

Closure

- by Angie

And ever best found in the close

- John Milton

“When will it stop?”

Vincent’s anguished cry haunted Catherine after he left her and returned below. He had been shot during the altercation in the old theatre, but his mental injury was more of a concern to her. He had left without another word.

Over the next few days, those last words echoed in her mind as she read the forensics reports and gathered the evidence against the two rich young men in their red convertible. It had been seen often – once with one of the missing hookers. The tires on the car, parked near the theatre, had been meticulously examined too. There was a lot of circumstantial evidence, but nothing definitive.

Their deaths changed nothing. She had to link them to the terrible crimes they had committed and put the case to rest, once and for all – for her own peace of mind, and for Vincent’s.

The papers had published society pictures of the men and photographs of the wreckage inside the theatre. Speculation was rife about a connection to the string of gruesome hooker murders, when it emerged the two were well known on the “stroll” - but it had died out quickly. Catherine had no doubt that a lawyer’s phone call to the publisher had been responsible for the latter.

The break came when a young woman had come into the DA’s office and asked for her, and then, in the quiet of the conference room, had said just one name – Maurice.

Catherine had nodded and taken the story from the woman who, it appeared, had been the one who got away – largely, she knew now, because her attackers had spotted Vincent in the shadows of the alley. The secretive and abrasive Maurice didn’t know that fact, but he had obviously been annoyed at the slow progress of the investigation and wanted the men responsible identified positively. He had his sources and Catherine had no doubt he could produce other witnesses - if necessary. She doubted it would be, now.

The woman had described the two men accurately, even to the knife one of them was carrying, the same Catherine and Joe had seen when the police had searched the killer’s home. There couldn’t be two like that. A real knife man would never carry anything so crude. She knew that much - to her cost.

The news finally could not be kept discreet any longer, and the DA’s office issued a comprehensive statement. The newspapers immediately assumed the two men had been murdered by an enraged pimp.

Catherine breathed a sigh of relief. Vincent was safe!

By Friday of that week, the families of the two men had gone into seclusion and the DA’s office had settled back into normal routine. Joe had taken Catherine aside and thanked her for her work.

“But don’t expect a commendation, or even a thank-you, Radcliffe. The Commissioner would have gladly pinned the murders on a homeless drunk. The rich are not like us.”

“I know, Joe. I’m tired. It’s four o’clock and I’m going home. I won’t be home this weekend.”

That last was a white lie. She had no plans to be away, but it was a good way to prevent unwanted phone calls.

“Oh, like that, is it?” Joe gave her one of his sideways smirks. “Hot date?”

Catherine’s tiredness evaporated and the stress of the last few days made her blunt. Vincent was her main concern. She could sense he was still in pain.

“And just what business of yours is that, Joe? My personal life is mine. Period.”

Joe’s jaw dropped and the humour vanished.

“Hey, ease off, Radcliffe. Have a good weekend.”

He made a fast retreat and Catherine immediately felt badly, but shook off any thoughts of an apology, gathered her purse and coat and left.

When she reached her apartment, she found a note under her door. Her heart skipped a beat as she read the note from Father, asking her to come below as soon as convenient. She quickly changed into jeans and a sweater, grabbed her jacket and went down to the basement. There was no one around, so she entered the threshold and pulled the lever inside. After Brian's adventure, they had bricked up that entrance and opened another a short distance away. This time, Mouse had installed a system that automatically closed the entry with a section resembling the basement wall and quietly slid a box in front of it. It was a technique that had been used for entries in helper's basements.

Catherine made her way quickly to Father's chamber. She had wanted to go straight to Vincent, but decided that diplomacy was called for. Father was probably unhappy with her. Once again, he'd had to patch up his son after he had rescued her.

Father was sitting at the chessboard with Geoffrey, frowning. He looked up when she entered and rose immediately.

"Catherine, how good of you to visit us at this hour. I hope all is well with you. Geoffrey, we'll finish our game later."

Geoffrey's mouth twitched, but he said nothing and gave Catherine a bright smile as he left. Obviously, he had been winning the game.

"Please sit down, Catherine. Would you like some tea?"

"No, Father. I'm too worried for pleasantries. It's Vincent, isn't it? I can feel some of his pain."

Father sighed. "Yes, he has been ... upset ... since he returned from above on Monday night. I know what happened. I made him tell me. He had a bullet wound, but it wasn't serious. Small caliber and from some distance. I read the newspapers. You are to be commended, Catherine. Such crimes as this – where rich men victimize marginalized women – are often unseen and unexamined. I know that Vincent got you involved in this case. He was upset after what he saw in the park."

"Yes. Our hollow men killed for some sick reason we will probably never understand. It must have been terrible to watch. They were monsters, inhuman."

"Quite. But Vincent hasn't achieved closure. I don't know why. He hasn't left his chamber and has eaten and drunk almost nothing. I can't reach him. There's something still bothering him. Do you know what it is?"

Catherine thought about that and remembered what he had told her after he had seen the murder in the park. She had an inkling.

"I think I do, Father, but I'd rather not say just now. I may be wrong. I'll go to him. He may not want to see me either, but I have to try."

"Thank you, Catherine. I've said it before, but I want you to know that your relationship with Vincent is as important to me as it is to him. I want you both to be happy."

"Thank you, Father. I want that too. I'm taking this weekend off to think about how that can happen a little sooner and easier. My job has become ... a chore. It's time I found another way to help people."

"You will do what is best, Catherine, I have no doubt. Good luck with Vincent."

Catherine gave Father a heartfelt hug and went quickly to Vincent's chamber. She found it almost in darkness, only one candle lit. She quickly lit a few more and stoked up the brazier. Then she looked at Vincent, who was curled up on his bed, his back to her, wrapped in his blankets. She wondered if he had even bothered to dress these last few days. She suspected not.

He had not moved, but she sensed he wasn't asleep and knew she was there. She moved quietly to the bed and then pulled off her boots. Then before he had a chance to protest, she eased herself over him onto the other side, so she could face him.

In the light from the stained glass window, she could see his tangled hair, but his eyes were hidden. His mouth drooped and he said nothing. She put a hand under his chin and quietly kissed him on the mouth. He immediately dropped his head onto her chest and she could feel his body shuddering with sobs. She gathered him to her and he put his arms around her. She held him until he was calm again and then moved a hand to stroke his hair and back, grateful that he was wearing only a nightshirt. She wanted him to feel her hand on him.

"Catherine."

Her name mumbled softly into her shoulder was the sweetest thing she had ever heard. She looked down and met his eyes. They looked haunted, but his face looked less gaunt in the dim light. When he spoke, his voice was strained and low.

"Why, Catherine? Why must these things happen?"

She knew he didn't really expect an answer. He knew as well as she did why such atrocities occurred. Just as surely, he didn't want to hear a cliché. She gave the only reply she could, the one she had learned from him.

"Because there are those who have no one to really love them, care about them, talk to them. Because of this, despite having all the material advantages, they are empty and cold inside."

"Yes."

"And no one understands them, or tries to reach that place where their humanity resides. They have no one at all. I was lucky. You found me."

Vincent shook his head in disagreement. His voice cracked as he spoke softly.

"Catherine, you would never have become like them."

"I wouldn't have murdered in cold blood, no, but I was blind to so much, Vincent. I was a cardboard cutout – shallow and unhappy - without realizing it. I might never have understood, but for you."

Vincent was silent for a few moments, then she felt him shudder again. He spoke softly and looked down at his hands, now between them.

"I have never hated anyone, Catherine, but I found myself hating those two men. I would have killed them in that alley, if not for the sake of justice – your world's justice - for all those dead women. But I had to kill them in the end anyway."

"And you killed for love, not hate," Catherine murmured. "And that is what sets you apart from them, Vincent. You can hate, but you do not act on it. Those men hated themselves above all. They were lost. They knew it couldn't go on forever. They got careless when they threatened me. And I compounded it by not having backup. Did they hurt you?"

"It was nothing. Even Father found nothing to worry him."

"Father asked me to come below."

"I know. I'm glad you did. I could not ask it of you."

"Why not?"

"I am ashamed to be so distraught. You have your own concerns."

"No concerns are as important as you. Surely, you know that."

"I dare not ask it of you. I have so much to be thankful for. Every minute I spend with you is a blessing. I do not want our time together darkened with my pain."

“Vincent, that is a spurious argument, and you know it. How many times have you comforted me? I want nothing more than to be here when you need me. Haven’t I proven that already? Why can’t you accept what I give?”

Catherine found her throat closing up and she fought back tears.

Vincent shifted so that he could hold her hands in his and looked in her eyes.

“Because, Catherine, you are my life.”

“And you are mine. Therefore, why not let our lives be one, both the good and the bad?”

Vincent dropped his eyes and she felt him come to a decision. He moved his hands to her face and leaned over to plant a kiss on her mouth. She pulled him to her and this time, she sensed he would not deny her.

Their kiss was passionate, a banquet of sensations that neither was in any hurry to finish. When they parted at last to breathe, Vincent sighed deeply. He held her close and she could feel his soft breath on her hair. There were no words necessary, but even so, it took Catherine some time to realize that the man she loved above all others had fallen asleep. She smiled to herself and she decided there was nowhere she would rather be – and nowhere she had to be. She was very tired and let herself relax into the kind of sleep she had been trying to find for the past two weeks.

When Father quietly looked in later, he saw the double mound on Vincent’s bed and smiled to himself. Once that sight would have infuriated him; later still, it would have raised grave concerns. Now it merely gave him peace. Would it someday give him joy, he wondered? He sincerely hoped so.

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