

Vignettes

Mirrors

Episodes 11- 20

- by Angie

11 – An Impossible Silence

When Laura was safe below again, Vincent sensed she was restless. She seemed distracted, at odds with her tunnel family, apart. Her hands and her expressive face told him she was unhappy, but she seemed unable to put it into words.

Something had happened when she went above with Catherine – and then got kidnapped and rescued. It wasn't the ordeal itself.

She talked to him still, but had not said much, even when he asked outright. He was puzzled and hurt by it, until Catherine's perspective as a woman told him what Laura didn't want to discuss, even with him.

Laura, Catherine told him, cared deeply for him - like a brother, a mentor, a friend. Laura had seen the love between them and realized what was missing in her life. She was a young woman and ached for someone to love as a woman. She knew Vincent cared deeply for her – but his true love was Catherine.

Vincent sighed. He should have been more perceptive. He now recognized in Laura what he had felt before he met Catherine. It was like looking in the Mirror Pool and realizing a different person now looked back. He had been changed – and now Laura needed that. It would not be easy for her, but her challenges would be more easily overcome than his own.

Catherine said that Laura was strong and that when she gave her heart, it would be forever. He couldn't deny her the opportunity to experience that and in the process, find herself – as he had.

She wanted to see herself reflected in eyes that understood what it meant to be deaf. Laura would know, as he did, if someone accepted her for what she was and whether their heart reflected the passion in her own.

Perhaps the tunnels were not sufficient for some kinds of love, Vincent mused. Perhaps Laura, like himself, had to look elsewhere. Strangely, that gave him comfort. If he, with his challenges, had found someone, so would Laura.

END

12 - Shades of Grey

Vincent held Catherine's hand as Father was lifted onto a stretcher. He shifted, as if to help lift the old man, but Winslow suddenly imposed his large frame in front of him and cast a no nonsense look over his shoulder. Vincent immediately stepped backwards out of the way, tugging Catherine with him.

As they followed the slow-moving stretcher, Vincent felt the weight of the past hours and stifled a yawn. Mary took charge in the hospital chamber and shooed the rest of them away.

Vincent sighed and looked down at Catherine, seeing her dust-covered face properly now. He was too tired to eat but there was something he could do. He gently led her down the tunnels to his chamber.

"Please sit down, Catherine," he implored, indicating his chair.

"I must look a mess," she said quietly, knowing as she said it there was no mirror in this chamber to confirm that.

Vincent said nothing. He quickly gathered up a bowl, filled it with warm water from a kettle above the brazier, then extracted a towel and facecloth off a pile of them nearby. He returned to her, put the bowl on the table and wet the facecloth.

He guessed that she would have liked a mirror, but he had an answer to that.

"Let me be your mirror," he begged, as he bent kneeled down in front of her.

She turned her head up to him obediently and he gently swabbed the grime off her face. He couldn't wash her hair, but he ran his fingers through it, and dusted it with the towel, hoping that would remove the worst of the dust.

"Now you don't look like a miner," he said quietly, putting aside the bowl and towels.

"Thank-you, Vincent," she said softly. "Unfortunately, I have to leave or Joe will send out a search party. He worries about me."

"As he should," Vincent agreed.

Catherine regarded him. "You're a fine mirror – one every girl should have," she told him, smiling. "I feel much cleaner."

"I'll walk you to your threshold," he replied, gathering her hands in his and helping her to stand. He held her a little longer, feeling her strong strength and given new energy by it.

They walked out slowly, both of them tired, but with a new closeness. When they got to her threshold, they hugged with a new gratitude for their bond.

Catherine looked at Vincent closely before she turned to leave, realizing in the brighter light just how grubby he was. He must want a bath badly.

Perhaps one day he would accept her as his mirror! That was something to look forward to. It would give her pleasant dreams tonight!

END

13. China Moon

The last words of his opponent echoed in Vincent's ears as he made his weary way back to Father's chamber.

The man had used words as a weapon – and an insult. When he had called him “a demon”, Vincent had simply replied that all men were demons when their loved ones were endangered. When they were face to face, the man had dropped his sword and declared that only “monster” would kill an unarmed man. Then, when he saw that Vincent hesitated, he said it was unfortunate that Vincent was “an honourable man”. Of course, that last statement was sheer hubris. He had seen a member of his gang creeping up, but had not realized how acute his opponent's senses were until it was too late.

The man had seen him clearly, had known exactly what ploy to use to give himself an edge. He had seen that indecision in Vincent's face and knew that he had hit home. At such a close proximity, it could not have been body language alone. The man had never taken his eyes off his face.

Was his face truly that open and did it mirror his thoughts so clearly? He had always believed his face could not display emotions - yet a stranger had read it. There was no mirror in his chamber because he did not want to see his reflection, but now he almost wished there were.

What did Catherine see in his face when they were together? He could recognize her emotions, both in her face and along their bond. She had often responded to him in ways that surprised and delighted him. Had she changed him, or had his face always revealed more than he realized?

The old man had given him an unexpected gift, one that only a stranger could – that of his reflection in an impartial mirror.

END

14. The Alchemist

Vincent left Catherine's balcony feeling more at ease. He did now understand why she risked her life, just he had told her. He had never before, in his mind, equated that reality with his own reasons for risking himself. This time, it had been different.

He had faced Paracelsus, not because of any possible danger to his tunnel family – or to Catherine – for that possibility had been small, but because it was the right thing to do. So many people had already died from the drug - and he had experienced its effects firsthand. He had become a true beast, disconnected from his humanity – and that made it imperative that he stop its production.

That anyone would destroy lives in this way disgusted him – and for gold. Paracelsus tried to talk his way out of it. He had known what the drug would do, and didn't care.

What would have happened if Catherine hadn't come to him? Would he have recovered without her? He doubted it. Somehow, even in his enraged state, he had sensed her calm and love along their bond, a bond he shared with no one else. Despite his dangerous mental state, which had terrified everyone else, she had been confident that he would not be able to hurt her and reached through that madness to hug him and bring him back to his senses.

Later, she had understood his need to confront Paracelsus. Neither of them, he realized, could turn away from their responsibility. It made them what they were. They were alike, Catherine and he, in a way he had never considered before, reflections of their worlds – but also each other. They drew strength from each other.

There was no moral distinction between their worlds. The tunnel community could not pretend to be apart, only distinct. They were two halves of the same coin.

Catherine was strong and determined, and if he could help her, he would do so. He would not just be saving her from danger now - he would also be ensuring she could continue her work in her world. That added a dimension he had not expected. It thrilled him – and it was worth every sacrifice he could make.

END

15. Temptation

Vincent looked at the porcelain rose in his palm. It fit there as if made for it. He closed his eyes. He could feel Catherine's love, as if the rose transmitted it.

Roses were precious to him. He had given Catherine a dried bud in the book of Sonnets. This one was a reflection of her beauty and passion.

He looked at the little leather pouch she had made for the gift. He never wanted to be parted from it and there was only one way he could keep it close.

Rooting around in his wardrobe, he found a pair of armguards from his youth, still with their long leather thongs. He paused, remembering. Someday he must tell Catherine about Devin. Sighing, he carefully unwound the thongs then took them back to the table. He carefully punched two pairs of holes in top of the little pouch with his knife, then threaded one strip into the bag, measuring it against himself before tying a reef knot. The other lace he wound around the bag and knotted. He let the loose ends of both laces hang down. Now he could anchor the pouch to his belt, if he needed to while working.

Catherine sat in front her mirror and admired the crystal necklace where it nestled between her breasts. It was a beautiful and unique piece, a reflection of Vincent's love. Like him, it was clear and pure, without guile.

He could not have picked a better gift to mark their anniversary. She would wear it close to her heart always, every day. It already felt like it belonged there. She smiled as she carefully lay it on her vanity, then got ready for bed.

The next night, Vincent felt Catherine's desire to see him and went eagerly to her balcony. She was waiting for him, the crystal necklace hanging in a very deep V-necked sweater, almost the same colour as her skin. She had lit just one candle on the little table and her apartment was dark. They stood apart for a few moments. Catherine noticed the pouch hanging from its leather thong around Vincent's neck and she smiled at him. She knew he had seen the crystal necklace.

He opened his arms to her and she gratefully moved into them, needing that connection, that confirmation of their love. She hoped he would now be more willing to hold her like this. She was very glad she had decided to wear flat slippers. She loved to be held close against his chest, wrapped in his cloak. It didn't escape either of them that, coincidently, his rose pouch and her necklace touched as they embraced.

END

16. Promises of Someday

Vincent had forced himself to keep his emotions under control and to leave Catherine quickly, before she realized what her news had meant to him.

He had managed to keep his wits about him long enough to tell her that he had carved the names she had seen in their culvert entrance – that the man she had followed had looked for and found. Vincent could not say anything more. His heart was racing and he felt as if he was going into shock.

There was only one person who knew of that escapade, because he had been there. Devin - his brother. Vincent had known in his heart that Devin had probably run away in anger and wasn't dead, but had not told anyone - especially Father.

After all these years, why had he returned? Why was he being so secretive? Devin knew all the entry ways – and even if some were now closed, he could have found one, if he had chosen to. Why had he chosen the park culvert? Was that the way he had left, all those years ago?

Vincent felt the pouch around his neck, which hung from the thongs he had worn around his arm guards those last days before Devin disappeared. He had always blamed himself and had never worn them again, or any of his other clothing from that time. The memories were too painful. Odd that he should have been thinking of his brother so very recently. The thongs had reminded him.

Devin and he had been very close. His older brother had been everything Vincent had wanted to be. They had done so much together. Yet he had left without so much as a goodbye.

When he got back to his chamber, Vincent carefully extracted the toy carousel from his trunk and put it on his table. The pain in his chest was still intense. The pleasure he had enjoyed that night had been overshadowed by what followed – the fight with Devin on the stairs, the slashes his brother still obviously carried on his face. Those, if nothing else, confirmed the mysterious man's identity.

Where had he been all this time? What would he think of them all now? Would he consent to seeing Father? There had been a lot of harsh words between them, heard by everyone.

There was so much that needed to be said to allow closure of those terrible days. His welcome would be a reflection of his world's strength. He was sure Devin would not be shunned.

What would Devin do next? Would he return to the culvert? Vincent sincerely hoped so. He was obviously curious about the tunnel world he had left so long ago.

Then he remembered that Catherine said his brother was now working in her office, under an assumed name. So he wouldn't just disappear again, at least not immediately. With her help, perhaps Devin could be convinced to visit them.

With a huge sigh, Vincent let out his breath and felt his chest muscles relax. He had missed his brother more than anyone else in his life. He had lost a friend, a mirror who reflected his fantasies and made them real. They had played them out together, as any two boys would.

He must keep a close watch on the culvert entrance. It would be best if he escorted Devin in. Then Father might not explode at the prodigal's return. His brother's reconciliation was long overdue.

END

17. Down to a Sunless Sea

There was so much gloom ... between them, Vincent thought. It seemed to overshadow them as they stood on her balcony.

Certainly there was sadness on Catherine's part - and he always felt emotionally drained after a fight to save her. It didn't matter that he'd had no choice, as she said. How could she understand what came over him at such times? He was outside her experience and no words of his could explain it adequately. He could also feel Catherine's remorse overshadowing everything else - even the sight of the City at night. She was ashamed that she had not seen Steven for what he was – sick in more than body, and obsessed with her.

But she had known, as he had told her. Deep inside she had felt the danger, but had overridden that fear in order to do what she thought was a good deed to an ailing man - someone she had once cared about.

Catherine's heart always trumped her brain, much as his own did. They were so alike that way. They lived though their hearts

Vincent had always struggled to separate his deep emotions from his rational self, but now he realized they could not be separated. They had to be considered together, to work together. There were not two Vincents in his inner mirror, but only one – conflicted as all men were.

Catherine, he knew, had always cared deeply for people, but had not reconciled that with the cold realities of her world. Then she had been attacked and brought below. She had returned to her world a different person – stronger. She knew that she wanted to use her heart and her intellect to help others.

Could she reconcile those two now? he wondered. He moved closer and put an arm around her, trying to send her peace along their bond. She leaned into him and, taking that for an invitation, he turned to enclose her in his arms and surround her with his cloak.

This was how he saw them in his dreams, together. She was a little tense, then he felt her relax and knew that she had found some inner peace. He didn't know if he had helped, but he hoped so. Her love for him was unchanged. He could still feel her inner warmth, which went straight to his own heart.

Her inner mirror would now reflect both her heart and her mind together and she would be more inclined to listen to her inner voice. As he had once told her - it seemed so long ago - those doubts could keep her alive. He knew that she also understood his own conflicts a little better.

He gave a great sigh and held her tightly. They had survived another challenge.

END

18. Fever

Vincent stood hidden in the shadows of the alley, watching the door. It had taken he and Winslow a long difficult hour to haul the heavy chest above. After they had rung the bell, he had stayed behind. He wanted to be sure the Mission received it safely – but also to think in peace and quiet.

The treasure, he mused, had exposed the challenges of their world apart. They had fallen prey to its promise of bettering their world, of helping their helpers.

They had seen hope and prosperity in the glitter of its gold, and seen the reflection of those desires on each other's faces. Even Father's logic had not moved them.

But he, Vincent, had felt himself apart as never before. He alone had been unmoved by the treasure. Was it selfishness on his part? All the gold in the world would not change his aloneness, allow him to walk with Catherine in daylight.

Perhaps he had not truly understood the lure of gold. He had read about greed and gold fever, but had never experienced them personally – or seen their shadow in his tunnel world. His arguments had not swayed his family because they sensed he lacked first hand knowledge.

Cullen's words had been cruel, but he had only voiced what many were thinking - and then acted upon it. When the danger had been brought home, the trance had come to an abrupt end. They had all realized they could not accept the treasure and remain who and what they were.

In the end, the safety of their world and their respect for each other had proven worth more than gold. They had almost sent the chest into the Abyss in symbolic exorcism. Vincent was glad they had agreed to this solution.

Suddenly, there was a loud grinding noise and the back door to the Mission opened. Two nuns looked down at the chest, puzzled, then opened it. What he saw on their faces reassured him.

These nuns belonged to a world apart too, but one where windfalls and miracles were not unheard of. Their organization would know how to convert this one into good.

Vincent signed deeply. He waited until the nuns had dragged the chest inside, then quietly returned to the tunnels.

He had learned something about himself that he could have learned no other way, he reflected. Knowledge was strength.

END

19. Everything is Everything

Catherine hated it when Vincent had to meet a stranger for the first time - almost as much as he did. Yet, despite his initial, obvious fear on seeing Vincent, Tony hadn't lost his power of speech and had said what came into his mind. That memory made her smile as she and Vincent began the long walk back to the home tunnels.

Vincent looked down at her, his arm still holding her close to him. He could sense her amusement.

"What?" he asked gently.

Catherine looked up at him and stopped, moving into a hug. When he released her, they both sighed, but Vincent raised his eyebrows. He still wanted an answer. She chuckled softly. Vincent was not easily distracted.

"When Tony first saw you, he was frightened, but still had the guts to say he had never seen anyone like you before. That boy would face a tiger and ask why it had stripes. But your answer was perfect. *'There's never been anyone like me before'*. I don't know how you do it."

Vincent was silent for a few moments, then spoke quietly. "Catherine, I'm over 30. I have seen myself mirrored in the eyes of many strangers coming to us to escape your world. I know what they see. Humour helps – for me and for them."

"Just the same, Vincent, you never spoke truer words. There hasn't been anyone like you before. Never. You see through people to their core and make them think, face their fear and discard it. You respond as if you read their minds."

"Catherine, I can read emotions on faces and sometimes sense them as well. Father says I'm empathic. Nevertheless, I know the first sight of my face will always be one of fear. Children are more inclined to wonder than fear – but Tony is an old child. He has seen much and had to face the world as an adult.

"I know that new arrivals will be surprised that I can talk - but more that I can see humour in the situation. Their response is automatic. It makes me more human."

Catherine sighed. "You're remarkable, Vincent - in every way. I now see the world through your eyes, all of its fears and flaws."

"Yet it has wonders too, Catherine - you not least of all. Thanks to you, I have seen more, been able to help. That is worth everything to me."

He pulled her close to him again, and this time they hugged for a long time. There was no more need for words as they entered the home tunnels hand in hand.

END

20. To Reign in Hell

Vincent watched the faces of the children as he finished the story of Catherine's abduction and rescue. It had been a difficult story to relate, but the tunnel community never hid the truth from its children. They passed along their history this way, like the storytellers of old. He was sure this story would be told many times.

Their adventure had all the elements that thrilled children - bravery, danger, even death. But it had been a story of love most of all, the strong love which bound them all below.

Love had convinced Vincent to allow Winslow and Pascal to accompany him on the rescue mission. Winslow had told them that love – and his belief in the love of Vincent and Catherine - had motivated him to come in the first place. Love had made Jamie follow them and turn the tide of their fight with Orlick, although Winslow had died. Finally, love had drawn Vincent to go alone to find Catherine and confront Paracelsus.

Paracelsus had tried to use his distorted version of love to poison Vincent's regard for Father – but had failed because it could not convince. Love could not be used that way - even the tunnel children knew that.

Father had suspected what Paracelsus would attempt and given Vincent a hint, but after the loss of Winslow and the threat to Catherine, that had been unnecessary. Vincent would not treat with a man who so discarded people, who seemed to care about nothing but himself - and not for the first time. Father's words had come back to him afterwards, when he and Catherine were returning home.

Paracelsus had miscalculated – again. He did not know Vincent at all and had no understanding of the years of mutual regard, honesty, cooperation – and love - which made the tunnel community possible. He had tried to get Vincent to see himself differently, in a mirror distorted by Paracelsus' decades of bitterness.

The man was obsessed with power and gold, and saw nothing beyond his vengeance. Even his voice, used to maximum effect, could not convince, for his words were poison.

The loss of Winslow had been a blow to the whole community, but especially the children. They had loved him, despite his gruff exterior. They had never been fooled by it - and would not forget that Paracelsus was responsible for their friend's death.

Vincent knew that their enemy would not give up. They were all in danger now, but especially the children. They had to understand the lessons in the tale - that decisions, even when made for love, did not prevent bad things happening. Sometimes heroes died – and all those left behind could do was mourn and remember.

Love didn't die though. That was the ultimate lesson. Love was part of their history and the tales they told the children.

The children looked at him, almost as one, and he knew they had understood. He gave an inward sigh, and smiled at them.

END