

I'm Okay, I'm Okay

by Barbara Anderson

An Arabesque expansion story.

**This story is interspersed with scenes and dialog from the Beauty and the Beast episode: Arabesque written by Virginia Aldridge.*

PG-13 for Violence



Catherine Chandler had learned from experience how vitally important it was to always be aware of her surroundings. The now faint scars on her face and the scar on her back from Mitch Denton's bullet, were constant reminders of that. She knew more than most that for all of its wonders and beauties, New York City was also a dangerous place with a sinister underbelly that showed little mercy to those who fell prey to it. She also knew that her safety, and even her very life, depended upon her constant vigilance.

In practice, however, Catherine had discovered how difficult it was to be on her guard every single moment. In the weeks and months after her face was slashed, she felt as if danger lurked in every alley and around every blind corner. That fear eventually took its toll on her mental and emotional well-being. In an effort to find a balance, she had made a conscious choice to eschew the fear and distrust in humanity that nearly paralyzed her and embrace faith in the inherent goodness of humanity... even in New York City. It was the only way she could find the courage to step out of her front door every day. Well... that and training with Isaac Stubbs in the techniques of street fighting.

Unfortunately, *that* choice had backfired on her more than once. She was well aware that if not for Vincent and the Bond they shared, she more than likely would have lost her life on more than one occasion. And though she worried about the toll it might be taking on him, she still struggled to find the balance between living in constant fear and finding the courage to live her life in spite of any dangers she might face.

'Sometimes your fear can keep you alive, Catherine.' Vincent had counseled on more than one occasion. *'You should listen to it more often.'*

How many times has he told me that? she wondered. Then she would remind herself that it was Vincent who had also encouraged her to face her fears.

How can I do both? she often asked herself in frustration. *How am I supposed to live with fear **and** face my fears at the same time?*

She had only recently begun to realize that her newfound courage in the presence of danger came at great expense to Vincent. She knew that now. He had sent her away after the incident with the Outsiders. After what he was forced to do to protect his Tunnel home and her from certain annihilation, he couldn't bear for her to look at him. His terrible shame had driven him deep beneath the city where she could not reach him. He had sent her away and then disappeared for weeks afterward. At the time, she feared she might never see him again. Fortunately, he had returned to her, and Catherine had resolved to be more cautious in the future.

Unfortunately for them both, fate had other plans...



It was mid-March, but it felt more like April as Catherine stepped out of her office building in Lower Manhattan. She breathed deeply and was sure she detected a hint of spring in the air. After a long, dreary winter and a long day cooped up in her office behind a stack of case files it felt like blessed freedom. It was dark, but after ten hours trapped behind her desk, she just couldn't bring herself to be cramped in a taxi for the duration of the ride home.

I think I'll walk for a while, she decided. She had a lot on her mind and walking always helped to clear her head. *Besides,* she concluded, *if I keep to the busy, well-lit streets, I should be fine.*

Despite her good intentions, Catherine's surroundings disappeared as her thoughts drifted to the last conversation she'd had with Vincent.



Catherine met Vincent at the Central Park Tunnel entrance to tell him what she had discovered about his old friend, Lisa Campbell. She expected him to invite her in, but he seemed uncomfortable and reticent to let her even approach him. So, Catherine kept her distance.

“She’s involved with a man who’s about to be indicted for arms smuggling,” she informed him. “There’s a good chance she’ll be called to testify against him.”

Vincent sighed heavily, “For Lisa to come back to us, I knew there were other reasons.”

“I’m sorry,” Catherine said. “Her performances were cancelled. She’s probably gotten herself out of the country by now.”

“Catherine... she’s with us,” Vincent admitted, reluctantly.

Her response was one of surprise. “She is?”

Why didn’t he send me word? she wondered. That isn’t like him.

Nodding, he confirmed his previous statement, knowing Catherine would wonder why he hadn’t sent word to her sooner.

“Well...” she said, trying to smile, “At least we know where she is.”

Her response did nothing to dispel the tension between them.

“Yes,” he replied uncomfortably. He sighed heavily, not knowing what to say next.

As she regarded him thoughtfully, Catherine could tell that something was terribly wrong. He was bent forward as if he were carrying a great invisible weight on his shoulders. His sadness hung like a heavy cloud between them.

“What does this woman mean to you, Vincent?” she asked, almost afraid to hear the answer. “Can you tell me?”

He stared at her for a moment, searching for the words. The pain and shame in his eyes tore at her very soul.

As if reading her thoughts, he turned away from her gaze and leaned against the gate, as if he didn’t have the strength to stand on his own.

“There are moments,” he finally said. “Images I remember so clearly... burning so deeply...”

“Tell me about those moments,” she asked gently as she stepped closer to him. She wanted nothing more than to comfort him, to take him in her arms and soothe away his pain. But his pain was so deep and so wide that it created a terrible gulf between them. She didn’t know how to reach him.

Finally forcing himself to look at her again, Vincent began, “It was a time when I first felt the tremendous joy that dreams could bring. Intoxication of sending your heart soaring into the realm of hope, at that same time that I...” He stopped and sighed again, then forced himself to continue. “...I learned that for me, dreams could bring more pain than I could ever bear. Enough pain to destroy me; even those around me.”

Catherine was astounded. She needed to know what was tearing him apart, but at the same time she dreaded what he might be trying to tell her. “How? What happened?” she finally asked.

Hanging his head forlornly, Vincent remained silent.

“You can tell me,” she assured him. “You can tell me anything.” And she meant it. No matter what happened between them, she concluded. It couldn’t be worse than not knowing and fearing the worst. She could see that whatever it was, it was tearing him apart.

Vincent, however, was certain that telling Catherine the truth of what he was and what had happened between himself, and Lisa would destroy their dream.

NO! he decided. If I tell her... it would ruin everything... everything.

“I once thought that,” Vincent said looking at her doubtfully. “...but there are things... things that I had dreamt away.”

*Catherine could hardly believe what she was hearing as she realized he intended to keep it from her, despite a promise he had once made to her. She could feel the heat rising in her face as she reminded him, “We’ve never withheld the truth from each other...**never.**”*

Vincent studied her closely, the disbelief and pain in her expression breaking his heart, ripping his soul to shreds as he came to realize that he had always kept the truth from her.



By Lynette Parker

“I know,” he said disconsolately. Slowly he entered the portal and closed the gate behind him, leaving Catherine standing there, bewildered and alone. He looked at her one more time before pulling the lever and shutting the heavy steel door behind him.

As the darkness closed in around her, Catherine felt as if he was shutting her out of his life for good.



The pain of that night was still raw. “Vincent—” Catherine whispered aloud, aching to find a way to help him,

“Hey... what...?” she exclaimed as she felt someone put an arm around her shoulder and steer her roughly toward the street.

“Let’s go for a little drive, shall we?” a sinister yet oddly familiar voice growled in her ear. It was then that she detected what could only be a gun sticking into her side.

Colin Hemmings, Lisa Campbell’s ever faithful and fearless watch dog, had been trailing her, waiting for just the right moment to grab her, and shove her into the back seat of his car. Catherine had only let her guard down for a few moments, but one careless moment was all he’d needed.

“You must think I’m stupid, Miss Chandler...” he sneered sarcastically as the car pulled into the traffic. “Brookhill School of the Arts...I checked... there is no such school... never has been. Is Catherine Chandler even your real name? Or is that fake too?”

“Try the white pages,” she said, with false bravado. “I’m in the phone book.” Catherine tried to put on a brave face as she attempted to get her bearings.

“Where is Lisa?” Colin demanded, still pointing the gun at her.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked, ignoring his question as she tried to catch sight of a street sign as they drove through an intersection.

“Someplace we can have a private conversation,” he answered cryptically. “Unless you tell me where Lisa is now, and then I’ll gladly drop you off at the next street corner.”

She scoffed at his false promise. “I’m not stupid either, Mr... Hemmings, is it? I’m sure Mr. Taggart isn’t very happy that his ‘ever faithful and fearless watchdog’ has lost his favorite prima ballerina. Leaving stray witnesses roaming around wouldn’t help you get back in his good graces, now, would it?”

Colin’s eyes widened as he realized she knew much more than he had realized. “Where... is... Lisa?” he demanded through clenched teeth.

Catherine knew full well that he would kill her as soon as she gave him the information he wanted. *Anyway*, she surmised. *I don’t know precisely where she is, and I wouldn’t tell you if I did.* She decided the best she could do now was to buy herself some time and hope she could think of a way out of the mess she was in.

“I don’t know where Lisa is. I haven’t seen her since the night of the ballet.” Technically what she told him was true, though she knew Lisa had since taken refuge in the Tunnels. But there was nothing that would ever induce her to divulge that to anyone. She had long since made a promise not to betray the Tunnels, and she intended to keep it.

“Liar!” Colin yelled as he slapped her across the face. “I’m finished playing nice. There’s more where that came from if you don’t tell me where she is!”

Catherine felt the sting of his hand on her face but refused to give him the satisfaction of knowing how much it hurt. She could feel a welt beginning to rise where his ring had scraped across her cheek, but she remained silent.

It was then that Catherine thought of Vincent. *He must know I’m in danger by now*, she realized. Then turning her thoughts directly to him she attempted to send a message. *Don’t come for me, Vincent! STAY AWAY! It’s too dangerous!*

It wasn’t long before the car pulled in behind a derelict building. The windows were boarded up and the area looked dark and deserted. She was pretty sure they were somewhere in Hell’s Kitchen and wondered if she could make a run for it if given the chance. *Maybe I can find a manhole, or a basement tunnel entrance*, she thought hopefully.

Unfortunately, she didn't get that chance. Colin and his driver dragged her from the vehicle and into the building. Catherine went limp in an effort to slow them down, but they were much larger than she was, and it didn't take much effort for them to drag her up the stairs to the top floor of the abandoned factory. At the top they pushed Catherine forward and shoved her to the floor.

Looking up she noticed the moon shining in through a hole in a cracked and dingy skylight just above her.



“Do you remember the first time you saw the moon?”¹ Vincent asked.

Catherine laughed. What a ridiculous question, she thought. “Who would remember the first...” she began to ask. Then it occurred to her that Vincent might. She looked at him curiously and asked, “Can you?”

“Mmmm-hmmmm,” he answered simply.

When they turned to look back at the moon, Catherine wondered what other seemingly ordinary things she had always taken for granted had special meaning to the man she loved...



Isn't it strange, she wondered, the things that come to mind when you're about to die?

It was then that Colin's companion lifted her up from the floor and slammed her back against the wall.

“I think it's only fair to warn you,” Catherine began. “... that there are people who *will* come looking for me. You'll never get away with this. Even if you kill me, they'll find my body, and *then* they'll find you.”

Colin's companion backhanded her with all his brute strength. The shock of it took her breath away and she could taste the blood where her teeth cut into the soft flesh inside her mouth.

¹ Dialog from the BATB episode, Brothers, written by GEORGE RR MARTIN

“That’s where you’re wrong, Miss Chandler,” Colin said. “We *will* get away with it, just like we have many times before.” He looked around the room and laughed sadistically. “This building is going to be demolished tomorrow morning.” Then pointing to the exposed rafters, he said, “You see... up there?”

Catherine’s heart sunk when she looked in the direction he was pointing and realized he was telling the truth. She could see that the building had already been rigged with explosives.

Colin laughed again. “So, Miss Chandler... by this time tomorrow there won’t be anything left of you to find. You will be ground to dust in a pile of rubble.”

Without saying anything, the nameless thug began hitting her again. Catherine was barely able to catch her breath between strikes, but she felt strangely calm and refused to show them how much pain she was in. Just as she thought she might lose consciousness, he stopped momentarily.

“Now tell me! ***Where... is... Lisa?!?!***” Colin demanded once again.

“I... don’t... know,” Catherine replied breathlessly.

“Wrong answer,” Colin said. Then tapping his companion on the shoulder, the two men switched places.

As Catherine began to crumple to the floor, Colin took hold of her with one arm and pulled her up. Towering threateningly over her he spoke softly. “All right, let’s try again, shall we?”

He then nodded to his companion and several rotted pieces of wood went flying as the man used his arm to break a decaying portion of the wall.

“You see,” Colin began in a sickeningly sweet tone that made the hair on Catherine’s arms stand up. “It’s just that easy with a human limb. John’s done it a thousand times, haven’t you, John?”

John, Catherine took note of the man’s name. *His name is John.*

Both men smiled eerily, as if contemplating breaking her bones gave them some sort of sick pleasure.

Colin reached up with his free hand and gently brushed the hair from Catherine’s face, making her feel nauseous at his touch. “And you wouldn’t be the first woman—”

His words were suddenly interrupted by the unmistakable sound of Vincent's rage, as he came crashing through the filthy skylight just above their heads.

Shards of glass and debris fell on John as Colin grabbed Catherine attempting to use her as a human shield from whatever it was that had interrupted his little faire la fête.

As Catherine struggled with Colin, Vincent lashed out at John, slashing his face before throwing him through a wall.

Satisfied that John posed no more danger, Vincent turned to Colin in time to see him holding a gun to Catherine's head. When Vincent bared his teeth, Colin decided to point the gun in Vincent's direction.

In a split-second, Catherine saw that Vincent was in grave danger. She knew instantly that she must do something, or she and Vincent would both be dead. *Either that or Vincent will have another death on his conscience to deal with,* she realized.

I won't let him carry this burden alone, she decided in that instant. *Not anymore!*

Whether it was her street-fighting training with Isaac Stubbs or sheer animal instinct, she found the strength to swing her elbow into Colin's gut with all her might. As he doubled over, she grabbed for the gun, and they began to struggle for their lives. Catherine knew she had no choice but to overpower him.

Vincent stood frozen, watching in horror as the scene played before his eyes. When the gun went off, Vincent felt his heart stop in terror. Rushing to Catherine, he embraced her from behind, as Colin, mortally wounded, fell to the floor.

Vincent lowered Catherine to the floor as she seemed to go limp in his arms.

As he checked her for injuries, she breathlessly assured him, "I'm okay... I'm okay."

I almost lost her, he thought as he rocked her back and forth. *I almost lost her.* Holding her ever tighter he pressed his cheek against her head and kissed her hair.

"Catherine... oh, Catherine..." he whispered as he continued to rock back and forth.

"I'm okay... I'm okay..." she said again.



By Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

*No, Catherine, Vincent thought. You are not okay... **WE** are not okay.*



Three Weeks Later...

It was nearly midnight when Vincent entered Father's study with his cloak folded over one arm. He stood at the top of the steps silently watching as Jacob read from one of his favorite volumes. The Tunnel community slumbered at this late

hour and the pipes were quiet. It was the only time of day that Jacob Wells was able to spare a little time for himself and Vincent was reluctant to disturb him.

“Are you going to just stand there? Or are you coming in?” Father asked, peering over the top of his glasses.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, Father,” Vincent replied. “I know you have precious little time for yourself.”

“Is there something on your mind, son?” Jacob asked, even though he could clearly see that there was.

Vincent came down the steps and laid his cloak over the chair in front of Father’s desk but chose to keep standing.

Noticing the cloak, Father said. “You’re going Above, I see.”

“Yes, I... I received word from Catherine that Lisa testified in front of the grand jury today. It appears that her testimony will put her, uhm... the man she was involved with behind bars for quite some time.”

“And what is to become of Lisa?” Father asked, worried what havoc she might cause if she wished to return to the Tunnels. His concerns were quickly put to rest.

“She is in protective custody until the trial is over.” Vincent informed him. “... or until the prosecutor is satisfied that there is no longer any danger to her. I don’t know what will happen after that.”

“And I suppose you are going above to see her one last time... to bid her farewell?”

“No...” Vincent replied, leaning on the back of the chair with both hands. “Lisa and I... we have already said our goodbyes. I’m going to see Catherine. I need to tell her... about Lisa... about what happened between us... about what I did to her.”

Father removed his glasses and scrutinized his son. “Do you think that’s wise?”

Vincent’s blue eyes clouded over. “I don’t know if it’s ‘wise’” he replied. “What I *do know* is that it’s the right thing to do. It is what I *must* do.”

Father considered Vincent’s words carefully. “You told me once that it was Catherine... your relationship with her... that was the only thing keeping you alive. Do you still believe that?”

Vincent nodded. “Yes,” he answered simply.

The expression on his face was impossible for Father to read.

“I’ve been wrestling with this ever since Lisa returned,” Vincent continued. “The guilt of keeping it from Catherine has become unbearable. She deserves to know the truth.”

Father leaned forward, looking at his son with great concern. “And you are willing to risk what the two of you share by telling her this truth?”

Vincent began to pace back and forth, clearly agitated. “*I must...*” he finally said. “I owe her that much.”

“Even if it means you might drive her away for good?”

Jacob realized the irony of his attempt to convince Vincent to change his mind. *There was a time when I would have welcomed any reason for Catherine to stay away from him*, he acknowledged. *Now I fear what will happen if she does.*

“When Catherine was here for the first time...” Vincent tried to explain as he leaned against the desk. “...when she was healing... I promised her that she was safe here... with me. She believed me, Father. She *trusted me*. Can you imagine what that meant for me... *to me*? For someone as beautiful, and fine, and gentle as Catherine... even after what happened to her... that she could trust... *me*. It meant the world to me.”

“Yes,” Father replied. “I know it did, but you have never broken that promise, Vincent. She has always been safe with you. You have saved her life on more than one occasion—”

“And she has saved *mine*, Father... in more ways than one,” he said, beginning to pace again. “Her courage has saved me as well as others who live here on many occasions...” Then turning to face his father, “...including *you*.”

“I know *that*, Vincent... and I *am* grateful... *truly I am*... for all she has done... all she has come to mean to this community. But I still do not understand why you feel the need to tell her the truth *now*... after all this time.”

“Because I made another promise as well... when she was bandaged... frightened... in the dark. I promised her that I would never withhold the truth from her.”

Father looked perplexed. “You promised her what?” He stood up, shocked by what Vincent had revealed to him. “How could you...? I mean...” he stammered. “Why... would you? When you knew...”

“When I knew I could never keep that promise?”

The two men stared at each other.

Vincent threw his hands up in despair. “Because I... I wanted her to feel safe...” Vincent tried to explain. “... and because I wanted it to be true.” He dropped heavily into the chair next to the desk and slumped in despair and regret, holding his head in his hands.

“We’ve never withheld the truth from each other,” he said in a whisper. “That’s what she said. That is what she believed... until now. Now she knows... she knows that I have *always* withheld the truth from her.” He looked up at his father again. “I’ve betrayed her trust, Father... I’ve broken my promise.”

“Is that why she has stayed away for the past few weeks?” Father inquired.

“Because she is angry?”

“No...” Vincent huffed at the very thought and shook his head. “Catherine is not angry. I have felt many emotions in her over the last three weeks, but anger is not one of them... although I believe it would be justified.”

“How can you be so certain that she isn’t angry?” Father insisted.

“Because I can feel her, Father,” Vincent said, putting his hand over his heart. “I can feel that she’s worried and hurt... even disappointed. I can only guess because I have let her down... perhaps because I didn’t trust her enough to tell her the truth in the first place. But over all of that... I can feel her love for me... a love I am not worthy of. I expected that she might attempt to close herself off to me, but if anything, it feels as if... as if her heart is more open than it has ever been... as if she is consciously trying to communicate her love through the Bond we share.”

Father was confused. “If she wants to communicate with you, why doesn’t she just come here and speak with you in person?”

“Because I shut her out. And because...” Vincent sighed heavily. “...when she asked what Lisa meant to me, I... I was so consumed with shame that I couldn’t bring myself to tell her the truth. Instead, I... I closed the portal and left her standing alone in the dark... in Central Park... in the middle of the night...” He shook his head in disgust as he recalled his actions of that night. “That act in itself

is unforgivable. But instead of being angry... she is waiting for me to come to her... in my own time... when *I* am ready. She still has faith that I will.”

Vincent stood again and resumed pacing the floor. “All this time...” He clenched his fists and growled in frustration. “All this time... I told myself that I was keeping the truth from her because I didn’t want to frighten her. But now I realize...” He sat down again, not wanting to utter the hopeless truth aloud. Finally in a much more subdued tone, he admitted, “Now I realize that I was afraid that if she knew what I truly am... what I am capable of... that she would turn from me... that the dream we share would crumble to dust in my hands.”

Opening his hands, he looked down and hated what he saw. He hated his great, hairy, clawed, and deadly hands. Hands he was convinced could never safely love someone as beautiful and fine as Catherine.

“And now you *are* ready?” Father asked quietly, trying not to agitate his son any further. “You have kept the truth from her all this time. What has changed... what is different *now*?”

Vincent looked into his father’s eyes. “She killed a man.” Saying it out loud made it seem more real somehow. “She killed a man... trying to protect me.”

Father sat forward in his chair, unsure he had heard correctly. “Catherine did what?” he asked incredulously.

“The night I brought her here, bloody and beaten... the night Lisa’s bodyguard abducted her off the street. They were trying to force her to tell them where Lisa was, but she would never betray our secret. By the time I reached her, she had already been badly beaten...” He stopped, horrified by the memory and the possibility of what could have happened to her. “We fought with them... I killed one. Catherine was struggling with the other. He pointed his gun at her head and then at me.”

Father listened in horror. “Good Heaven’s, Vincent!” he exclaimed.

“When he pointed the gun at me, I... I saw something... a flash of something in her eyes... a primal fear when she realized he was going to kill me... and suddenly she...”

“What? Vincent... please tell me,” Father begged.

“She became... different... menacing and wild. She hit him with a strength beyond her own, and they began to wrestle for the gun. He was much larger than her, but

she was so fierce... somehow, she overpowered him, and then... the gun went off. He closed his eyes momentarily against the vision.

“In those few moments...” he finally said. “I saw something in her that...”

“Something that you have only ever seen in yourself?” Jacob suggested.

Vincent looked at Father in disbelief. And yet, he knew it was true. “She killed that man... *to protect me*. She risked her own life to save mine because...” He fell silent at the very thought.

“...because she loves you,” Father said, finishing his sentence. “She loves you more than she loves her own life... with the same intensity and fierceness that you love her.”

Vincent nodded somberly. “But that love is based on lies, half-truths, and broken promises. That is why I *must* tell her. She must know that I am not worthy of her love.”

“My boy,” Jacob replied tenderly. “If only those who were worthy of love received it... this world would be a very dark and miserable place.”

Refusing to be comforted, Vincent replied, “At the very least, Father, she deserves to know what I truly am... that it is not safe for her to love me... or for me to love her. She must know that the things she dreams for us... can *never* be. These hands... can *never* love her.” He held his hands out to Jacob, as if to prove what he was saying was true.

“Even if it destroys what the two of you share, together?” Jacob asked, worried beyond measure for the life of his son. “Even if it destroys you?”

“Yes... even if it destroys me,” Vincent said resolutely. “I owe her that much.”

“And what if it destroys Catherine?” Jacob asked.

Vincent shuddered at the thought of causing her more pain, but he could see no other path. Shaking his head, he answered, “I don’t know, Father. She nearly went to her grave not knowing the truth I have kept from her. What I do know is that continuing to keep the truth from her *will* destroy what we have. I can feel it has already begun. Catherine must be free to decide for herself and to do what she must. I promised her once that I would never withhold the truth from her. It’s time I started keeping that promise.”

Father stood and came around the desk. Putting a hand on Vincent’s shoulder, he said, “Then I will be praying for you, Vincent... I will be praying for you both.”

Vincent stood to embrace the man who had loved him and stood by him through thick and thin his entire life. “Thank you, Father,” hugging him tightly. “Thank you.”



Vincent had been standing in the darkest corner of Catherine’s balcony for more than an hour. The apartment was dark, and Catherine was sleeping, albeit restlessly.

He sighed, remembering the first time he had come to her balcony. *I hid in this very corner*, he thought. *She welcomed me with open arms.*

This may be the last time I ever come to her balcony, he realized. He could feel his heart beating in his ears as he contemplated the words he must say to make Catherine understand the truth of what he was. Trying to imagine how he might go on with his life without her in it filled his heart with dread.

Catherine was the end of my aloneness, he thought. *I don’t know if I have the strength to face it again.*

As he looked toward the room where she slept, her bedroom light came on, softly illuminating the balcony through her sheer curtains. *She’s not sleeping well*, he realized. *Is it because of me?* he wondered.

Just then the door opened, and Catherine stepped out. She looked like a vision of loveliness to Vincent as she stood breathing in the cool spring air. He knew the lights of the city always calmed her. He didn’t have to guess at what she was thinking. He could feel the aching in her heart and knew that he was the cause of it.

“Catherine,” he whispered, trying not to frighten her.

She turned toward him and smiled softly. “I wonder if I’ll ever not be surprised to see you there,” she said, welcoming him with all her heart.

Instead of being warmed by the love she conveyed, he was convicted by it.

Unable to look into her eyes, he bowed his head in shame. “We’ve never withheld the truth from each other,” he uttered with deep regret.

“No,” was her simple reply.

“Catherine...” He breathed deeply, summoning the courage to go on. “There are things I must tell you about who I am... and *what* I am.”

Catherine approached him carefully, knowing instinctively how fragile and vulnerable he was in that moment. “Vincent,” she said, speaking slowly and clearly as she walked toward him. She wanted to be sure that he understood exactly what she was saying to him. “...to me... you’re beautiful.”

He closed his eyes and let her heartfelt words wash over him, wishing to the very depths of his soul that they were true. Then forcing himself to look her in the eyes, he said, “What I have to tell you is not beautiful... it’s terrifying and shameful, but it is the truth.”

Drawing ever closer, she opened her heart fully to him, and looking into his pain filled eyes, she said, “Then I want to hear it.”

“It’s about Lisa and what she meant in my life,” he began.

And in that moment, old and deep wounds finally began to be healed.

