

This tale was inspired by a wonderful game at Winterfest Online. My thanks to everyone for your help and magnificent inspiration.

## **Love And A Rug**

By Nefereu

Vincent awoke at the gentle tug on his consciousness that drew him from his peaceful sleep. Reluctantly, he opened his eyes and was greeted by a truly wondrous vision that roused him instantly. Next to him, lying spoon fashion, Catherine was deeply asleep. Sometime during the night, the covers had fallen down leaving her shoulders and her breasts exposed to the night-chilled air of the tunnels. In the golden glow of the single candle above their bed, her honeyed hair and silken skin gleamed in an ethereal light. Just then, an almost imperceptible shiver ran through her and Vincent knew what had awakened him to this magnificent sight.

Tenderly, he turned her to him as he drew the covers up. Immediately, she snuggled against the soft warmth of his large chest, murmuring wordlessly in contentment as she slept on. Now fully awake, Vincent put his head back down with a happy sigh. This was his favorite time of the day, the sleepy in-between time when both his world and the one Above were still quiet and at peace. But it hadn't always been that way.

Until barely a month before, this time of the day had been almost an ordeal. He would awaken each morning before the rest of the world, his soul and spirit unable to be at peace any longer as he faced another lonely day. High Above him, the most precious part of his heart and soul would soon wake and pursue her day, separated from him. That torture had often sent him wandering in the early darkness, hoping for some brief moment of solace in his world or hers. But, that was no longer the case.

Vincent sat up a bit, careful not to wake Catherine as he lounged on the pillows. Lazily, he gazed around the chamber that had become the haven where Catherine and he passed most of their time. The two lovers now spent almost every night here in the bed he was slowly beginning to think of as theirs rather than his alone.

Invariably, his gaze fell upon the large, ostentatious rug that now occupied a place of honor atop his old trunk. Catherine had pronounced it the most beautiful gift she had ever received and now held it in very high esteem. Vincent smiled as it drew his thoughts back to the night that Fate had intervened and brought him his greatest happiness; and to think it all started with that rug.

For several months, Vincent and Catherine had been making a concerted effort to spend more time together. Catherine had cut back on her hours at the office and Vincent had arranged to be free several evenings a week. They alternated between spending time on her balcony or in the Tunnels below. But, one Monday a puzzling message arrived for Vincent.

*V,*  
*I will be working late and will be unable to see you this week. I will contact you later.*  
*Love,*  
*C*

The short, almost curt note confused Vincent. Catherine had mentioned nothing about any upcoming extra work the previous day when they were together. Bewildered and more than a little hurt, he had no choice but to accept her wishes. But as the days passed, Vincent became mystified by the strange emotions he could sense reaching him through their bond. In spite of working quite hard and being tired, Catherine seemed unusually happy. In fact, as the week progressed, her joy and excitement increased exponentially. At times, her emotions were so strong that Vincent found them positively distracting. More than once, someone had to draw his attention back to what he was doing as his thoughts turned to Catherine at the most inconvenient times. By Friday, Vincent's nerves were raw and his iron willed control was beginning to fray badly as Catherine's increasing emotions became almost intoxicating.

Mercifully, a message arrived from her that very morning.

*Vincent,*  
*Please come to my apartment for a late supper tonight at ten. I have a surprise for you.*  
*Until then, my love.*

## *Catherine*

Vincent virtually floated through the rest of his day. As the day dragged on, Vincent became almost giddy from Catherine's rising excitement and anticipation. He was ready long before ten and spent the time endlessly pacing back and forth between his chamber and Father's. Finally, Father had enough.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Vincent! Why don't you just go onto Catherine's apartment and stop this endless pacing? This is the fifth time in the last hour you've come through my chamber. Frankly, it's becoming most annoying."

"But, Father," Vincent protested. "Catherine's message said..."

"I know what it said, Vincent. But somehow, I doubt Catherine would mind if you arrived a bit early. Perhaps you might even be able to assist her with some of the preparations," Father ventured.

Vincent's face lit up at the notion and he immediately smiled. "That's an excellent idea, Father. Good night and don't wait up. I may be quite late," he called over his shoulder as he hurried out the doorway.

Father murmured a vague reply before chuckling and heaving a contented sigh of relief. At last, he could get back to his reading uninterrupted.

Vincent made the trip to Catherine's balcony in record time. He paused outside the door for a moment. But when Catherine didn't come out to greet him, he tapped lightly on the door, noticing it had been left slightly ajar.

Inside, Catherine was rushing to finish her shower. Vincent would be arriving shortly, and she knew the news she was bursting to share would make them both quite happy. She had intended to be ready long before now, but the farewell party her co-workers had thrown for her lasted longer than she anticipated. Even her best friend, Jenny Aaronson had put in an appearance, lightly tanned and newly returned from her Caribbean vacation. She had even gifted Catherine with a special present – a large gaudy hand-woven rug that she swore she had seen in her dreams.

“The old weaver who sold it to me knew I was buying it for a friend,” Jenny informed her. “She swears it will bring you good luck.”

Catherine had merely smiled indulgently and thanked her generous friend. She was used to Jenny’s eccentricities by now. Unable to find a good place for the rug in her elegant apartment, she finally settled on using it in her bathroom. At least there against the neutral tile, the rug didn’t seem so out of place.

But, just as she turned off the water and moved to step out, the rug seemed to develop a mind of its own. The next thing she knew, she was sliding across the floor as her feet went out from under her. Involuntarily, she cried out as she fell.

Already on edge, Vincent jumped at the cry he heard and the panic he felt from Catherine through their bond. Without a second thought, he jerked open the balcony door and followed his sense of her straight into the bathroom.

He rushed in only to stop dead in his tracks, dumb struck at the sight that greeted him. There on the floor sat Catherine; apparently unhurt, dripping wet and gloriously naked. Catherine’s eyes rounded as she saw Vincent and she gasped his name. “Vincent!”

The sound of Catherine’s voice roused Vincent from his stunned state. Averting his gaze, he quickly began to back out of the room, but once again, the slippery rug interfered. Vincent stumbled on it in his haste to leave and immediately slipped just as Catherine had. In an instant, he found himself flat on his back, staring at the bathroom ceiling in confusion. Alarmed by his hard fall and muffled groan, Catherine crawled quickly over to him, forgetting her state of undress.

“Vincent!” she inquired anxiously. “Are you all right?” She looked into his eyes and suddenly a wave of white-hot desire flooded their bond. Catherine’s senses were swamped by the powerful current, and she quickly found herself swept away by its undeniable power. Vincent’s azure gaze bore into hers for a moment before trailing lower, roaming hungrily over her naked flesh. Instantly, Vincent reached up, cupping her head in his hand and drawing her mouth down to his own as Catherine bent to him. Greedily, he

began to devour her lips like a starving man eating a sumptuous meal as she eagerly returned his kiss.

He seized her in a forceful, yet gentle grip and quickly pulled her down onto him, never once breaking their kiss. Frantically Catherine clung to him with all her strength. Somehow, the barriers between them were shoved aside and they soon were both swept away in an irresistible whirlwind of passion as their bond finally found the completion it had been denied for far too long. They were both hurtled uncontrollably upward, helpless to resist as every touch and sensation only fed their passion and drove them even higher. For one heart stopping moment, they felt as if they were one, not knowing where each began or ended. All too quickly, their passion reached its zenith and broke over them both like a storm. They were swept up out of themselves on an endless tide of pleasure. Catherine's passionate moans joined Vincent's cry of pleasure, now turned to a strangled groan as their combined climax literally stole the breath from his lungs. Spent, they floated on a sea of bliss in the afterglow.

Vincent was the first to come back to himself. Stunned, he struggled to take in what had just happened. Catherine was now atop him, breathing heavily. Somehow, one of them had drawn up the edge of his cloak to cover Catherine's wet, naked body.

Gingerly, Vincent unfastened his cloak and rolled her gently to the side. With infinite care, he lifted her up off the cold tile and carried her to her bed. After placing her there, he went out onto the balcony, desperate for space as he fought the urge to flee.

Catherine recovered herself as well. For a moment, she paused, about to dash after Vincent. But, she saw a shadow pass outside her doors and realized with a sigh of relief he had not fled back to the tunnels yet. As she tried to get up, her knees wobbled a bit. Unsteadily, she quickly retreated to the bathroom, wisely giving them both a minute to collect themselves. She rapidly finished cleaning up and drying herself. Back in control of emotions, she firmly tied her robe around her and went in search of Vincent.

Vincent paced the balcony restlessly. Part of him was appalled at his earlier behavior and wanted nothing more than to flee back to some dark, remote corner of the tunnels. But a stronger, more primitive part of his psyche refused to abandon Catherine after what they had just shared.

As Catherine appeared in the doorway, Vincent's heart ached from her beauty. Tears began to stream down his face as he fought to speak.

"Catherine, forgive me! I..."

But, Vincent's words were cut off as she flew across the balcony to her large lover and covered his mouth with her hand to prevent him from saying anymore. "Don't you dare apologize for what just happened, Vincent! It's been long overdue. We've both denied our passion for far too long." She moved her hand to cup his cheek as her voice dropped to a husky whisper. "I've never hidden my past from you. But, I can truthfully say that this was the most beautiful experience of my life. Until tonight, I never really understood what making love was."

Vincent's eyes widened, and Catherine smiled as the importance of what had just happened between them finally began to sink in. "Is that what we did?" Vincent breathlessly whispered back.

"Oh yes, my love. We most certainly did."

"But Catherine, I lost control," Vincent protested softly.

Catherine's smile increased. "Vincent, I think it's safe to say we *both* lost control."

Vincent began to smile as well as he echoed her sentiments. "Yes, Catherine I believe we did." Slowly, he moved closer and began to take her into his arms. "You aren't hurt," he observed, stating the obvious.

"Not in the least!" she confirmed as his mouth lowered onto hers.

Later, Vincent sat on the loveseat with Catherine on his lap, snuggled firmly against his chest in his arms. Vincent had surprised them both by sweeping her up into his arms and carrying her inside after their kiss. For a long time, he had merely sat, rocking his beloved in his arms as they savored the new-found intimacy that they had been craving for so long.

At last he spoke, his voice full of wry amusement as he turned to his beloved. "Well Catherine, when you said you had a surprise for me, I never guessed it would be this."

Catherine blinked for a moment and then slapped her forehead in exasperation with herself. "I can't believe I forgot to tell you my surprise!"

"Tell me," Vincent asked tenderly as he gently trailed a clawed finger down her cheek.

Catherine smiled at the now familiar words. "I quit my job as an investigator with the D.A."

Vincent gaped in shock. "Catherine, you love your work."

"I'm not quitting completely," she assured him. "I just won't be an investigator any more. A new position just opened up for a legal supervisor in the Grand Jury Stenographers' department. It's really just a desk job, but I jumped at it when my friend, Edie, called me about it Monday. That's why I worked so hard this week, so I could finish up all my open cases."

Catherine gazed up into Vincent's eyes and spoke from her heart. "I need this change, Vincent. We need this! I want to spend more time with you and my family Below, especially after tonight."

Vincent's eyes grew luminous. "Yes, tonight was... I have no words to describe what passed between us, Catherine."

"I do. We became lovers," she assured him.

"Lovers!" he exclaimed reverently in that same worshipful, breathless way he pronounced her name when they were close. Suddenly, his eyes began to glow with an inner fire as he drew her closer to him. "Catherine, do you think that we might try to...make love again?" he asked, fighting vainly to keep the eagerness from his voice.

"Oh, yes, my love," she whispered softly as she stood up to lead him in the direction of the bedroom. "Most definitely."