

Vincent's Letters to Catherine



Letter 1 (Once Upon a Time in New York)

Dearest Catherine,

As I write this letter, the world Below sleeps, I am in my chamber, alone. Thoughts and feelings rush through me. Many of these feelings I have never known before. Some I have only known through books. Some...I could never imagine. You may never receive this letter, but I must write it, if...only to begin to understand, understand all these...things that are happening to me.

The night I found you in the park, the night I first saw you, proved to be both the darkest, and the brightest night of my life. In the days before that night I had been filled with a growing emptiness, the deep, nameless longing that I could not understand. It was...a shadow, and that shadow loomed inside me. I had lost my hope. I felt - no I KNEW - I would forever be alone.

I walked that night, the streets, the alleys, as I had walked so many nights before. The city seemed cold and empty. The park, my place of comfort, was dark and strange. Then something stopped me. I saw you, and my life... changed ... forever.

Against everything I knew, all the rules of our community, I brought you into my world. In my mind there was no choice, there was no time. I could feel your will to live...it called to me ... all my doubt, all my pain ... lifted. Your spirit called to me, and I knew I had to see you live.

Those days I spent with you caring for you, reading to you, watching over you, were the sweetest days I have ever known. You trusted me. You let me give ... and as you healed, I healed too. And then you opened your eyes, and saw my face. I saw your fear, felt it ...cut through me. In that moment, I believed the dream was lost, but you had the courage to look at me, to see me, to truly see, and in your eyes I saw something I had never known. I saw a world of possibilities ... for me.

Our ... our time was short - soon you were well. Before we parted at the basement of your apartment building you ... lay your head on my shoulder. I... I could not speak. Even ...even now there are no words. And when voices from above broke the stillness, there was no time to say goodbye.

Over and over again I have tried to say goodbye to you, Catherine, tried to remember, tried to forget. Now I know goodbye was never meant to be. We are part of each other. Whatever comes, we are part of each other, and we found each other. Perhaps, that is our destiny.

Do you remember the poem I read you?

Somewhere there waiteth in this world of ours,
For one lone soul, another lonely soul.
Each choosing through all the weary hours,
And meeting strangely at one sudden goal.
Then they blend, like green leaves with golden flowers,
Into one beautiful and perfect whole.
And life's long night is ended,
And the way lies open onward to eternal day.

Sleep well, my dearest Catherine, sleep well.

Vincent

LETTER 2 (Terrible Savior)

Dearest Catherine,

I knew there would come a time, all too soon, when our bond .. our trust would be threatened. I did not know what form that threat would take, what mask it would be wearing, or whether we would survive. But now that time has come. Much conspired against us, against the idea of us.

Your world fears what is different, what it doesn't understand. My world fears your world's intolerance and brutality. Every time we meet we are at risk. That risk is nothing to me, I ... I take it gladly and I would die to protect you - know that.

But also know, our greatest enemy, the greatest threat comes not from outside, but from within. Within ourselves, our enemy's name is doubt. And if we do not battle with it, it will surely destroy us. I know that what I am inspires fear, that ... however hard I try to improve myself, to go gently, to embrace others, their first sight of me will always be filled with utter fear. There is nothing I can do to dispel that fear except ... wait ... and hope ... to be seen in truth.

I believed you saw me - truly. I believed you knew I would never do harm to you. Never. As I live and breathe, Catherine, never. But somewhere within you the fear and the doubt took root. You suspected, if only for a moment, that I was capable of violent crimes. The acts of a ... subway vigilante. The pain I felt came, not from your suspicions, but from the sad truth that you did not yet know me, or trust me.

Yes, I am capable of terrible things. Things that shame and frighten me, but so are we all. Yes, I am capable of rage that overwhelms me, a rage that ... can become violent. But only for one purpose, only to one end. To protect my home, and the ones I love. There is not, and cannot be another justification for violence. I believe that. I live by it. You must believe me. There is nothing I can say, no words to convince you. If we are to survive the danger, and live to see the dream, finally we must trust. That is our greatest challenge. Without trust we have nothing. All is lost.

To trust is ... not a decision we make. It is a voice we hear from within. A voice that tells us that all is well. You can go ... safely. You listen to your heart - what does it say? Your heart is where your courage lives. It speaks the truth. It is wise. I know ... I can hear it.

There... there was a moment, after the storm had passed, we ... stood on your balcony in each other's arms. The dawn was coming. As the city slept, the sky was painted in shades of gold - only for us. You remember that moment, your head lay against my chest. All was still, all was well, and all was one. And our hearts knew it.

Sleep well, my dearest Catherine, sleep well.

Vincent

LETTER 3 (Siege)

Dearest Catherine,

When you first came into my life, I felt I'd been born into a new world, a world I had only read about in books, one that only lived in my imagination. For a moment I believed in that world, in all its possibilities; a door had opened where none existed. All of this came through you. So many new feelings that were once only words now rush through me. I cannot yet describe them. All at once, they startle me, sometimes frighten me, but always fill me with wonder and gratitude. But how can such happiness bring me such pain? How could I have forgotten that, though the door had opened, I could not pass through it? For me, all that was possible was to stand at the threshold, and watch.

Please know that I only want your happiness; and, yet the feelings I felt of you with another poisoned all that was right and good. I know what I am, I accept what I am. This envy was a stranger to me. Now it lives within me, mocks me. In every fibre of my being, I struggle to conquer it. Yet if I do, what have I won? Still, I am standing at the threshold, watching, longing for a life that can never be. How can I be part of you when I know I must let you be a part of someone else?

I've lost my way, Catherine. How can we continue? The way is filled with peril. Do we endure what surely lies ahead? And yet, the thought of never seeing you again is unthinkable. I said to you that someday someone would come and you would live another life and dream another dream. When that day comes, I will rejoice for you, but I am not now, strong enough to do that. Perhaps I am thinking only of myself, but I must, or this poison called envy will engulf me.

There is a place in my world called the Chamber of the Falls. Someday, perhaps, you will see it. It is the most beautiful place I know. The sound of rushing water soothes me. I go there often to think.

Catherine, I do not know when I will see you again. I've always told you to follow your heart. Now I must search to find the strength to follow my own. They are not long, the days of wine and roses. Out of a misty dream, our path emerges for a while, then closes, within a dream.

Sleep well, dearest Catherine, sleep well.

Vincent.

LETTER 4 (No Way Down)

Dearest Catherine,

I cannot sleep. I have tried, and when I sleep, I dream...and the dream is always the same. And when I sleep, the nightmare I have just survived Above, continues. So I write to you. It is early morning. The children will begin gathering at the Mirror Pool to watch a new day dawn. I'm home, and I am alive. I am back in my world surrounded by friends and people I love. The nightmare I have just lived is over - but it haunts me. Not the proximity to death, although I have never been so close. Not the terror of being lost and trapped Above. What plagues me is the utter hatred. The evil I saw in the eyes of those that hunted me.

I have often looked on the world Below, this world beneath the streets, as my prison. Now I see it as the extraordinary sanctuary that it is. Yes, it is a place apart, apart from the cruelty and brutality that seems to live in the air Above. Our world Below offers something precious. It offers safety. It offers compassion and trust. In the newness and wonder of seeing your world through your eyes, I forgot why I had been isolated for so long. I forgot the danger that waits for me Above. I forgot such a thing as evil exists or...perhaps I was never aware.

Much of what I know, I know through books. There is much for me that is new, and there are things that books can never teach us. I will never understand how people can gain sustenance through cruelty. I struggle, but it is something I cannot grasp. And yet I saw it in the eyes of those men. I felt it in the eyes of those men. And that is what haunts me.

I know there is goodness in your world. You are in it. There are others, too, who reach out with kindness and generosity. And yet for every good soul, there is another waiting to annihilate it. In every fiber of my being I refuse to believe that darkness can envelop the light or that evil can mock what is good. Perhaps...I cannot allow myself to believe it. Perhaps what haunts me is not what I saw in the eyes of the others, but in their eyes - I saw myself.

Have I been too quick to judge? Has the sanctuary of my world shielded me from some terrible truth? I've always feared the darkness within me. But now your world forces me to confront it. Do I have the courage to look in the mirror? Do I have the courage to look into your eyes? In your eyes, Catherine, I see myself not only as I am : in your eyes I see the truth of what can be, of all that is possible. And now I am learning that the truth can be as terrifying as it is wondrous.

The first day's night has come; and grateful that a thing so terrible had been endured, I told my soul to sing.

Sleep well, dearest Catherine. Sleep well.

Vincent

LETTER 5 (Masques)

Dearest Catherine,

Less than an hour ago we parted at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge. Now I sit here writing to you because I know only you will understand what I am feeling. It is early morning. All Hallow's Eve is ended for another year and I have never in my life been so happy. Was it a dream, Catherine? Did the two of us walk the city last night - - openly - - together?

I have known this city well, but I have never seen it quite this way before. Many nights I have sat alone on building tops, looking out at the glowing lights. As beautiful as those lights were, they were always distant. From the streets below, the sound of the city would drift up to me like an echo of a melody from far away. There were nights when those city sounds made the most beautiful music I have ever heard. There were nights when I wondered if I was the only one who could hear it. Tonight, I became part of that music "Sometimes we must leave our safe places and walk empty-handed among our enemies."

How many times have I read those words? How many times have I presumed to understand them? Not until I walked among the crowds, heard their laughter, felt the warmth of their passing bodies, did I realize what those words truly meant.

"Leave our safe places..." Tonight, I left my safe place. Tonight a dream became real.

We sat, hand in hand, on a bench by the river...like ordinary people, watching the sun rise over the city. That one moment was worth everything, Catherine. Everything we've risked, everything we have fought for. Everything.

Out of your whole life give but a moment!
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it, -- so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present, -- condense
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense - -
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me, (you) above me.*

Sleep well, my dearest Catherine. Sleep well.

Vincent

*Robert Browning, 'Now' .

Letter 6 (The Beast Within)

Dearest Catherine,

Tonight I almost lost you. Tonight my greatest fear tore through me as that bullet tore through you. I held you. I felt your life slipping away and I lived an eternity. I saw my life without you, Catherine, and it was a loss I could not survive. I've known hopelessness, even worse. But what struck me to the core was this : until that moment I had never truly known faith. Yes, faith. Darkness enveloped me and yet I felt an inexplicable hope, a belief beyond knowledge that you would live. I know now that hope, that faith, came to me through love.

The night you told me of the risks you faced, I said to go no further. That warning came from care, but it was also filled with fear. I was afraid of losing you. Afraid you were not strong enough without me. I want to protect you. We need to protect the ones we love. But now I understand we also need to trust, to allow the ones we love to face their risks and find their courage alone.

How hard it is to let you go. How frightening it is to trust that fate will be kind, and yet I know I must if you are to continue to grow strong.

Isn't it strange that those we hold closest to our hearts are the ones we must also set free. Love is not a refuge. I think it is a journey -- and not a safe one. It is filled with terror and wonder and we must go forward in courage and in truth. I am with you on that journey, Catherine, wherever it leads. And on that journey we are all as children finding our strength, facing our fears, holding each other by the hand.

Oh yet we trust that somehow good will be the final goal of ill, to pangs of nature, sins of will, effects of doubt, and taints of blood;
that nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed, or cast as rubbish to the void, when God had made the pile complete.

Behold, we know not anything.

I can but trust that good shall fall, at last far off, at last to all; and every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream, but what am I?

An infant, crying in the night, an infant crying for the light and with no language but a cry.

Sleep well, dearest Catherine.

Vincent

LETTER 7 (Nor Iron Bars a Cage)

Dearest Catherine,

Those words you read to me echo in my mind :

"...when I stood forlorn
"Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
"That neither present time nor years unborn
"Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.*

I thought I would never see you again. I thought I had lost you. Catherine, I knew there would come a time when your path would lead away from me. But what I never could imagine was the pain I felt when that day came. You must do everything you were meant to do -- for me; for both of us. To try to stop you would be to mock everything we believe in. And yet, to live by what is right can sometimes be so difficult.

Our bond has given me a freedom I've never known before. Through you I have seen a world I had only dreamed of. When that world of possibilities seemed to end, I could not think, I could not breathe. I had lost myself. And in that moment of vulnerability, I fell prey to those that would do me harm.

When I awoke I was in a cage, trapped. My strength, my will, my hope had left me. I could no longer fight. What was there to fight for? I could feel myself slipping away.

Freedom for me has always been circumscribed by who I am, by what I am. I have never accepted those limits. From the time I was very young I promised myself never to become a prisoner of my fate. I took the risk. I went Above. Father always protested, but these risks brought me great solace. The alleys, the shadows, the rooftops were mine. They belonged to me. When I traveled them, my freedom was limitless. But I traveled them alone -- until the night I found you. And then we traveled them together.

When fate called you down another path, I felt all was lost, that I had been forgotten. I had lost my freedom. I had lost my faith, and in that cage I was dying. As darkness clouded my sight, I looked up ... and saw you. I thought it was a vision. I could not believe you had come for me. In that cage, I had lost my belief in everything, but you were there to remind me that there is a power greater than evil, greater than disillusionment, greater than fear. You were there to remind me. For that -- for everything, there are no words except -- thank you.

Sleep well, my dearest Catherine. Sleep well.
Vincent

*William Wordsworth, 'Surprised by Joy.'

LETTER 8 (Song of Orpheus)

Dearest Catherine,

It's been a week now, since Margaret passed away. Father has begun to heal. I think what makes this possible are those seven days they spent together, in love.

It seems that Margaret awakened something in Father I have never seen before, as if a missing piece has been restored, a piece of his innocence, a piece of his youth. Margaret was a longing he carried with him, a painful memory of what he left behind. The years could not diminish that longing. Before there was always a sadness in Father's eyes I could not understand. It was a secret he kept hidden from all of us, a secret he could never share, until now.

I suppose we all carry our secrets, like winter garments we are unable to shed because we cannot believe spring has finally come. All my life I have kept a secret Catherine, but I can keep it no longer from you.

From the time I was young, I dreamt of being held close, close enough to someone to feel the warmth of their body against mine. I longed for it. Sometimes, I ached for it. to be held, tenderly against the breast of a woman, to have my head stroked gently, to hear a voice whisper that all is safe and well.

And I dreamt of holding someone in my arms; holding them and feeling their heart beat within mine, but always there was the hunger. At first I did not know what it was, when I did, that hunger terrified me. Where would it take me? Would I lose myself? Would my hunger destroy what I held most dear?

But those dreams were only intimations, shadows of what could be, until the night I found you. Catherine, you gave a name to those feelings, a face to those dreams, and now I know what frightened me so.

Everytime I hold you I feel such peace until the hunger begins to stir inside me. Do not be frightened. i would take my life before I would endanger yours. And so I struggle with myself.

What shall we do? Perhaps the only way is to hold each other close and take a leap of faith into the dark night.

Sleep well, my dearest Catherine, sleep well.

Vincent