his wife's engorged breasts himself. I can definitely tell you that your solution was a lot more comfortable for her than any breast pump would have been!"

Vincent nodded his head. "That thought occurred to me also. We didn't realize you would be available to wet-nurse Little Jacob, so no one thought of bringing a breast pump. Catherine's need was real and immediate, and it was a joy to take care of it myself. Nina, it was both a treat and an education to drink Catherine's milk. I had read that it takes five teaspoons of lactose added to a quart of cow's milk to make it equivalent in sugar content

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to human milk, but I had no contextual understanding of what that meant before. It was almost like drinking warm ice-cream!”

Nina was smiling as she said, “It sounds like you really enjoyed that snack! Vincent, it has done our whole community a world of good to know how happy you are! We needed healing after so many years of being separated from you by violence. Your relationship with Catherine has become legendary in our community from the experiences Elisia has shared with us as she has helped you both. We are all going to be thrilled to see you reunited with Catherine today when she wakes up.”

When Vincent, carrying Catherine, and Tony stepped off the elevator into the living room, the others, including Dresden, were already waiting to go to the healing chamber. Letha asked Vincent, “Were you and Catherine comfortable, Vincent?”

Vincent smiled at his aunt. “Aunt Letha, comfortable is a totally inadequate word! That was pure luxury! Thank you so much. We both rested very well.” Letha smiled happily.

Tanimus spoke up and said, “Everyone else is headed for the healing chamber now. Are you ready to wake your little wife up, Vincent?”

Vincent replied, “I’m ready and anxious, Uncle Tanimus!”

Just as Vincent said that, Catherine became fretful in

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his arms. She began struggling as he held her firmly, and then she cried out, “No!” Vincent looked at her in shock. It was the first word she had spoken since she had been rescued, but he could feel that this was not a good thing. Then, she became limp again. Tanimus and Elisia rushed to Vincent, and they put their hands on Catherine’s head and shoulders.

Elisia said, “Uncle Tanimus, we need to hurry and get Vincent to the healing chamber with her. She is having a crisis, and Vincent needs to get into her mind as quickly as possible to pull her out of this.”

The group left the home and rushed, without discussion, through the corridors. They ended their journey at a small round chamber the Tandins had carved out of the tunnels. This chamber was completely encircled by a wide outer corridor, with candle lamps on the walls, and large comfortable recliners all the way around. The candles had been infused with natural vanilla and lavender essential oil, and the scent was very calming. Inside the round chamber, in the center, there was a large adjustable bed. All around the top of the circular wall was a ring of softly glowing lights. This chamber had been painted a soothing shade of robin-egg-blue with fluffy white clouds. There was a strange black panel suspended from the ceiling of the chamber over the top of the bed. A remote control panel was on a pedestal beside the bed.

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The others, both from Father's world and the Tandin world were already there waiting, and they listened quietly as Tanimus began explaining the procedure. "Vincent and Catherine will be inside this chamber, and the rest of us will form a circle in the outer corridor surrounding the room. You twenty who are from Father's world have already established telepathic links with Elisia and our other family members. Now, you just need to relax your minds and think positive thoughts about Vincent and Catherine. Try to imagine Catherine waking up and being reunited with Vincent. You will feel the power of our joined minds, but no one will be reading anyone's mind. We will simply be harnessing the collective faith and healing power of our joined minds."

Tanimus then addressed Vincent. "Vincent, you need to stay in physical contact with Catherine, and then enter her mind and participate in her nightmares to bring her out of the coma. This is the same thing you have been doing all along for Catherine from Elisia's instructions. We will simply be helping to strengthen your own mental power as you do so this time. We will not be in her mind with you, so whatever occurs will be private between you and Catherine."

Elisia further explained, "Our doctors are going to be monitoring both your vital signs and Catherine's after I set this remote control for the scanner over the bed. If your life is threatened, we will need to break your connection with her."

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Vincent looked at Elisia in alarm and said, “No! Don’t break my connection with her, no matter what appears to be happening!”

Elisia looked very worried. “Vincent, this will be a much more intense trip into her mind than any you have ever experienced before. The adrenalin rush alone will put a tremendous strain on your heart, and you have not received the proper training throughout your life to do this. You have endured a terrible ordeal yourself, Vincent, and you are still not back at your peak physically yet. You could die!”

Vincent was immovable. “I will have your added mental and emotional support, and I will have the strength of my love for Catherine and her love for me. Stabilize our bodies, if you must, but don’t break our connection. I’m not coming out of her mind without her! She is my life! Without her, there is nothing but darkness!”

Father spoke up at that point. “That is nearly precisely what Catherine said to me about you when I tried to stop her from risking the danger of going after you in the lower cave when your mind had been shattered by Paracelsus. Elisia, there was no point in arguing with Catherine then, and there is no point in arguing with Vincent now. Vincent, just don’t forget that you have a child who needs you out here.”

Vincent looked at Father as he said, “He needs both of us, Father, and he is safe with his family now, in both

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worlds. I'm ready to face any abyss, no matter how terrifying or life threatening, to bring Catherine home."

Elisia put her hand on her brother's arm. "Vincent, at least promise me that if you get into trouble, you will call out to me. I will be there if you do."

Vincent smiled down at his sister. "I promise you I will do that, Elisia."

Just then, an elderly human couple came into the chamber. The man was of average height and slender build with steel grey hair. On his arm was a beautiful petite woman with white hair wound on top of her head. Tanimus and Letha walked quickly to the couple to assist them. Letha exclaimed, "Mother and Daddy, you should have asked us to come and help you come here! We didn't think you were up to this."

Letha's mother smiled at her daughter. "You didn't think we were going to miss out on the opportunity to participate in helping our grandchildren, did you?"

Vincent was overjoyed to see his grandparents. He gently settled Catherine on the bed and then approached them. They both looked so frail, he was afraid he might crush them if he hugged them too hard. However, his grandfather hugged him with surprising strength. His little grandmother was fragile, though, and Vincent was very careful with her as he hugged her. They both were overcome with emotion, and tears were running down their cheeks.

Tanimus introduced them to the group. "These are

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Letha's parents, Doreen and Porter. Since you are now here, Daddy Porter, you are the senior member of our group. Would you like to offer a prayer for us before we start this healing session?"

Porter smiled with happiness at being asked to pray for the group. He proceeded to ask for divine help in supporting their efforts to heal Catherine and wake her up. Father and Peter then followed Elisia to the remote control panel, and she showed them how to program the monitor for Vincent and Catherine, so that their vital signs were then being transmitted to the clinic chamber. Then, Vincent settled on the partially raised bed, with Catherine in his arms, as he waited for the group to establish their healing connection in the outer corridor.

When the group filed into the outer corridor, Elisia arranged everyone so that they were beside and between those they each had the strongest emotional connections with. There were now a total of thirty-two humans and Tandins. That was enough that they could all hold hands in a complete circle in the corridor around the chamber Vincent and Catherine were in. She explained, as she arranged them, that they would hold hands long enough to establish the healing connection with Vincent, and then they could just relax and think positive happy thoughts while relaxing in the easy chairs. When they were all positioned with hands joined, it wasn't more than a few minutes before everyone in Father's group could feel

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positive energy washing over them like a warm blanket. It was a feeling they would find difficult to describe later, just as Tanimus had told them it would be.

Inside the chamber, as Vincent held Catherine, he felt that warm blanket of healing energy enveloping both of them. He knew that the time had come now for him to enter Catherine's nightmare world for the last time, to rescue her, and to bring her home.



Vincent closed his eyes—and leaped into the abyss.

When Vincent opened his eyes again, he found himself on Catherine's balcony, where she had lived before she was kidnapped by Gabriel. When he looked through the balcony doors into her apartment, he was shocked by what he saw. Catherine was standing on the other side of her bed with tears streaming down her cheeks. Her entire demeanor was one of a child who was being harshly scolded. There was absolutely none of the confidence that Vincent had helped her to cultivate. He could see that her spirit was crushed. What was even worse was that every scar that had been removed from her pretty face by plastic surgery after her attack was back on her face. They were

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glaring red reminders of the vicious violence she had suffered at the hands of the cruel criminals who had abducted her and slashed her face.

The man she had been engaged to before that attack, Tom Gunther, was standing over her and yelling at her, while she just looked at the floor. He had dark wavy hair and was a little over average in height. His haughty look actually made him quite ugly. He screamed, "Marrying you was the only way I could get your father's backing for the shopping center project! No one else wanted you with those ugly scars! Now, I'm beginning to wonder if it was worth it! Well, I'm stuck with you, and you are going to go with me and smile for everyone at this party I'm hosting for the project, or I will make you really sorry when we get home! Now, use plenty of make-up to cover up that hideous face of yours! I don't want anyone else knowing what a loser I married! Am I making myself clear?"

Catherine answered meekly through her tears, "Yes, Tom. I'll get ready to go right now."

With that, Tom Gunther stormed out of the room. Catherine walked with abject sadness to the end of the bed and sank onto it, covered her face with her hands, and began weeping. Vincent had been so shocked by this nightmare, that he had simply stared at the scene, frozen in place on the balcony. Now, he took action. He opened Catherine's balcony doors and walked quickly to Catherine. Vincent knelt in front of her at the end of her bed, and then he gently took her hands away from her

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face. Catherine just stared at Vincent as if she didn't know who he was, but she wasn't frightened by him either.

Vincent spoke gently to her. "Catherine, you do know who I am, don't you?"

Catherine nodded her head sadly. "Of course, I do. You are Vincent, a figment of my imagination."

Vincent was totally unprepared for that response. "What?"

Catherine explained, "You aren't real. My therapist says that I made you up as a way of dealing with the trauma of my attack, and with my insecurities, and with my inadequacies."

Vincent shook his head as he tried to figure out how to deal with this nightmare. "Catherine, there is nothing inadequate about you! You are a strong, confident, capable woman with a generous heart. You deserve much more than rough treatment from a man who thinks of you as a possession or a commodity to be exploited. You are *my* wife, not his, and I love you with all of my heart! Besides, you were your father's whole world. He would never have paid an horrible man like Tom Gunther to take you off his hands!"

Catherine countered with, "No one who is real could possibly love me! Look at my face. I'm ugly!" She looked down at the floor again with a completely defeated expression.

Vincent put an hand under her chin and lifted her

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face, so he could look into her eyes. “Catherine, you are the most beautiful woman on earth to me. Even if these scars were really still visible as you see them now, you would still be beautiful to me. I thought that you were the loveliest woman I had ever seen when I found you with your face slashed in Central Park. I had no idea then that the damage could be repaired, and I adored you anyway!”

Catherine didn’t seem to comprehend what Vincent was telling her. A look of fear passed over her face as she cried out, “Oh, I mustn’t just sit here now! I have to get ready to go with Tom to that party he is hosting. If I don’t get ready right away, he will be angry, and he will yell at me some more!” Catherine jumped up, leaving Vincent still kneeling on the floor, and ran to the closet. She opened it and started searching for a dress to wear to the party.

Vincent realized that he was going to have to do something quickly, or he was going to lose her to this nightmare. He decided that actions might speak louder to her injured soul than words. He stood up, strode to the closet, and swept Catherine off her feet and up into his arms. Vincent took her back to the bed and sat down on the end of it with her on his lap.

Catherine looked up into Vincent’s face with big fearful eyes. “What if Tom returns, and I’m not ready to go?”

Vincent was firm when he replied. “Catherine, if that man shows up here and tries to bother you, I will toss him out on his ear!”

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Catherine just blinked at him. Then Vincent put his hands on either side of Catherine's scarred face, and he began tenderly kissing each and every angry red scar on her face. She closed her eyes and smiled blissfully. Then she wrapped her arms around his neck as this nightmare lost its grip on her. The scars faded from Catherine's face, and their lips met in a passionate kiss as she sighed and relaxed in Vincent's arms.

When their lips parted, Catherine laid her head on Vincent's chest and asked, "Vincent, what am I doing here? I feel very confused, like my life is a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces scattered all over the place and out of order. I should be with you, I think, but somehow I'm not."

Vincent then explained what her condition was. "Catherine, you are trapped in a state of unconsciousness. None of what you see here, except me, is real. When our baby was born, Gabriel's doctor shot you full of morphine. Do you remember that?"

Catherine looked up into Vincent's eyes and nodded her head. "I do remember, Vincent! The doctor told me that I wouldn't suffer, and I knew then that he had given me a shot of morphine to kill me. Then, they took our baby away, and I found you just before I died."

Vincent smiled at her. "You didn't die, Catherine. You have been bravely hanging on in this nightmare world. I'm here to bring you home now. I found my family, Catherine, or rather they found me. My people are called

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the Tandins, and we are in their world right now under the north end of The Bronx. They are telepaths, Catherine, and they are using their mental abilities together with the empathic connection we have with our own people in Father's world to help me wake you up."

Catherine finally seemed to comprehend what Vincent was telling her. "If I wake up, will I get to see our baby boy?"

Vincent hugged her. "Yes, Catherine, he is waiting out there in the waking world for us now."

A look of remembrance came over Catherine's face. "You named our baby Jacob! You told me that you named our baby Jacob for Father didn't you?"

Vincent smiled and nodded. "Yes, Catherine."

Catherine smiled softly. "You made the most wonderful love to me. That was all in this dream world?"

Vincent hugged her tightly. "Yes, Catherine, and it is time to wake up now."

Vincent stood up and gently put Catherine down on the floor in front of him. He took both of her hands and entwined his fingers with hers. However, before he could do anything else, a thick wall of thorns sprang up between them and around Vincent's arms. Vincent tried to hang onto Catherine in spite of the pain of the thorns digging into his flesh, but just then, Tom Gunther returned with a vicious expression on his face. He rushed to Catherine, snatched her off her feet from behind, and pulled her away from Vincent.

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Catherine screamed, and Vincent roared as their hands were pulled apart. "Vincent! Vincent! Put me down, Tom! I don't belong to you! Vincent! Vincent!" She kicked and struggled as he continued to drag her away.

Tom Gunther's angry voice yelled, "So, you're talking to your imaginary friend again, are you? I guess I'm just going to have to have you committed and lock you away in the insane asylum!"

As Tom Gunther dragged Catherine out the door, Vincent roared again with furious frustration, and then he gave a mighty yell, as his precious wife disappeared from view, "Catherine! CATHERINE! **CATHERINE!**"

Despair and anguish welled up in an overwhelming flood of misery as Vincent's hope of quickly recovering Catherine vanished. The pain he was feeling was unbearable, and then he realized with a twinge of genuine fear, that his pain was not just emotional. He felt a severe crushing pain in his chest which quickly radiated down his left arm. As Vincent clutched his chest, he cried out, "No! Not yet! Not before I save Catherine!" Vincent called out in desperation telepathically to his sister. "Elisia, I'm dying! You must save Catherine for me!" Vincent then crumpled unconscious on the floor of the bedroom.

When Vincent woke up, the pain in his chest was gone, but he was no longer on the floor of Catherine's bedroom. Now, he was on the floor of the Great Hall back

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in Father's world. It was dimly lit by only two wall torches. The great double doors on the lower level were open, and there was a brilliant light shining through them from beyond. Vincent recognized that light from when Catherine had pulled him back from the brink of death in the small lower cave. There was a couple standing just beyond the door watching him, a large Tandin man and a small human woman. Vincent stood up and took a few steps toward them, but they held up their hands indicating that he should stop. He recognized his parents, Gaylin and Loren, from his dream of the attack on his family in the solarium after Diana had found Dr. Vlas' secret office in Gabriel's mansion.

His mother, Loren, spoke softly to him. "Vincent, you must go back. It is not time for you to come with us now. Your Catherine needs you, and you are the only one who can save her. Little Jacob needs both of you."

Vincent answered his mother. "I want to go back, Mother. I must save Catherine. I am so happy to see both of you, though!"

His father, Gaylin, then spoke. "Vincent, we are very proud of you. We have watched over you and your sister ever since you were separated. You have both become everything we prayed you would be. Please tell your dear little Catherine that we love her too."

Vincent smiled at his parents. "I will tell her." He then watched as his parents turned around and went back into the light as the doors slowly closed behind them.

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When Vincent turned around, he saw Elisia standing in front of the entire group of his family and friends at the foot of the staircase. He then realized that they had all entered the dream to save him when his vital signs indicated that he was in serious trouble. Elisia spoke to him. "Vincent, you had an heart attack. Your heart was compromised as a teenager when you were ill, and it took another beating when you became ill again after Paracelsus' attack. Your people are amazing! With the power of their faith and love added to ours, we were able to repair the damage to your heart. You are now completely healthy again. We are leaving Catherine's dream world now. Go find your wife and wake her up!"

Vincent nodded as joy and hope filled his entire being again. "I will, Elisia, thank you—all of you!" The happy group turned around and went up the stairs and out of the upper doors.

Vincent just stood still and thought for a few minutes about where he might find Catherine next. If her nightmares were taking her on a tour of past failed relationships, then he had a pretty good idea where she would be now. Vincent closed his eyes.

When Vincent opened his eyes again, he found that he had been right. He was standing on the massive stone porch of the mansion where her former fiancé, Steven Bass, had imprisoned her. He looked through the glass doors and saw Catherine seated on a large wooden chair

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with both of her arms tied to the chair.

A very tall man with wavy brown hair was standing over her. He would have been handsome were it not for the frightening look of crazed obsession on his face. Steven Bass was yelling at her, very much as Tom Gunther had been. "This is your home! This is everything you ever wanted! You belong to me! I am the only one who knows what you need! No one will ever love you the way I love you!"

At that point, Vincent broke the door off its hinges and rushed inside. His warning growl turned into a furious roar, and Steven Bass shrank back cowering to a corner with a terrified expression on his face. Vincent looked at him and said, as he was untying Catherine, "You're right, thank goodness. No one will ever love Catherine the way you do ever again. She deserves much better than that!" Vincent picked Catherine up in his arms, and he carried her out of the mansion, through the woods, and back into the tunnels.

Once he was in safe and familiar territory, he set Catherine gently on her feet and asked her, "Are you ready to wake up now, little Sweetheart?"

Catherine looked up at him with a soft expression of complete trust. "Oh, yes, Vincent, this is a terrifying place. Please help me wake up and leave here! How will you do that?"

Before Vincent could answer her, Catherine vanished

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from his sight. Vincent's roar of devastation reverberated throughout the tunnels, and he sank to his knees and put his head in his hands. He thought in despair, "Where have her nightmares taken her now?" Then he remembered that there was only one other failed relationship that he was aware of that would have caused Catherine enough pain to play a part in her nightmares. He jumped to his feet. He knew where she was!

Vincent closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, there was chaos all around him. He was standing in Elizabeth's Painted Tunnels, and they had collapsed from the drilling for the foundation of Elliott's Burch Tower. Elizabeth's wall murals were completely destroyed, and there was an ominous groaning of the remaining tunnel walls and ceilings threatening more imminent collapses. His heartbroken Catherine was kneeling beside Elizabeth's broken body where she had been crushed to death by the falling cement ceiling of the tunnel.

Catherine was sobbing and cried out, "Elizabeth, I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry that I couldn't stop Elliott!"

Before Vincent could climb over the debris and reach Catherine, Elliott Burch appeared and grabbed her arm. Vincent almost didn't recognize him. This tall man with the expensive collar-length haircut and carefully trimmed beard and mustache had an haughty self-absorbed countenance that made him appear almost evil. Elliott pulled her to her feet and was dragging her out of the

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tunnels. He said triumphantly, “She’s just a little person, just an obstacle to be removed! Stop your crying! You are going to be happy now living with me in my great tower with the six-story waterfall!”

Vincent wasn’t about to see the woman he loved dragged off into another hopeless nightmare. This time, with a mighty leap, he cleared the obstacles in his path. He ran down the tunnel after them and then planted himself directly in front of Catherine. He glared and snarled with fangs bared at the apparition of her imagination, and the heartless Elliott Burch disappeared. Catherine stared at Vincent in confusion, and then she shook her head as the nightmare fog in her mind began to dissipate.

Catherine finally said, “I’m still not awake, am I?”

Vincent smiled at her as he took her in his arms, “No, not yet. Elliott is dead, Catherine. In the end, he became the man you encouraged him to be. He sacrificed his life to save mine. This is a nightmare, an illusion that your mind has created. It isn’t real! Elizabeth is well and happily painting in her tunnels back home right now.” Vincent picked Catherine up in his arms. “I need to take you where your nightmares began, so I can help you to wake up.”

Vincent carried Catherine through the darkened and empty back streets of the city. He was taking her back to the very place where he thought that he had lost

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Catherine forever in this life. Finally, they were on the roof of the old Battery Arms building, where she had climbed the stairs to come to Vincent as Gabriel was taking their son away in his helicopter. Catherine said, "This is the last place that we were together, before I lost consciousness, and my nightmares began."

Vincent smiled softly and nodded, "Yes, Catherine. Do you remember the terrible nightmare I had after we decided that it was too dangerous for me to try to travel to visit your special place with you?" Catherine nodded as that memory returned to her. Vincent continued, "My nightmare was about what the tunnels would have been like if I had died as a baby after I was found. In that nightmare, Paracelsus had prevailed, and Father had died on the streets homeless. Everyone in Paracelsus' world was living in fear and hopeless misery, and he was a ruthless dictator. In that terrifying dream, you were the angel that was taking me on a tour of what might have been if I had not had the courage to live. In that nightmare, I thought that I had lost you altogether, because it was another life in which I had no part. You told me in the dream, and then you told me again when I awakened from that nightmare, that I could never lose you if I only remembered something, something important, one word. Do you remember what that word was?"

Catherine smiled as she said, "I told you to always remember love!"

Vincent hugged her tightly and said, "Yes, Catherine,

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remember love. Our journey has been one filled with tender love, and it is time now for you to awaken and be reunited with your family and friends who love you and with your baby who needs his mother.” Vincent looked deeply into Catherine’s eyes and quoted the line from Dylan Thomas’ poem, “Though lovers be lost.”

Catherine finished the line, “Love shall not.”

Vincent spoke softly. “Catherine, close your eyes.”

Catherine closed them. “Now, open your eyes, Catherine.”



When Catherine opened her eyes again, she was in the bed with Vincent in the healing chamber fully awake. Vincent then quoted the last line of the poem, “And death shall have no dominion!”

Catherine’s voice was filled with pure rapture as she exclaimed, “I’m awake—really awake?”

Vincent chuckled, “Yes, my sweet Catherine, you are really awake!”

All thirty-two of their family and friends came into the room from the outer corridor and gathered around the bed with smiling faces. Catherine looked around in amazement at both the familiar and the new faces, and she smiled at their obvious joy. Vincent gathered Catherine into his arms and closed his eyes in ecstatic

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relief that he was now reunited with his beloved wife in the waking world.

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Chapter XI

New Beginnings

When Vincent was finally able to bring himself to loosen his grip on Catherine, he settled her back comfortably on the pillows of the partially raised bed, so the others could get a good look at her now that she was finally awake. They had all been happily satisfied to just silently watch this miraculous reunion. Now, Joe was the first to speak. “Well, Radcliffe, waking you up has sure been a lot more fun than attending your funeral was!” The entire group giggled happily.

Catherine hadn’t caught sight of Joe until he spoke, and now she looked at him in wide-eyed surprise as she reached toward him. “Joe! Oh my goodness! You’re here!” Then the realization of what Joe had said dawned on her, “My funeral? I had a funeral?”

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Joe took her hand, kissed it, and then laughed, "That you did! It was an humdinger too! I didn't find out until nearly four months later that it was a sack-of-sand and not you that we buried. It is a really long story. Suffice it to say that I am very relieved that you are finally awake!"

Catherine giggled and looked at Vincent. "I am so thrilled that Joe knows about you! I told Joe once that he had an heart like yours."

Joe chuckled, "I didn't know, until I met Vincent, what a compliment that was!"

A look of confusion passed over Catherine's face as something else Joe had said registered in her mind. She looked at Vincent and asked, "Four months? How long have I been asleep?"

Vincent smiled at her. "Catherine, Little Jacob was born October 13th of last year. It is now March 5th."

Catherine shook her head and said with wonder, "That is nearly five months! I remember that you told me I would get to see our baby when I woke up. Where is Little Jacob?"

Vincent was mildly surprised as he asked her, "You remember what I told you in your nightmare world?"

Catherine put her hand on Vincent's cheek as she answered. "Oh, Vincent, I remember everything there! It was such a dark horrible frightening place except when you were with me. You gave me hope, and you rescued me just as you have always done."

Vincent smiled softly at Catherine as Tanimus spoke

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up and answered her question. “Catherine, my daughter, Nina, is on her way here with Little Jacob now.”

Catherine smiled joyously at Tanimus and asked him, “Are you Vincent’s father?”

Tanimus smiled back at her. “No, Catherine, I am his Uncle Tanimus. Vincent’s parents, my brother, Gaylin, and his wife, Loren, were killed by Gabriel’s brother, Adrian. That was how Vincent came to be left at St. Vincent’s hospital as a baby. Gaylin distracted Adrian’s men when they attacked, allowing Loren to escape with Vincent. Loren ran into the city with Vincent, tucked him in a window-well behind the hospital, and then was leading Adrian and his men away from Vincent when she was caught by them and strangled to death by Adrian. I was able to prompt Narcissa to find Vincent and take him to Father’s world before he froze to death. That adversarial history with Adrian is why his brother, Gabriel, was obsessed with taking your baby away from you.”

Catherine smiled at Narcissa, who hugged her. “Narcissa, when you saved Vincent, you saved me too! Thank you!”

Narcissa smiled warmly at Catherine. “Vincent saved all of us, child. Paracelsus would have destroyed our world if it had not been for Vincent.”

Catherine said to the elderly woman, “This is so far away from your tunnels, Narcissa. It must have been difficult for you to make such a trip to help me.”

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Narcissa patted Catherine's cheek softly. "Not so far! You are Vincent's whole world, and we all love you. Besides, these Tandin tunnels are full of many wonderful new places to explore!" Catherine giggled at Narcissa's joyous enthusiasm.

When Narcissa left the bed, Catherine took Vincent's hand and put it to her cheek, "Oh, Vincent, your poor parents!"

Vincent smiled at her. "Catherine, I have a message from them for you."

Catherine looked at him in surprise. "You have a message for me from your parents? How did that happen?"

Vincent responded, "While I was in your nightmare world trying to awaken you, I had an heart attack." Catherine's eye became huge with worry. "Don't worry, Catherine, the damage has been repaired, and my heart is perfectly sound now." Catherine was visibly relieved. "Anyway, when I had the heart attack, my parents appeared to me. They told me that it wasn't time for me to go with them yet. They also told me that they had been watching over me and my twin sister, Elisia, ever since we were separated when they were killed. Then, they told me to tell you how much they love you."

Tears sprang to Catherine's eyes as she said, "Oh, Vincent, I love them too. They sacrificed their lives to save yours!" Then, she looked at him in astonishment as another detail of what she was being told came to mind.

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“You have a twin sister?”

Elisia then stepped to Catherine’s side of the bed. She sat on the edge of it beside Catherine, and the two women hugged. “I’m Elisia, Catherine, and I am thrilled to finally see you awake!”

Catherine was overjoyed. “Oh, Elisia, you are so beautiful! I have this really strange feeling that I know you somehow.”

Vincent explained, “Catherine, Elisia and my people are telepaths.”

Catherine nodded, “I remember you told me that in the nightmare world.”

Then Vincent continued, “Elisia was the one who supported your mind when you came to me and pulled me out of the hallucination I was having from Paracelsus’ drug.” A look of realization came over Catherine’s face, and she smiled at Elisia. Then Vincent told her, “Do you remember when you entered my mind in the cave the second time Paracelsus attacked me with his vicious lies?”

Catherine looked at Vincent in surprise. “Yes, Vincent, I remember that vividly. I’ve never been more frightened in my life! Your vital signs had ceased completely, and I was afraid that you were dead. I never could figure out how I managed to go into your mind that way. It was as if some powerful outside force took me in there to you. Do you also remember that?”

Vincent chuckled, “I do now. I remember everything now. Anyway, Elisia was that powerful force who helped

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you to connect with me telepathically, so you could pull me back from death.”

Catherine had tears of gratitude streaming down her cheeks now, and she hugged Elisia tightly. “Oh, Elisia, thank you so much! Vincent is my life! I couldn’t bear to have him leave this world without me.”

Elisia hugged her back. “Thank you for loving and saving my brother, Catherine. His happiness with you is an inspiration to us all.”

Catherine looked at Elisia as another memory came to her. “Elisia, at one time, I had a stalker who nearly drowned me in the trunk of his car by pushing it into a lake. As I was dying, I saw my parents, but before I could reach them, Vincent caught me, picked me up, and carried me back to consciousness. Did you help him do that?” Vincent closed his eyes at the terrifying memory of nearly losing Catherine that time to her obsessed stalker.

Elisia smiled softly. “Catherine, Vincent was so desperate to save you, I think that he probably could have managed that feat on his own, but I did give him just a little boost of support.”

Catherine hugged Elisia again. “Thank you, Elisia. Neither one of us would be alive today if it weren’t for you!” Elisia stood up to give the others a chance to reunite with Catherine.

Catherine smiled and looked at Joe again as she asked, “Who is your little friend, Joe?” Joe had his arm tightly around Diana, and he turned his head to look

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down at Diana, but before he could answer Catherine's question, Catherine cried out in alarm, "Joe, you have been hurt!" She had caught sight of the bandage on the back of his head when he looked at Diana. "How did that happen?"

Joe tried to dismiss it. "Oh, that's nothing more than a boo-boo! I hit my head traveling between worlds."

Catherine looked sternly at him. "That's a very pretty lie! What really happened? I can see now that your lovely little friend has done a masterful job trying to cover up some painful looking bruises, and I know very well that you didn't give those to her!"

Tanimus decided that Catherine wasn't going to let anyone sugar-coat events for her, so he decided to explain. "Catherine, we had a conflict, the last one we will ever have, with Adrian on our way to bring you here to our world. Joe was knocked out and Diana was chloroformed in the process. Adrian was particularly angry with Diana, because she was the one who rescued Vincent and Little Jacob from Gabriel after he had imprisoned them in his Staten Island mansion. She then shot his brother, Gabriel, to death there. We now have Adrian and his men in custody in our world, and they will never be allowed to harm anyone ever again."

Catherine reached for Diana, and she sat on the bed this time beside Catherine. Catherine hugged her tightly as well. "Diana, how can I ever thank you for saving my husband and my baby?"

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Diana replied, "Believe me, Catherine, I have been rewarded many times over by the wonderful changes that have occurred in my life as a result of being associated with Father's world."

Catherine smiled at her. "I can clearly see why Joe loves you!"

Diana smiled back at her. "I love him very much too!"

Catherine looked up at Joe as she said, "He deserves the love of a really good woman, Diana."

Vincent spoke up and told Catherine, "Rescuing Little Jacob and me from Gabriel's mansion wasn't the first time Diana saved my life, Catherine. Gabriel tried to kill me twice before that. The second time, I ended up badly injured, and Diana found me on your grave. She took me to her home and nursed me for three days, and then she kept the secret of the tunnels and my existence at the peril of losing her job."

Catherine asked, "What is your job, Diana?"

Joe spoke up and answered Catherine. "Diana is a Unit 210 Special Crimes investigator with the police department. Her profiling skills were what saved Vincent and Little Jacob. I had assigned her to investigate your death, and I really gave her a tough time when she clammed up and withheld information from me, because she was trying to protect Vincent and Father's world. When she discovered the existence of Gabriel's older brother, Adrian, and found information about Vincent's people, the Tandins, she received permission from the

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Council to bring me into Father's world to help." Diana stood up and Joe tucked her back in his arm again.

Catherine then looked at Vincent. His account of Diana finding him on her grave caused another realization to come to her. "Vincent, you didn't know that I wasn't in my grave, either, did you?"

Vincent shook his head sadly. "No, Catherine, when you lost consciousness on the roof of the old Battery Arms building, I thought that you had died. I carried you back to your apartment, stayed with you the rest of the night, and then I called Dr. Marx to collect your body. My empathic connection to you was still broken, and I hadn't slept properly for months while I was trying to find you. My senses were so impaired that I didn't detect that your vital signs had only slowed down, not stopped."

Father then stepped forward, took Catherine's hand, and bent over and kissed her. "Catherine, David Marx did realize that you were alive, and he managed to hide that fact from everyone who had arrived to investigate your death. He sent word to me with Tony, and we then took you to the hospital wing of Peter's home." Peter came to Catherine and gave her an hug. Then Father continued. "Tony had stowed away in the coroner's van after reading David's note, and he insisted that he needed to help us with you. We didn't want Vincent finding out that you were actually alive until his empathic connection to you was repaired so that he found you on his own. We were afraid that if we told him you were alive when we found

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you, he would be so frantic to save you that it would slow down the repair of his connection with you. So, then Tony used a new code that Pascal worked out on the pipes to keep track of Vincent for us in the tunnels, so he wouldn't find out prematurely that you were alive."

Catherine looked all around for Tony. "Is Tony here too?"

Tony stepped forward from the back of the group and smiled at her, "Hey, Lady! I told you that I owed you, and that a Gypsy never forgets!"

Catherine giggled at him. "Come here, you Gypsy imp!" He walked to the bedside, and they hugged each other. She kissed him on the cheek. Then she caught sight of Pascal, and she shook her head. "How on earth did they convince you to leave your pipe-monitoring chamber, Pascal?"

Pascal chuckled as he hugged her, "Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss helping to wake you up for all of the pipes in all of the tunnels in the world!"

Catherine giggled, "But you miss them, don't you?" Pascal was still smiling as he nodded. Then, Catherine saw Rolley, and she smiled at him with pure joy. "Rolley, you decided to come home!"

Rolley smiled shyly as he received his warm hug from Catherine, "Yes, after you were taken, I got myself shot trying to rob a liquor store for drug money. Father and Vincent saved my life. Then, I got myself clean, and I stayed below."

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Vincent spoke up. "Rolley has been serenading you every night on the piano since you were taken to Peter's home."

Catherine smiled at Rolley. "Thank you, Rolley! I remember hearing your music in that terrible nightmare I was in. It helped me to keep hanging on in there. I am so glad that I am awake now to hear you play. Vincent had told me wonderful stories about your gift when you were brought into the tunnels as a child."

Vincent spoke again. "Rolley has a duet partner now. Uncle Tanimus' grandniece, Chrystal, is also a savant pianist."

Chrystal peeked out from behind Rolley, and Catherine giggled with delight at the tall Tandin girl. "Oh, Chrystal, you are so pretty! Come here and let me see you."

Chrystal approached the bed and sat down beside Catherine. Catherine hugged her and asked, "How old are you, Chrystal?"

Chrystal smiled at her. "I'm twelve, Catherine."

Catherine was surprised. "My goodness, you are tall for your age! So, you are enjoying playing duets with Rolley?"

Chrystal lit up with pleasure. "Oh, he is so very good on the piano. It is a lot of fun to play duets with him. I love it!"

After Chrystal went back to Rolley, Catherine saw Isaac, and she shook her head and laughed as Isaac came to her and hugged her. "Things sure have changed a lot

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since I've been asleep! How did you end up in the tunnels, Isaac?"

Isaac laughed and said, "Well, Father and Diana came to me to hire me as a bodyguard for you after Diana discovered that Gabriel had an older brother. I was overjoyed to find out that they didn't need for me to stake out the graveyard and nab grave robbers!" Everyone laughed with him, and he went on. "I can't tell you how much joy it gave me to know that you weren't in your grave!" Catherine laughed as Isaac made room for the others to get to Catherine.

When Catherine saw Devin with his arms wrapped around Elisia, she lit up. "Well, Devin, I see you finally found what you were wandering all around the world looking for!"

Devin laughed as he released Elisia and came to Catherine to hug her. "Yep, I just had to come home to find her!"

Then Catherine looked at Charles with surprised joy. "Charles, is that really you?" Charles grinned and nodded as she exclaimed, "Tell me how!"

Charles came and hugged Catherine very gently, and then he said, "Dev found a research hospital in Sweden where they were doing experimental surgeries on people with neurofibromatosis. They fixed me!"

Catherine held Charles' hand as she said, "They certainly did! You are such a handsome man, Charles. Lots of women are going to be fighting over you!" Charles

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chuckled with pleasure at the compliment.

Mary, Susan, Laura, Jerry, Mouse, Brooke, Rebecca, and Sarah all took turns getting hugs from Catherine as Vincent explained all of the things each of them had done to help take care of her and Little Jacob as well as distract Vincent in the tunnels, while his empathic connection with Catherine was healing.

The last of Father's people to come and hug Catherine was Jamie. As she left the shadow of a giant Tandin man, Catherine noticed that his eyes followed Jamie with unabashed adoration, and she smiled. When Catherine hugged Jamie, she asked her, "Who is your very large bodyguard, Jamie?"

Jamie looked back at Dresden and giggled, "Who? You mean that big teasing Brute over there?" Dresden's eyes twinkled at the genuine affection in Jamie's voice. Jamie motioned for him to come to her, and she introduced him to Catherine. "Catherine, this is Vincent's and Elisia's cousin, Dresden, Tanimus' son."

Dresden bent over and kissed Catherine on the cheek, and she giggled as she put Jamie's little hand into his enormous one. "Here, big guy, you can have her back now!"

Dresden chuckled, bowed, and said, "Thank you, Catherine; this little Princess is just what I have always wanted!" Jamie shook her head and giggled as she let Dresden lead her away from the bed.

Tanimus then introduced Catherine to the rest of

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Vincent's biological family who had helped to wake her up. "Catherine, this is Chrystal's father, my nephew, Tucker." Tucker hugged a still smiling Catherine. "This is my sister, Marina, and her husband, Michael, who are Tucker's parents and Chrystal's grandparents." They, too, embraced Catherine.

When Tanimus brought Letha to Catherine, she sat on the edge of the bed with Catherine and hugged her tightly. Tanimus said, "This is my wife, Letha. She is the identical twin sister of Vincent's and Elisia's mother, Loren."

Catherine had tears running down her cheeks again as she said, "You are beautiful, Aunt Letha! It must have been hard for you to lose your twin to such violence from the world above."

Letha answered her. "It was then, but I am ecstatically happy now to see Vincent so happy, loved, and well. You have helped to keep him safe, and I adore you for what you have done for him!"

Catherine smiled happily. "Vincent has done far more for me! Words alone can't express what he means to me and how much I love him."

Then Letha introduced Catherine to Vincent's four grandparents, her parents, Porter and Doreen, and Tanimus' parents, Vernal and Kaitlin, and she was overjoyed to get hugs from them. Last of all, she met and hugged Tanimus' and Letha's son-in-law, Nolan.

After meeting everyone, while they were still waiting for Nina to arrive with Little Jacob, Catherine looked around

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with curiosity at the chamber they were in. She exclaimed, "This is such a lovely and relaxing chamber! It smells so wonderful in here. What is that scent?"

Elisia answered her. "That is an aromatherapy blend we use specifically for the healing ceremonies. It is a combination of vanilla and lavender."

Then Catherine asked about the ceremony. "So, all of you helped me to wake up?"

Vincent explained, "Yes, they formed a circle in the outer corridor of this room, and then my people used their telepathic abilities to link everyone's minds, so that their combined mental powers, together with their faith and love, would support me as I went into your mind to wake you up. It was an amazing experience!"

Peter then added, "Catherine, Tanimus told us when he and Elisia came to your room at my home, that the procedure couldn't be adequately explained. He said that we would have to experience it before we could really understand it. He was right! Words just can't properly describe what we felt. It was like a warm blanket of healing love enveloping us. It was too wonderful for words! I don't think there was any doubt in anyone's mind, once we were all linked, that Vincent would be able to wake you up. Our faith received a powerful boost with that link. With our combined minds, we were even able to repair the damage to Vincent's heart when he had his heart attack."

Catherine smiled, "Well, I am really grateful to all of

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you for saving Vincent and helping him to get me out of that terrible nightmare!"

Catherine's face suddenly lit up with pure joy as she looked toward the door, and everyone turned around to see what she was looking at. Nina had just walked in with Donner strapped to her in a baby pack and Little Jacob in his stroller. Nolan went quickly to his wife and took Donner out of the baby pack, and Nina took the pack off. Then, Nina bent over to get Little Jacob out of his stroller.

Vincent climbed off the bed and walked around it to go and get Little Jacob from Nina. He was halfway to Nina when he heard everyone gasp, and a couple of them cry out, "Catherine!" Vincent whirled around to see that Catherine had climbed off the bed, and her legs were crumpling under her. Everyone rushed toward her, but Vincent got there first. He caught her before she hit the floor, and he swept her up into his arms.

Vincent lay Catherine gently back on the bed, and she looked at her legs in consternation as she exclaimed, "Those aren't my legs! They won't do what I want them to!"

Vincent couldn't help but smile, but then he said in a soothing tone, "Don't worry Catherine, I'll help you teach them to behave again. Just be patient. Remember, you haven't had any physical activity for months now."

Catherine totally forgot about her weakened legs when Nina brought Little Jacob to her and placed him on her lap in her arms. Tears of joy streamed down Catherine's

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cheeks, and that started everyone crying with joy over the poignant scene. This was the first time Catherine had ever held her baby, and she just gazed in silent wonder into his smiling alert little face. She finally whispered, “Oh, Vincent, he is so beautiful, isn’t he?”

Vincent had climbed back on the bed with Catherine, and he had his arms wrapped around both of them as he enjoyed Catherine’s peaceful look of motherly love for her infant. “Yes, Catherine, he is truly a beautiful baby boy!”

Catherine looked up at Nina with an expression of profound gratitude, and Nina bent over and kissed Catherine’s cheek. Vincent introduced her. “Catherine, this is my cousin, Tanimus’ daughter, Nina. She took care of Little Jacob for us while we were all here waking you up.”

Catherine said softly, “Thank you so much, Nina!”

Nina replied, “It was my pleasure, Catherine. Little Jacob is a joy to care for!” Catherine looked back into Little Jacob’s eyes with the adoring gaze every child wants to see on a mother’s face.

At that point, everyone quietly slipped out of the chamber to give the happy little family some privacy. Little Jacob started to fuss, and then he nuzzled Catherine’s breast through her nightgown. Catherine looked at Vincent with worry and asked, “Does he need a bottle?”

Vincent chuckled softly. “No, Catherine, he just needs you!”

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Catherine looked confused. "He does?"

Vincent explained to her, "Even though you have been asleep, you have been nursing Little Jacob. He still gets all of his nourishment from you."

Catherine was overjoyed. "Oh, Vincent, how wonderful, but I don't know how to nurse him."

Vincent smiled at her. "I'll teach you."

Catherine giggled at him. "You will?"

Vincent chuckled. "Yes, I had read about breastfeeding when Father was teaching our health courses while I was growing up. Then, when I found you at Peter's home, Mary taught me the correct technique, so I could help you to nurse Little Jacob until you awakened."

Catherine smiled happily. "Teach me, Vincent!"

Vincent unbuttoned Catherine's nightgown and gently supported one of her breasts with his hand. Then, he showed Catherine the right technique for helping Little Jacob to latch on and begin suckling. When Little Jacob was properly attached to her breast and hungrily nursing, Catherine was elated by the experience, and she giggled softly. Vincent kept his strong arm under her weakened arm to help her support Little Jacob as he nursed. She settled comfortably in Vincent's arms and watched Little Jacob nurse with such a look of joyous satisfaction that it brought tears to Vincent's eyes.

When Little Jacob decided that the first breast was empty, he popped off and looked up at his mother with a

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smile. Catherine giggled, and Vincent said, “Now, he needs to be burped before he nurses from your other breast.”

She kept looking into Little Jacob’s eyes as she said, “Show me how to burp him, Vincent.” Vincent lifted the baby up onto Catherine’s shoulder and showed her where to pat him on his back. She patted him a few times, but she couldn’t keep her arm up long enough to get a burp out of him.

Catherine gave Vincent a distressed look when she had to lay her arm down. He said softly, “Don’t worry Catherine.” Then he took over patting Little Jacob’s back on her shoulder until the baby bubbled up an huge burp that made Catherine giggle again. Vincent then helped Catherine switch Little Jacob to her other breast, and while he was happily emptying that one, Nina came back into the chamber.

Catherine was so focused on Little Jacob that she didn’t even notice Nina. Nina smiled at the pretty scene, and then she looked at Vincent. “I thought I would come back and take Little Jacob in his stroller for you when he is done nursing. That way, you can help Catherine to get back to Mom’s and Dad’s guest house chambers. We have moved a crib and a playpen with toys down there for Little Jacob.”

Vincent smiled at his cousin. “Thank you, Nina. That was very thoughtful of you. Those chambers will be lovely and comfortable for Catherine while she is recovering.”

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Nina smiled, "Everyone is thrilled that the two of you are now reunited and safe." Little Jacob popped off Catherine's breast, looked at Nina, and smiled. Nina asked Catherine, "Can you bear to part with him for a little while, so Vincent can help you get back to my parents' home, Catherine?"

Catherine giggled, "I think so, Nina, thank you." Nina picked up Little Jacob and burped him. Then she put him in the stroller and left the healing chamber with him.

Vincent got off the bed, went around to Catherine's side, and asked her, "Are you ready to go to Uncle Tanimus' and Aunt Letha's home, Catherine?"

Catherine lit up as she was buttoning her nightgown. "That sounds wonderful, Vincent!"

Vincent gently picked Catherine up, and then he kept a supporting arm around her waist as he set her feet on the floor of the chamber. "You are going to love the chambers that Uncle Tanimus and Aunt Letha gave us! They are very beautiful and comfortable. It is the perfect place for you to recover in."

Vincent kept most of Catherine's weight on his right arm, and held her left hand in his left hand, as she tried to walk with him. She managed to walk with his support to the doorway, but then she was exhausted. Catherine was discouraged. "Oh, Vincent, I'm so sorry! I'm totally useless!"

Vincent swept her up into his arms and began

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carrying her back to Tanimus' and Letha's home chambers. He shook his head. "Please don't fret, Catherine. You will regain your strength. It will just take a little time. Besides, I love having you in my arms!" Catherine giggled happily. Vincent continued, "The chambers that Uncle Tanimus and Aunt Letha gave us have a spa-pool in them. You will be able to practice walking in it, where the water will help to support your weight."

Catherine smiled at him. "That sounds delightful." Then, she noticed all of the lovely artwork in the corridors Vincent was carrying her through. "Oh, Vincent, there are some magnificent pieces of art here! These corridors are absolutely beautiful."

Vincent told her, "All of the artwork in these tunnels has been created here. It is the work of both human and Tandin community members, and some of the pieces have even been crafted by the children."

Catherine was amazed. "How long have the Tandins occupied these tunnels? Accumulating all of these treasures took some time."

Vincent answered her. "The Tandins were brought here by human friends from Romania two-hundred years ago. Adrian's and Gabriel's adoptive father was a Romanian geneticist who was working with and studying my people. His ancestors were among the human friends who smuggled them aboard ships and brought them here to these tunnels where they would be safer. His name was

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Dr. Dominik Vlas, and he was completely devastated by what his sons did to my people. When Gabriel was fifteen, he killed Dr. Vlas while he slept by strangling him. Dr. Vlas had rescued the boys from their abusive father in Romania on one of his trips there to visit relatives. They just never did overcome their terrible upbringing, and it broke Dr. Vlas' heart when they caused such tragedy among my people."

Catherine looked at Vincent. "Didn't Uncle Tanimus say that they now have Adrian in custody?" Vincent nodded, and she asked, "What are they going to do with him?"

Vincent looked at her and smiled. "Would you believe that they are actually going to try to help him? Even if they can't help him, they will take care of him and his mercenary army for the rest of their lives. Uncle Tanimus says that the Tandins have had considerable success rehabilitating hardened criminals they have had to incarcerate here over the years. Many of them are now productive members of their community. With the Tandins' mental abilities, it is impossible for the prisoners to deceive them, and he says that they have never lost a prisoner yet."

Catherine said softly, "Your people are truly remarkable, Vincent. They are certainly more generous, forgiving, and compassionate than the world above has ever learned to be."

Catherine suddenly noticed her beautifully manicured

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and perfectly shaped fingernails. “Whom do I thank for this fine manicure, Vincent? Someone took a lot of time and care working on my nails!”

Vincent chuckled with pleasure that she had noticed. “That would be yours truly, my sweet Catherine.”

Catherine looked at him in amazement and giggled. “Who taught you how to do a professional manicure, Vincent?”

Vincent smiled at her. “You’ll have to thank Diana for those lessons. She was very patient with me, and I had a lot of fun learning all about the fine points of feminine grooming. I’m really happy that you are pleased with the results, Catherine.”

Catherine smiled softly at him. “I have been so much trouble while I have been asleep, haven’t I?”

There were pretty wooden chairs by a few of the tables displaying artwork throughout the corridors, and Vincent sat down on the nearest one with Catherine on his lap. He put an hand under Catherine’s chin and tipped her face up, so he could look deeply into her eyes. He said firmly, “Catherine, you were never any trouble to care for! It gave me tremendous pleasure to personally handle every aspect of your care! When I thought that I had lost you and would never see you again until I died too, I was in complete despair. I thought the grief would surely crush me. Finding you alive was the happiest day of my life until now! I wouldn’t even let anyone else take care of you after that, and they all wanted to. I just couldn’t help

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being selfish and wanting to experience the joy of taking care of you myself alone. I had been without you for so long. I love you with all of my heart and with all that I am, Catherine.”

Catherine had happy tears streaming down her cheeks, and Vincent started kissing them away. She put her hands on either side of Vincent's face and kissed him passionately. Then Catherine snuggled against Vincent's chest and said softly, “Vincent, I love you so deeply! I have never been happier in my life! This all seems like a dream.”

Vincent chuckled and said, “Catherine, my Love, this is far better than any dream! I just wish that I could take you to some exotic vacation spot in the world above for a real honeymoon after you have recovered.”

Catherine smiled softly at Vincent as she replied. “Vincent, this world that the Tandins have created is far more exotic than any place the world above has to offer. Being with you and our baby together in Tanimus' and Letha's beautiful chambers is a far better honeymoon than I could ever have imagined. We are always redefining terms to suit our special relationship, Vincent, and I am blissfully happy.” Vincent smiled and hugged her tightly.

When Vincent and Catherine finally arrived back in their guest chambers, Little Jacob had just fallen asleep in his crib, and Nina was rocking Donner in the rocking chair that had been moved down there too. Catherine's

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eyes twinkled at the sight of Donner. She exclaimed, "Oh, Nina, your baby is adorable! I didn't get a good look at him when you came to the healing chamber. What is his name?"

Nina brought Donner over to her, and Catherine stroked his cheek as he smiled at her. "This is Donner, Catherine."

Catherine asked, "May I hold him?"

Nina smiled at her, "Of course!"

Vincent carried Catherine over to the big easy chair and carefully set her on it. Then Nina put Donner onto her lap, and she knelt on the floor beside Catherine to help her hold him. Catherine was fascinated by the blond baby Tandin with his crystal-blue eyes, and he giggled happily at her. Catherine said softly, "He looks just like you, Nina!"

While Catherine and Nina were talking to Donner and to each other, Vincent went into the kitchen to see what was available to feed Catherine. He found the dishes all washed and put away, the refrigerator completely stuffed with food, and the cabinets plentifully stocked. A trip into the bathroom revealed piles of fresh towels and washcloths, and their clothes had all been washed and were folded on the bed for him to put away. There were also fresh new roses in the vase in the bedroom.

Vincent approached the easy chair and spoke to Nina. "Someone has been busy taking care of us!"

Nina giggled at him. "We had more volunteers from

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the community than we had jobs for them to do! They are all thrilled to see this story have an happy ending. We weren't sure when you would come up for air, so everyone went a little overboard stocking everything for you. All you need to do is ask if you need for me to come and take Little Jacob for awhile. Oh, and before I forget, Dr. Bentley wanted me to tell you that the final body scans that she recorded just before you left the healing chamber showed both of you to be in excellent health, except for Catherine's compromised muscle tone, and that will improve with exercise now that she is awake."

Vincent smiled with relief. "Please tell her 'thank you' for us, Nina."

Nina got up, and Vincent lifted Donner off Catherine's lap after she kissed him good-bye. Nina said, "I'll tell her, Vincent. Now, I'm going home and leave you two love-birds alone!"

Vincent and Catherine said "good-bye" to Nina, and Vincent accompanied her out to the elevator and put Donner in her arms. When Nina left, Vincent locked the elevator doors, turned off the overhead light, and then went back into the bedroom. Catherine was no longer on the easy chair, and the bathroom door was shut. He went to it and tapped on it. "Catherine, do you need any help in there?"

Catherine giggled but declined. "No, Vincent, but thank you for asking. I believe it is about time I tried doing a few things on my own, don't you think?"

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Vincent chuckled and replied, “As you wish! Just know that I will come running if you get into trouble in there.”

Catherine laughed at him. “If I fall into the toilet, I promise I won’t flush!”

Vincent laughed too. “What a smart little wife I have!” Then, he went into the kitchen and prepared a meal for them.

While Vincent and Catherine were eating the meal he had prepared in the kitchen, they heard *Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata* being piped over the intercom. Catherine smiled happily. “Oh, Vincent, that sounds heavenly! That must be Rolley and Chrystal playing the beautiful grand piano I saw in Uncle Tanimus’ and Aunt Letha’s living room. The music is spectacular with four hands, isn’t it?”

Vincent nodded and replied. “Yes, it is inspiring. You should have seen how overjoyed Chrystal was when we arrived with Rolley. Uncle Tanimus told us that she had been playing by ear from the time she could pull herself up to the keyboard, and she was reading and playing pieces even their best musicians couldn’t master by the time she was six. When the Tandins told her about Rolley’s gift and that he was coming, she could hardly wait to meet him and have him play duets with her.”

Catherine smiled and said, “Chrystal is such a pretty sweetheart! I’m so happy for both her and Rolley. They were each alone with their gifts before now. I could see

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that they have really bonded with a very special friendship for one another.”

Vincent nodded and smiled as he took their dishes to the sink, filled the dishwasher, and started it. When he turned back around, Catherine was watching him with an adoring smile. Vincent walked over and knelt down beside her chair, and she stroked his mane. Vincent asked softly, “What would you like to do now, Catherine?”

Catherine’s eyes widened and her breath caught. Vincent felt her intense desire for him, and it nearly overwhelmed him as his own heated desire for her washed over him. He tried to stay calm as she answered his question. “Vincent, all I want is you! I want to make love with you now, please!”

Vincent spoke in a whisper. “Catherine, your body is very fragile right now. It would destroy me if I hurt you!”

Catherine could see how concerned Vincent was, but she could also see that he wanted her as desperately as she wanted him, and she was determined to figure out a way to make love that wouldn’t worry him. Then she smiled at him and said, “Vincent, take me to the pool. We can make love in the pool, and I promise it won’t hurt me!”

Vincent looked dubious. “Are you sure, Catherine?”

Catherine’s voice was full of emotion as she answered. “Oh, I’m very sure, Vincent. I want you, and I need you desperately!”

When Vincent stood up and picked Catherine up, his body was tingling in response to her arousal. It had been

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warm and thrilling to hold and carry his sleeping Catherine after he found her alive. Now, carrying his fully restored and wide awake Catherine, trembling with desire to make love with him, was wildly exciting. Something between a growl and a purr began rumbling deep in his throat, and Catherine giggled softly with joy that Vincent was equally aroused by her. She began passionately kissing his neck as he carried her to the pool, and when she paused and looked up into his eyes, he bent his head down and captured her lovely lips with a burning kiss that left her completely breathless.

Vincent set Catherine down on the chaise lounge by the pool and quickly stripped his clothes off, enjoying her caressing gaze as she watched him, while she was unbuttoning her nightgown. Then, he kneeled in front of her, removed her crystal necklace and put it on the table, and then lifted her nightgown off over her head. He stood up and picked her up again, and she clung tightly to him as he walked down the stone steps into the pool.

When Catherine felt the warm water swirling over both of them, her look of delight warmed Vincent's heart. She giggled and said, "Oh, Vincent, this feels so good! The water is the perfect temperature."

Vincent said softly, "I knew that you would enjoy this. Uncle Tanimus and Aunt Letha were really thoughtful to provide us with these chambers while you heal. This pool should help us to strengthen your muscles."

Catherine's small soft hands were all over Vincent's

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body as he gently set her on her feet in the pool. They looked deeply into each other's eyes as Vincent stood perfectly still and let Catherine stroke him as he caressed her. He bent down, and his mouth covered her pretty lips as he lifted her in his arms, and she wrapped herself around his body. Enveloping Catherine with his supporting arms and caressing hands in blissful union with her, Vincent made a telepathic connection with Catherine while he was kissing her.

Vincent spoke with a loving tone nonverbally to Catherine. "My sweet Catherine, are you sure I'm not hurting you?"

When their lips parted, as they continued to caress one another while making slow tender love, Catherine answered fervently, "Oh, Vincent, my Love, this is pure pleasure! I love you! Your mind is so wonderfully powerful now!"

Vincent responded passionately. "Love for you has made it so, Catherine."

Catherine spoke with a tone of wonder. "We truly are one with each other, both body and mind! Speak to me that way again, Vincent! I feel like you are part of me when you do."

As he captured her lips again with another breathtaking kiss, Vincent spoke telepathically to Catherine. "I was not complete until I found you. Thank you for loving me, Catherine, and for giving me such a beautiful son! You are my world, and I love you more than

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words alone can express!”

Over the next week, Vincent and Catherine spent a lot of time in the pool in between taking care of their beloved Little Jacob. Once again, their lives became like a joyful dream. With her physical therapy sessions in the pool with Vincent, Catherine’s muscles gradually became stronger. This long-awaited “honeymoon” was more wonderful than either of them had ever imagined would be possible. It made the many months of separation, anguish, violence, and grief slip away until they were all but forgotten.

Meanwhile, the other members of Father’s world were having a marvelous time. Father and Peter were learning new medical procedures in the Tandin hospital. Mary, Susan, and Sarah were helping in the clinic and learning new nursing techniques. Brooke was camped out in the baby nursery of the Tandin hospital, and the nurses there loved her attentive care of the newborns.

Everyone was keeping a discreet eye on Narcissa. The Tandins were aware of Narcissa’s solitary nature, so they didn’t interfere with or pester her as she happily wandered around their world exploring. Elisia was aware of Narcissa’s whereabouts as she kept tabs on her empathically, and she reminded Narcissa that she was available telepathically if she ran into trouble and needed help. Narcissa was accustomed to wandering around

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strange places alone, and she had an excellent sense of direction, so she always ended up safely back at Tanimus' and Letha's home in the evenings without mishap.

Elisia was having a wonderful time with Laura. Since Laura had been deaf all of her life, she thought in sign language and pictures. Laura was a very apt pupil, though, as she began learning to use words in her telepathic communication with Elisia.

The communications engineers in the Tandin world were fascinated by Pascal's pipe system of communication in Father's world, so Pascal was joyfully occupied teaching them the code. Tony had suddenly found himself in great demand among both the human and the Tandin youths here. They were all curious about the life of a Gypsy, and they loved the stories he told them about his family and all of the places he had lived. Isaac found himself consulting in a self-defense class for human members of the Tandin community who worked in the world above. Charles was thoroughly enjoying an art class taught by a very tall and pretty Tandin woman who showed an obvious interest in him. Rebecca was learning how to make and use bee's wax ear candles, which she was told was a painless natural method for removing ear wax. Joe, Diana, Devin, and Jerry were learning how to use the Tandins' non-lethal ion-tet stunner. Mouse was in his glory wandering around everywhere studying all of the technological wonders of the Tandin world.

Then, there was the sweet romance developing

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between Jamie and Dresden. Dresden had been taking Jamie every day to remote caverns in their world, where she could safely teach him how to string and fire a traditional bow and then help him practice with both a bow and a crossbow and arrows. He loved the feel of her tiny hands as she gently guided his arms to the correct positions and helped him to improve his firing technique.

A week after waking Catherine up, Jamie had left Marina's and Michael's home quite early, and she was wandering around the Tandin world exploring on her own. When she arrived just outside of the orchard chamber, youngsters were leaving it carrying bows and quivers of arrows. She heard one of them say, "Today's class was really fun!"

Another one laughed and said, "What do you mean? It's always fun!"

Jamie was curious about who was teaching this archery class, so she entered the orchard to see. She walked several yards into the cavern, and then she stopped and stared. Dresden had a traditional bow and quiver of arrows slung over his left shoulder, and he was holding a double-loaded crossbow in his right hand. His back was to Jamie, and she watched open-mouthed as he fired the first arrow from the crossbow at an apple on one of the trees. It sliced through the stem of the apple so that it fell from the tree. Then, with lightning-fast aim, Dresden fired the second arrow so that it hit the apple

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squarely and sent it flying until it was skewered to the tree with the arrow through the middle of it. He dropped the crossbow, took the traditional bow off his shoulder, reached back for an arrow from his quiver, and loaded the bow. Then he fired it, splitting the arrow in the center of the apple. The apple then fell in two halves to the ground.

Dresden heard a feminine cry of dismay behind him, and he whirled around in alarm as he recognized Jamie's voice. Her painful look of shocked hurt sliced through his heart, and he whispered, "Oh, Jamie!" Jamie spun around and took off running, and he dropped his weapon and quiver and took off chasing her. He called after her, "Jamie, please stop!" On she ran with amazing speed for her petite size. Dresden thought to himself, "Oh, no, I am in so much trouble! I have got to fix this, or I am going to end up at the bottom of the nearest ravine with Mouse throwing rocks in after me to make sure I did the job properly!"

Dresden chased Jamie out of the orchard chamber and down the corridor. He finally caught up with her, wrapped his arm around her waist, and snatched her off her feet from behind. She screamed in fury and kicked and struggled like a little wild thing. Jamie pummeled Dresden's powerful arm and then tried prying unsuccessfully on his huge hand tearfully crying out, "Put me down, you big Brute!"

Dresden managed to keep a grip on Jamie as he gently set her on her feet and then turned her around to face

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him. Hot angry tears were running down her cheeks, and she began beating his chest with her tiny fists as she cried out, "You big monstrous Brute! You lied to me! You didn't need any teaching! You're a more advanced and skilled archer than I could ever be! You were just humoring me!" Then, she collapsed against him sobbing, and he enveloped her in his arms and stroked her hair.

He said in a soothing tone, "No, Jamie, I was just enjoying you! I am so sorry that I hurt you. I was afraid that if you knew how proficient I was with a bow, you would be self-conscious about showing me your very unusual style. Believe me; I have learned a lot from your lessons. It has improved my own technique, and I am using some of what you showed me in the archery classes I teach."

Jamie had finally calmed down, and now she looked up at him with wet cheeks. "You aren't just telling me that, so I'll stop beating you up?"

Dresden chuckled and picked her up in his arms. He went to the nearest chair in the corridor and sat down on it with her on his lap. He softly wiped the tears from her cheeks. "No, Jamie, I'm not just telling you that. It is the truth. Oh, and speaking of the truth, I didn't exactly lie to you. I simply told you that the stunner was my weapon of choice. You know, I promised Mouse that if I ever hurt you, I would leap off the nearest cliff."

Jamie raised her eyebrows and shook her head. "You did what?"

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Dresden chuckled again. "Mouse told me that if I ever hurt you, he was going to come after me."

Jamie giggled at him. "Mouse really said that?"

Dresden was still smiling. "He did, indeed, and I told him that he wouldn't have to, because I would be leaping off the nearest cliff if I ever hurt you. You want to come and watch?"

Jamie gave him an amused look and said, "You silly Brute! I really should, you know. I tell you what, though, I won't tell Mouse if you won't."

Dresden hugged Jamie and said, "Deal!"

By March 13th, eight days after waking up, Catherine was strong enough to take a tour of the Tandin world with the others. When they stopped to let her rest in the botanical garden chamber, she sat down by Diana on one of the benches, while Vincent was discussing some of the medicinal herbs growing in this chamber with Tanimus.

Catherine smiled at Diana and said, "Vincent tells me that I have you to thank that I'm not an hairy cave-woman with scary claws after all of that time asleep."

Diana giggled at her. "None of us would have allowed that to happen, Catherine, but Vincent did insist on taking care of your grooming needs himself. He was a very apt pupil and anxious to learn how to do it all perfectly for you. Vincent was completely fascinated by the whole process. He told me that you had always taken the time to look and smell the way you did, and that it was

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a small thing for him to take care of that for you while you couldn't."

Catherine smiled softly. "Vincent went to a lot of trouble to take care of me."

Catherine then appeared puzzled as she looked at Diana's short-cut practical nails, and Diana laughed. "You're wondering how a gun-toting-crime-fighting-tomboy like me could teach Vincent how to do a professional manicure." Catherine giggled, and Diana explained. "I had no interest in girly stuff like that as I was growing up, but my sister did. She insisted on teaching me how to do manicures, so I could do her nails for her. I actually found it fun, and I became so good at it that all of my sister's friends had me doing their nails for them too. It was about the only activity that my sister and I enjoyed doing together, because our interests were so different, but it was enough to keep us close."

Catherine smiled and said, "That is a really happy memory to have. Vincent says that you also had a list of my scented toiletries from when you were profiling me and that Susan did the shopping to find them. Thank you so much!"

Diana replied, "You are most welcome. It was really fun teaching him what to do with all of it. Did Vincent tell you why that scent of honeysuckle and roses was so important to him?"

Catherine was curious. "No, tell me, Diana. We've talked about so many things since I woke up, but that

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subject hasn't come up yet."

Diana told her the story. "When Vincent was a baby, before he was lost to the Tandins, his mother, Loren, used to take him into the solarium in the home of his grandparents, Porter and Doreen. His favorite flowers there were a pink rosebush with blooming honeysuckle vines growing up through the center of it. He loved that combined scent of roses and honeysuckle, and she took him there every day while they were blooming together. Vincent told us that your scent of roses and honeysuckle was what drew him out of the tunnel the night that he found you. He couldn't remember then why that scent seemed so familiar. He said it was an happy memory at the edge of his mind that he couldn't quite reach, but it helped him to find you!"

Catherine shook her head as she explained. "My mother always wore that scent before she died. That was why I never wore anything else. It made me feel closer to her. That explains the vase of pink, red, and white roses everyone keeps making sure we have fresh cuttings of. I understood the red and white ones because of my rosebush, but I didn't understand the significance of the pink ones until now."

Catherine smiled as she watched Father with his arm around Mary as they walked by them. They were completely oblivious to anyone but each other. Catherine commented to Diana, "Vincent told me about the new romance between Father and Mary and how many years

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Mary had waited for that to happen. They sure do look happy together now, don't they?"

Diana nodded as she watched the couple too. "Everyone is blissfully happy for them. Both Father's world and the Tandin world sure do encourage love to flourish and grow."

When the group left the botanical chamber, they were taken to an enormous engineering chamber. This cavern was brightly lit with full-spectrum lights, and there were large work tables, computers, lab equipment, and numerous other both familiar and strange machines and inventions all over the place. Many people, both humans and Tandins, were in this chamber working on various projects.

Mouse noticed a lovely young human woman with fair skin, full red lips, waist-length black hair, and pretty green eyes working on a project by herself at one of the large tables. She took no notice of the group, but Mouse was fascinated by what she was working on. He walked over to investigate. She was staring at a small-scale replica of a waterfall she had created inside a glass-sided aquarium. There was a small brightly lit lamp with a swivel neck inside the aquarium, and it was pointed toward the waterfall. She appeared to be puzzled by some kind of a problem with her creation. Mouse studied the aquarium, and neither one of them spoke to each other. Then, Mouse stepped closer, reached in and adjusted the

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lamp, and a beautiful rainbow with the full range of pretty colors sprang up.

She looked up into his eyes, smiled, and said, "Yes!"

Everyone working in the chamber gasped when she spoke, and they all left their work to go to the young woman. Father's group, with Tanimus and Elisia, had been watching as Mouse helped her. Now, Elisia spoke to Vincent in a shocked tone. "Will you look at that!"

Vincent replied, "Yes, it looks like Mouse has made a friend!"

The entire group listened with curiosity as Elisia explained. "It is far more miraculous than that! Perrine is an autistic savant that we found wandering in the tunnels lost when she was only about seven years old. Because of her condition, she was completely unaware that she was in any danger. We have never had any autistic children in our world, so her condition was beyond our experience. Our humans made extensive inquiries above, but Perrine was never reported missing, so we had no way to find her family. She has never spoken to nor made eye contact with any of us for the past twelve years we have had her, and she has never shown any kind of emotion. We studied every technique for working with autistic children we could find in the world above without any success with her. We could feel empathically that she was happy, even though she never displayed any emotion, so we just let her develop her talents as she wished.

"She is a genius with anything mechanical, and she is

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very happy to just create and invent. Up to now, she has just foraged for the parts she needs, never saying a word to or looking at anyone. She never takes anything, though, unless it is given to her. We have all become accustomed to having her come around and stand in front of and look at something she wants until we hand it to her, and then she takes it and goes away, silently and without expression, back to her project. We all have appliances and wonderful inventions in our homes which she has created for us. We find them on the floor at the entrances to our homes. Perrine has an uncanny ability to perceive what would be useful to or enjoyed by each of us.”

Father chuckled as he commented. “Mouse could learn a thing or two from Perrine about taking things!”

Elisia smiled and added, “Mouse has done what we thought would be impossible for Perrine. He has made a connection with her. Look at them!”

Mouse came over to the group very excited. “She likes me, Vincent! So pretty, like Snow White, isn’t she?”

Vincent chuckled at Mouse’s enamored look. “You do seem to have made quite an impression on Perrine, Mouse. Look behind you!”

Perrine was standing directly behind Mouse, and he turned around and looked at her. She was standing there staring at his hand. Elisia told him, “Mouse, Perrine wants your hand, and she won’t take it unless you give it to her.”

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Mouse's face lit up with delight, and he extended both hands to her. "OK Good! OK Fine! Take my hand. Have both!"

Perrine actually laughed, looked directly into Mouse's eyes, and said, "Just need one! Come!" She pulled him by the hand, smiling ear-to-ear, back to her project. She took one end of it, and Mouse took the other end, and they left the chamber together. By this time, the whole community had come over to see this miraculous event, and they all stared in disbelief as the couple left the chamber with Perrine's rainbow-maker.

Catherine giggled as she leaned heavily on Vincent's arm. He could see that she was fatigued, and he picked her up in his arms. She said, "I wonder where they are going with that."

Elisia offered a guess. "One of our teachers has been explaining how rainbows are formed to her class of small children. I imagine that Perrine created that as a visual aid for the class. I'm sure that teacher will find it in her classroom tomorrow."

Tanimus chuckled and said to Father, "I do believe one of us has lost an engineer, and I'm quite sure it will be Perrine deciding which world gets the two of them!"

Father's people decided to leave the next day, on March 14th when Diana suggested that if they left then, and it took them four days to return to Father's world, they would have a couple of days to rest before celebrating

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a very belated Winter-Fest on March 20th, the last day of winter. The Tandins relayed the message telepathically to the Tandins in Father's world, so William could begin preparing for the celebration. Rebecca had already made the candles for this year's Winter-Fest many months earlier, because she had hoped that they would eventually be able to celebrate the holiday. So, Angela started sending the children above with the pretty white-tipped yellow-orange tapered candles to give to their Helpers in anticipation of the holiday when Father returned with the rest of their community members.

Just before they all started out the next day on their journey back to Father's world, the Tandin doctor and midwife caring for Father's community relayed the telepathic message that the young couple, Quincy and Tanya, had just been blessed with an healthy baby girl. Father said happily, "Well, we need to plan for a Baby Naming Ceremony next month!"

Brooke grabbed Jamie's arm as they started on their journey back and asked her, "Isn't Dresden going to travel back with us? I was beginning to think that he would never let you out of his sight!"

Jamie giggled at her and shook her head. "He told me that he has an obligation that he can't get out of here. The big Brute will probably turn up when I least expect him to in our world."

Brooke smiled and said, "I doubt that he will hang

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around here for very long. He is head-over-heals in love with you and making absolutely no effort to conceal it!" Jamie smiled and nodded.

To the delight of everyone, Perrine decided to accompany Mouse back to Father's world. They were ideally suited for one another, communicating more by actions than by looks or words, and both of them were comfortable with silence. Kanin had been sent word to start working on a chamber for Perrine, and Angela was preparing a temporary satellite chamber for her. Tanimus, Letha, and Elisia were making the trip back with them, so that they could begin tutoring Vincent to help him further develop his mental abilities in Father's world.

Chrystal was also coming with the group, so she and Rolley could play duets on the grand piano for Winter-Fest. After Winter-Fest, the Tandins that had been babysitting Father's world were going to accompany Rolley and Chrystal back to the Tandin world, where Rolley was going to take over as Chrystal's piano teacher.

As they traveled back by the same route they had used to come to the Tandin world, they encountered both Tandins and humans working in the tunnels, expanding and improving the passageways. They had power-wagons loaded with equipment, materials, and tools to accomplish the improvements all along the way back. Lighting, bathrooms, and security monitors were being installed between the two worlds. They were even attaching the plumbing pipes along the walls to extend Pascal's

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communication system between worlds. When they passed through the steam tunnels of Paracelsus' former domain and the site of their frightening battle, they found Tandin workers sealing off unsafe tunnels and accessways.

Along the way, Tanimus spoke to Father. "Father, what would you think about a student exchange program between our two worlds?"

Father looked at him with enthusiastic curiosity. "Why, Tanimus, I think that is a perfectly marvelous idea! Our children could learn a lot from your people that we cannot teach them with the resources we have at this time. I'm not sure what any of your children would get out of such an exchange, though."

Tanimus then told Father, "Actually, Father, our youth would benefit greatly from experiencing a simpler life and learning new skills in your world that would help them to be less reliant on technology. It would add breadth to their education and help them develop in ways we aren't equipped to accomplish in our advanced world."

When the group finally arrived at the edge of Father's world, the entire community was lined up along the corridors waiting for them. Elisia and Tanimus had been relaying their position as they traveled, to the Tandins in Father's world, as the anxious community awaited their arrival. Now, they were very excited and happy as they hugged and kissed everyone returning. Vincent was

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carrying Catherine as they came through the crowded tunnels, and everyone was completely overcome with tears of happiness to see her awake and restored to Vincent. The children were all clamoring to hug Catherine, so Vincent had to find the nearest boulder to sit on, so they could touch her. Catherine had tears of joy streaming down her cheeks at this heartwarming reception.

Angela swept Little Jacob away for a bath, and other community members took everyone's backpacks for them, so they could wash their clothes. William took them all into the kitchen for the meal he had prepared including a belated birthday cake for Jamie. Then, they were all sent off to baths and to bed.

Finally, the morning of March 20th arrived, and the entire community was in an happy festive mood. The Helpers from above had all been led down into the tunnels, carrying their Winter-Fest candles, and Father, Mary, Vincent, and Catherine were at the head of the procession as they went through the tunnels and down the stone staircase leading into the lower regions of their world to the Great Hall. Vincent lifted the heavy wooden beam from the huge double doors and opened them wide. Father lit his candle from the wall torch outside the doors, and then he took Mary's hand, and Vincent took Catherine's hand, and they led everyone into the Great Hall and down the staircase into the huge cavern. William had set the long tables for the feast they would have, and

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now everyone found places to sit, so the ceremony could begin. The room was completely dark except for Father's single candle, and everyone looked expectantly at him after they were all seated.

Father spoke in a joyful tone. "We begin this year's Winter-Fest celebration just as we have always done in darkness, the way these tunnels were once dark." Father lit Catherine's candle on his left, and then he lit Mary's candle on his right. They, in turn, lit the next candles of those beside them, and all of the candles were lit in turn as Father continued speaking. "Over the years, we have lit these tunnels with our love for each other as we have built this world with hard work and perseverance. Our Helpers have helped us to keep them lit by supporting us with both supplies and love. This year's Winter-Fest is very special. We have weathered yet another great storm." Father looked lovingly at Catherine and then at Vincent. "Those who were once lost to us in each world have now been found."

Father then looked around at each of the Tandins in attendance. "Our family has been extended, and our world has expanded to include wonders we never could have imagined before. Now, grief, despair, and terror have been replaced by light, love, family, and friends. This is a time to be thankful for our many blessings and to celebrate the rich life we have been afforded." By this time, even the great candle chandeliers had been lit, and the entire cavern was now brightly illuminated. Father

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looked at Kevin Chin. “Kevin, would you please offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all of us and ask for a blessing on the fine feast that William has prepared?”

Kevin Chin arose and said the prayer. Then, William stood up and said in his booming voice, “Well, what are all of you waiting for? Grab your plates and go dig in!” It was then joyous chaos as everyone picked up their plates and went to the buffet that William had set up against the wall for them.

Even before they had finished eating, the games and socializing commenced. The grand piano had been moved from the concert chamber into the Great Hall, and Rolley and Chrystal began playing duets together to the delight of everyone.

Vincent and Catherine were at a small table with Diana and Joe, and Jamie had just joined them. Brooke had stolen Little Jacob after he nursed, and she and Tony were talking to a group of the children who wanted to hear stories about what they had seen in the Tandin world.

Father took Mary up to the landing on the stairs, and then he shouted to get everyone's attention. They all stopped what they were doing and looked up at them. He said, “I want to announce some happy news! I have asked Mary to be my wife, and she has graciously said ‘yes!’ We are taking a page out of Vincent's and Catherine's wedding book, and we have decided that the past thirty-plus years counts as a more-than-long-enough engagement. We are, therefore, planning to be wed next Saturday morning.

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Now—”

Rebecca had been standing just below Father on the floor of the Great Hall. With her hands on her hips, she interrupted him by shouting, “Father!”

Father looked down at her and asked, “Yes, Rebecca?”

In a very determined and firm tone of voice Rebecca said, “If the next words out of your mouth include anything remotely similar to ‘simple’ or ‘no-fuss,’ I am going to throw a serious temper tantrum!” Father’s mouth snapped closed, and everyone laughed. Rebecca continued, “This wedding will be spectacular!” Everyone clapped with happiness, and Father led a smiling Mary down the stairs. Rolley and Chrystal began playing a waltz. Father handed his cane to one of the children and swept Mary across the floor to it.

Charles, Devin with Elisia, and Tanimus with Letha, were seated at the table next to the one with Vincent and Catherine. When Charles’ face lit up with surprised pleasure, they all turned to see what he was looking at. His very tall and pretty Tandin art teacher, Roselyn, was coming down the stairs. Charles jumped to his feet to go greet her, and when she caught sight of him, she rewarded him with a beautiful smile. Roselyn was fair-skinned with a light-brown hip-length mane and pretty dark-brown eyes. Tears sprang to Devin’s eyes to see his big friend, whose life had been miserable for such a long time, so happy now.

After Charles had taken Roselyn off the stairs, Dresden

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made his grand entrance. He charged down the steps to the landing of the stairway, and then he began calling out in a loud voice, "Jamie! Jamie! Show yourself to me!" Everyone stopped to watch his performance.

Vincent laughed and said to Jamie, "I think that's your Heathcliff calling for you. Didn't you tell me once that you were not going to send him packing?"

Jamie burst into laughter. "Don't tempt me! I guess I'm going to have to go do something about this."

Jamie then leaped up onto the table and called out, "I'm here, Dresden, and I'm coming!" She then began running and leaping across the tables like a graceful gazelle until she jumped down to the floor below the landing.

Dresden vaulted over the railing and landed right in front of her. He swept her up into his arms, and then he bellowed so everyone could hear him, "I love Jamie!" In a lower voice, as Dresden looked into Jamie's eyes, he asked, "Aren't you going to call me a Brute and demand that I put you down?"

Jamie settled comfortably in his arms and laughed, "Not this time, Heathcliff." Dresden cocked his head sideways, and raised his eyebrows as he looked at her. She shook her head. "Oh, just shut up and kiss me already, you big Brute!"

Dresden smiled at her. "That's my girl! I love it when you're bossy."

Dresden ran with Jamie still in his arms back up the

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stairs to the landing, where everyone could see. Then he dropped to one knee, with Jamie seated on his other upraised knee.

Catherine giggled as they watched from their table. “That looks familiar!”

Vincent laughed too. “It does, doesn’t it?”

Dresden pulled a necklace out of his pocket, and Jamie stared at it with pure delight. It was a white-gold four-leaf clover studded with heart-shaped emeralds forming a crown. The unique charm was on a delicate white-gold chain. Jamie exclaimed with little-girl joy, “Oh, Dresden, I’ve never seen anything so pretty in my life!”

Dresden put it around her neck and said, “I’m sorry that I couldn’t get it finished in time for your birthday, little Princess. You were still traveling then anyway, and this is a much more romantic setting.”

Jamie stared at him as she held the charm in her hand. “You made this for me, Dresden?”

Dresden chuckled at her astonishment. “I did, with Roselyn’s help. That was why we couldn’t travel with you and Charles. I wanted to get this finished for you in time for your Winter-Fest celebration. Now, did I hear something about a kiss?”

Jamie giggled at him. “Yes, I said kiss me, you big Brute!”

Then Dresden put a giant hand under her chin, tipped her head up—and kissed her on the forehead. Jamie gave him a look of pure exasperation. “You never stop, do you?”

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What are you, my brother? I love you too, Dresden! Now, pay attention! This is how you do it!" With that, she grabbed his face in both of her hands and kissed him passionately on the lips. Dresden's eyes closed in ecstasy as he pulled Jamie against him amidst cheering and clapping from everyone who had stopped to watch the couple. Dresden and Jamie were completely oblivious to it all, though.

At Vincent's table, Joe spoke up. "So, that's how you give a woman jewelry!" Joe shook his head. "I think I just might have to do some field research testing that method!" He looked at Diana who was giggling.

Brooke and Tony came to their table with Little Jacob, and when the baby saw Catherine, he reached for her with an happy smile and said, "Mama!"

All of them stared at him, and Catherine gathered him to her with tears of joy streaming down her cheeks. Little Jacob had said his first word, and Vincent was also tearful with happiness that the baby had chosen to honor his mother with that word. Catherine's look of motherly love and awe of her child moved him deeply. Vincent scooted his chair closer to Catherine's and wrapped his arms around his wife and baby.

Looking up and watching all of the joyous commotion going on as everyone continued to celebrate; Catherine smiled and said to Vincent as she laid her head on his chest and held Little Jacob against her breast, "Our world is such an happy place, Vincent, so full of love!" It made

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Vincent's heart swell with rapturous joy to hear Catherine say "our world" instead of "your world," and he squeezed his little family tighter.



And the story continues....

Happily Ever After

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