

RENAISSANCE

by Jacqueline Skalski

In the afterglow of lovemaking, two heavenly souls lay sated in the warmth of each other's arms. Their love for one another pulsed within their unique bond. A bond that transcended time and space in both the heavens and earth.

They, like a myriad of others, dwell in this safe place where all souls wait to be reborn. Over countless centuries they had re-united numerous times in this utopian haven. Their after-lives were always a time of celebration, freedom and love. No matter the time allotted, whether of long or short duration, the parting was always with heavy heart.

Never knowing the when or why, the golden haired man felt his time was once again near. Rebirth was imminent. The woman he loved with immeasurable depth lay nestled in the crook of his arm somewhere between sleep and waking. He turned his head slightly to look down upon her angelic face, and a gentle smile turned up the corners of his mouth. His gaze lifted to her honey blonde hair, and he wanted to run his fingers through the silky strands, but had no wish to disturb her rest. He let out a melancholic sigh and appeased himself with just holding her.

Knowing she wasn't yet aware he felt the pulling...the calling, he wanted to grant her these last moments of contentment. Closing his eyes, his thoughts drifted back to their adventures together in this paradise. He recalled their meandering on the beach one afternoon, and how they had laughed when they dipped their toes in the cool ocean water. Bright and early one morning they had strolled through a forest, lush with every shade of green imaginable to the mind and eye. They had danced under the moonlit night sky to music from unseen musicians. Another time they sang off-key at the top of their lungs startling nearby animals. The memory made him chuckle. With the slight shaking of his chest the woman became wakeful. Though he was sorry to have pulled her from her slumber, he also wished to speak to her before he could no longer share.

In this extraordinary realm, one need only to envision a location of choice and they magically would have their wish granted. He never ceased to marvel at this wondrous phenomenon. He brought to mind a sunny green meadow, a place they had happily visited on numerous occasions. Opening his azure blue eyes to the brilliance of the cerulean sky above them, he gazed up at the cotton ball clouds. The couple lay on a soft yellow blanket in a lush green meadow surrounded by thousands of vibrant wild flowers. As she stirred, his gaze returned to her beautiful face and was met with a gentle smile and sleepy eyes.

“Hello, Love,” she murmured.

“Hello, my most precious Love,” he answered in that low velvety voice that always sent shivers through her.

Stretching lazily, she became aware of the chirping of birds and a warm breeze gently caressing her body. Rising slightly, she became fully awake. Her green eyes, as alive as the meadow surrounding them, widened with wonder. She was instantly smiling and full of happiness. “You brought us to our special place,” she exclaimed. “Thank you. You know I love it here.”

She turned to look at him and something deep within caused her to inhale sharply. She looked into his eyes to confirm her deep-seated fear. Her smile faded. She was now aware his time of rebirth was upon them. Tears filled her eyes. “No, no...not yet. Just a little more time,” she pleaded. She fell back into his arms and he held her tightly.

Wishing to comfort her, he spoke softly, hoping to reassure her all would be well. “I feel your sadness Love, as I know you feel mine. Yes, my time here with you draws short. Know that we will find one another again in our new lives. We always do.”

She knew he spoke the truth, but the separating was always painful. A sigh escaped from the depths of her being. Barely able to speak, she replied, “I shall miss you desperately and pray the waiting...the waiting until we are destined to meet again on earth...will be mercifully short.”

Unable to find voice, he merely nodded his head and pulled her closer...then closer still. He only felt truly happy, free and contented when he was in her loving arms.

He knew her thoughts and feelings, even before she voiced them aloud. “Do you think that someday...will we ever be together...truly together?” Before he could answer she continued. “I wonder what destiny awaits us...this time. We have suffered so many trials as we have traveled the road to each higher plane. We have endured religious differences, wars, feuding between families, racial prejudices and social class divisions. It seems we always have a barrier between us...separating our different worlds. Will this time be easier I wonder?”

He spoke quietly while sending his unconditional love and comfort to her through the bond. “I feel our journey will be one that none have ever taken. Our connection is strong, and we will find our way no matter what awaits us. This I promise.”

All too soon she felt the gentle tugging sensation at almost the same instant he did. He was leaving her. Their lips met one last time in a kiss, passionate and filled with his promise. He began to fade.

She desperately clung to him, tried to hold on, but her arms now held only emptiness. “I love you,” she called out to him.

A distant voice, quiet and low, echoed back, “And I love you.”

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Below the streets of New York City in the tunnels where he made his home, the leonine-featured man tended to the needs of a woman. He had found her above in Central Park. She had been brutally attacked, her face slashed and then left to die.

He had brought her Below to heal, aided by the medical expertise of his father. The moment he had lifted her in his arms from the damp grass in the park, he sensed his world, a world of aloneness, had changed. He felt a connection to her...a bond. He also felt her pain, and that she had been

close to death. He sensed the stirrings of love, a love that was familiar, as if it had come before.

Though in extreme pain, confused and understandably frightened, the injured woman sensed this man caring for her was gentle, kind and no threat. He read to her and offered words of comfort. His low gravelly voice struck a cord deep within her heart. She asked, "Who are you?"

He answered, "Vincent. Tell me...your name."

"Catherine."