

RACING THE WIND

Racing through the North Meadow pulling his homemade kite behind him, Devin glanced up and caught a glimpse of gold in the drainage tunnel. Vincent was standing just inside the cement drain, unable to play with the other kids. Poor kid, Devin thought, I'll find a way for him to fly a kite. Just then his kite gave a sharp tug on the string and all thoughts of his friend fled as he watched joyfully as the kite soared higher and higher.

Twenty years later Devin was sitting on a park bench watching the tunnel kids fly their homemade kites when the memory of that exhilarating day returned. Sadly he had never done anything to bring that promise to life. Better late than never, he decided, but he wanted this to be a surprise for the man he had just found out was his adopted brother. No wonder there had been this strong bond between them from the time Vincent had been brought below.

Smiling to himself, he thought, I'll get Chandler in on this. She loves to do anything she can to make Vincent's life more enjoyable. Heck, she'd get a kick out of this herself.

Rising, he hurried quickly to Chandler's apartment. It was Saturday, so she should be home. He knocked and waited impatiently for her to answer the door.

"Devin," she cried surprised, "what brings you here on Saturday? I thought you'd be spending as much time as possible with Father and Vincent."

He grinned ruefully, "You know me, Chandler, I can't stay below too long. I was watching the kids fly their kites, and it reminded me of the day I flew mine."

"Oh, I'd like to hear about that. Sit down and I'll get us a cup of tea."

"Got anything stronger? I've had so much tea: I think my bladder's swimming in it."

"Would a beer be all right?"

"What do you think?" He grinned at her and watched appreciatively as she went to the kitchen. Vincent certainly had good taste when it came to women. Not that he begrudged his brother anything; he didn't want to be tied down with any woman. Not now, maybe never.

Catherine returned with two beaded, wet bottles of beer. Handing one to her visitor, she settled onto the couch tucking one foot under her and leaned back, inviting him to tell her of his memory.

Devin told her of his exhilaration when the kite took off into the sky and how he reveled in the joy of running across the meadow. Then he told her about Vincent standing in the entrance of the drain pipe and how it made him feel. "That's what I was remembering," he said, "and I also remembered that I didn't fulfill that promise. That's really why I'm here, to enlist you in my plan to have Vincent fly a kite."

Catherine clapped her hands. "Oh, that's wonderful; I'd love to get involved. How do you want to go

about it?"

"Well, it has to be at night . . . a clear night with a good wind . . . maybe on a full moon, next Saturday is the next full moon."

"What about the kite? Do you want a fancy one or should it be one that Vincent has made?"

"Um. He's been helping the kids make their kites; I could help him and make an extra one."

"I think that would work. Oh, I wish I could be there, too." Excited, Catherine moved to sit on the edge of the couch.

"Why couldn't you be? If we did it on a weekend, you could be there." Devin took another swig of his beer and pointed it at her. "I delegate you as the procurer of all the newspapers we need."

"Aye, aye, captain," Catherine saluted with a big grin.

"Good, that's settled. Now tell me how are things in the DA's office?"

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On Friday evening Catherine came Below with a pile of newspapers, thin slats, and several balls of string. Enough material to make a kite for every child in the tunnels. Keeping her excitement to herself, she hoped to make it to Vincent's chamber without him knowing it.

He looked up in surprise as she breezed in with a happy laugh. "I did it," she chortled. "I made it all the way to your chamber without you sensing me."

Hurriedly rising to his feet, he left Devin sitting by the small writing table and hastily made his way to Catherine to take the pile of newspapers from her. "Yes, you did," he said appreciatively. "You're getting better at it every day."

Catherine reached up and buzzed him on the cheek. Ducking his head, slightly embarrassed, he placed the newspapers on the foot of his bed and took the slats and string from her.

A frown appeared on her face as she turned to Devin. "Hi, Devin."

"Why the unhappy face, Chandler?" he asked, watching her sit on the edge of the bed.

"I won't be able to be here to fly kites with you."

"Why not?"

"I have to go to Albany to take a disposition from a witness. I'm packed and will leave as soon as I go back Above. I took the time to bring you the material you needed." She sighed. "I miss out on all the fun. Sometimes I think about quitting . . ."

Vincent's head snapped up, and he gazed at her as if wishing she would do just that, but then he shook his head . . . no, he couldn't ask that of her. She was needed.

“. . . but then I know I won't, at least, not right now.” She looked at Vincent as if she needed his agreement. He smiled and nodded at her, and she smiled back, getting his message.

She stood up, as if eager to be on her way and get an onerous duty out of the way; so she could come back and spend more time with the man she loved. “Well, I can't stay. Will you walk me back, Vincent?”

“Of course,” he said as he grabbed his cloak and swung it around his shoulders. Taking her hand, he led her from the chamber.

At the entrance to her building, he pulled her into a close embrace. She lifted her face to receive the kiss he was about to bestow on her. Still amazed at his temerity, he lowered his lips to hers and kissed her gently. Coming up for air, she sighed and rested her head over his heart.

“Oh, you are the most wonderful kisser. You take my breath away each time you kiss me.”

“I'm glad it pleases you,” he said then chuckled, “Practice makes perfect.” And he bent to kiss her again.

“Come on, we've got to quit or I'll never make my plane.” Reluctantly she pushed out of his arms and held him at arms length. “I'll be back Sunday evening, and I'll be down to find out how your kite flying went.”

“Take care, Catherine. Be safe.”

“I will; I have you with me all the time.” Before she entered the light cone, she turned. “Have fun tomorrow night. I've heard that it might rain somewhere around midnight; so be sure to do it before then.” She disappeared into the light.

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Vincent returned to his chamber to find Devin sprawled in a chair waiting for him. “Well, bro, shall we get cracking.”

“Yes,” and with that the two friends and brothers trooped off to the dining chamber. There they built their kites in record time, having learned by experience what needed to be done. Propping them against the wall in Devin's chamber—they were safer there, not as much traffic—they spent the rest of the evening reminiscing about their childhood.

Father noticed the next day that Vincent seemed to be going through the motions while his mind was elsewhere. Ah, yes, he thought, Catherine is gone. That's the problem. But if Father knew the real reason for his son's woolgathering, he would have had a conniption fit. He would have found some way to discourage the evening's entertainment, but neither Vincent nor Devin told him what they had planned. Devin had especially warned his brother not to say a word to Father. He had shut down any number of their other wild exploits, and Devin didn't want anything to spoil this night for Vincent.

Both of them retired early, claiming that they had not slept well the night before. Suspiciously, Father stared at them as they left his chamber, but when he just happened to be walking by their separate chambers, he found both of them in their beds apparently sound asleep. Mollified, he returned to his chamber and got ready for bed. After all they were grown men and Vincent, especially, wasn't prone to committing rash acts. He should learn to trust them more.

Around eleven o'clock Vincent rose from his bed, fully clothed, and tiptoed to Devin's chamber. Devin was sitting there waiting for him. "Did you hear the old man checking up on us?" he chuckled. "I think he suspected something, but I think we fooled him."

Nodding in agreement, Vincent grabbed his kite, Devin took his, and they scurried as noiselessly as possible to the Park entrance.

"Hey, where you going?" Mouse's voice rang out.

Devin spun on his heels and whispered, "Shh! We're going out in the Park to fly our kites."

"At night?"

"Sure, why not? Vincent can't do it during the day."

"Oh, right. Can I come? Never seen Vincent fly kite."

Devin glanced at Vincent who shrugged ambivalently. "Ok, but be quiet. We've managed to get past all the sentries so far."

After opening the sliding door, they slipped out into the drainage culvert. Vincent and Devin both had a flash-back to the day that Vincent stood in the tunnel watching Devin fly his kite.

"Ready, Vincent?"

"Yes, I sense no one around."

Quickly they hurried into the surrounding trees and made their way to the North Meadow. It was glowing with reflected silver moonlight, and it was bright enough to be able to see the kites flying in the air.

"Ok, you know what to do?" Devin asked Vincent as they held their kites at ready.

"Yes." Vincent's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"Ok, let's go," Devin yelled and, laughing, they flew across the meadow. It had been a long time since Devin had heard Vincent laugh, and he knew then that this was the right time for this adventure. Young Vincent wouldn't have appreciated it as much as the older Vincent. Soon the wind caught the kites and they soared into the night sky.

And he was glad that Chandler wasn't here. If she had been Vincent would have been solicitous of her enjoyment and not his own. As it was, he was standing there holding the kite string with a large foolish grin on his face, staring up at his kite gamboling in the midnight wind. Then it became a race to see who could get their kite the highest. Vincent was a very adept pupil and learned all the tricks of kite flying in a short time.

Mouse was cheering him on, "Higher, Vincent. Higher."

Suddenly there was a large flash of lightning followed by a rolling peal of thunder. "We better get outta here, Vincent," Devin cried.

"No, not yet. Just a few minutes more," Vincent pleaded.

"It's too dangerous; you know that." And just as suddenly as the flash of lightning, the rain began pelting down. The kites nose dived to the ground, and the trio was wet through before they had moved a step.

They picked up the soggy remnants of their kites and trudged back to the drainage tunnel. "I'm sorry the rain ruined your kite flying, Vincent," Devin said.

"It didn't ruin it; it capped the evening. Thank you for thinking about it; I've enjoyed myself immensely."

"I meant to do it years ago but never got around to it. I think this was better, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, and I thank you again."

They reached the closed sliding door and Mouse operated the mechanism to open it.

"Sorry you came, Mouse? You got all wet." Devin followed him into the tunnel.

"No, got to see Vincent fly kite. Worth getting wet. Wet dries. Memories stay."

"You got a point, Mouse. Couldn't have said it better myself."

Vincent was uncharacteristically quiet on the way back to the home tunnels.

"What's the matter, man? Sorry you got rained out?" Devin punched him in the arm to bring him back to the present.

"No, just doing what Mouse said, saving the memories." Suddenly he smiled, showing the tips of his white canines. "It was fun, wasn't it?"

"That's why we did it, bro. For you to have a little fun in your life." Devin started to skip down the tunnel. "Bet you can't do this, anymore."

Laughing, Vincent replied, "Oh, I can, but I choose not to. I'm not quite that young, but you? You're nine

with twenty-six years experience.”

“Right on, buddy.” And he continued to skip down the tunnel followed by Mouse skipping along with him.

All the sentries came out of their hidey-holes to gaze in amazement at the wet and bedraggled trio as two skipped by and one kept to his sedate pace. Vincent just nodded at them.

Mouse skipped on to his chamber with a wave and a “Good night.” Devin and Vincent stopped at the laundry to get some dry towels and parted at the junction to Devin’s chamber.

“Good night, Devin, and thanks again for teaching me how to fly a kite.”

“I’m just glad the rain held off until we had flown them. The weather forecast worried me, but everything turned out all right after all.”

With a hearty, thumping hug, they parted, each to their own chamber where they dropped their clothing and briskly rubbed themselves dry. Dropping the wet towels by the entrance to their chambers, they donned their sleeping clothes and fell into bed, fast asleep in seconds.

The next morning as Father was making his rounds to check on all his children, he noticed in both Devin and Vincent’s chamber a pile of wet towels by the entrance way. Oh heavens, he thought, what have those two been up to tonight. He shuddered to think of what they could have done and decided not to take the risk of finding out. He didn’t need a coronary; he needed peace and quiet. Noiselessly, he hurried off to the dining chamber, hoping William was in a better mood than yesterday. William was easier to face than two recalcitrant overgrown teenagers.

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