



Broken Bond, Broken Heart

By JessicaRae

*In the old religion,
they called it Samhain.*

It's the night

*when the walls 'tween
the worlds grow thin,*

*and spirits of the underworld
walk the earth.*

*A night of masks
and balefires,*

*when anything is possible, and
nothing is quite as it seems.*

Countless Halloweens had passed, more than Vincent cared to remember at the moment. Each one was always preceded by the mad hustle and chaos of helpers bringing supplies below.

There was glue and scraps of everything from paper to burlap all over the candle making room, even candy appearing in the kitchen, corralled into a great copper bowl set on a high shelf that William begrudgingly took down nearly every quarter hour during the entire week leading up to the great night, to allow one or the other of the children to curiously pilfer through. He swore every year that he would just set it on the table and allow them to take what they wanted as he had too much going on to be gatekeeper of the candy. But each year they insisted he provide them with a Dracula voiced version of "Come my pretties, what shall it be today?"

Secretly, the strong ox of a man loved having a little attention from the eager smiling faces of the little ones. One could say he was quite proud of the opportunity, and he dutifully filled the bowl each year.

On this cool October night, the chatter of the children carried down the tunnels to Vincent's chambers and a bittersweet love tugged at his heart. On a good day, he enjoyed their ceaseless chatter. On a bad day, it made his head hurt and his skin crawl. There were not many bad days, only a few where the Other rose up a bit too strongly and robbed him of the joy he always had in his heart because of *her*.

Today was one of the bad days – because he was without *her*.

It was one day before Halloween night, and while all the children were eagerly running up and down the tunnels working on their spooky and sweet masterpieces to wear Above, Vincent found himself withdrawing into himself.

She would have loved this, as she did each year, laughing along with the children and helping them make up grand stories for their monster costumes. "I am going to get you!" she would hiss at them, sending the wide-eyed little ones squealing with delight back toward Rebecca's candle room where the glue and cloth had been relegated, to keep some order in the tunnels.

Father was quite worried about glue somehow making its way into the library where his valuable volumes resided. This happened because one year Samantha suggested being a book belle and making a ballgown of burlap with book pages glued to it. Father immediately turned ashen and banished all Halloween activities to the candle room where nothing could be destroyed.

Rebecca was a gentle saint at the change in plans, moving her supplies to one side and setting up a table for the little ones to create to their heart's content. Some of the other tunnel folk took turns helping with the glue and scissors, and that settled Father's mind. Vincent sat up on the side of the bed and rested his head in his hands. It had been months since Catherine had vanished into the night, and he had found no enjoyment this year in the preparations for the holiday. She should have been here for this, just like every year before. She would have been here.

But why was she not? He had no answers.

He reached out through the Bond to touch her, and still felt nothing. A small growl of frustration escaped his lips, and he curled his hands into tight fists until his knuckles protested from the pressure. The agony of the emptiness burned into his heart, a squeezing, aching pain. Every breath hurt and his ears rang with the strain of holding back the terrible broken roar that tumbled about in his chest.

"Vincent?"

He snarled again as the quiet voice filled the silent chamber and he raised his head to see Peter Alcott, the doctor from Above who was their most trusted helper from Above.

"Forgive me Vincent, I did not mean to intrude. I just wanted to check on you while I was here. I came below to bring more glue and some feathers for Kipper. Apparently, he has decided to go Above as a goose this year. I dare say Jacob will be quite appalled at the state of the candle room just now. Rebecca has the patience of a saint."

Peter brushed a few stray feathers from his jacket and Vincent watched them drift slowly to the floor, not daring to meet Peter's intense gaze. The silence was palpable as one waited for a response, and one waited for the other to leave.

The elderly doctor sighed gently, knowing better than to push Vincent into responding, his keen eye noting the tension in the other man's broad shoulders. He could not help Vincent in his current state, that was clear.

"Vincent," he spoke cautiously, gently. "I know you hurt. Just do not bury your life in the hurt. It will not make it any easier, and you will lose everything you still have. You know this."

Vincent winced, his blue eyes tracing the shapes in the rug at his feet. He knew Peter was right, but he also knew that if he acknowledged the grief in his heart at this moment, it would erupt in an ugly way, and he could not frighten the children on such a night and ruin their fun.

While he physically could not hurt them, his agonized roars would sadden their hearts, and the holiday would be over before it had truly begun.

"I will leave you now," Peter spoke softly, understanding the silence for the defense mechanism that it was. "But you know where to find me if you need me."

Vincent managed to shift his head painfully, in what he hoped was a nod of acknowledgement and Peter took it as such and silently turned, disappearing into the hall.

"He is stoic and silent," Peter spoke to Father in the Library over cups of Earl Grey. Peter set down his cup and leaned forward, propping his chin in his hand, elbow upon the chess table. "It pains me to see him so broken."

Jacob Wells, the elderly patriarch of the tunnel community wrapped his hands around his cup and bowed his head.

"You know my feelings, Peter, and I see you mirror them. The poor boy is falling apart over Catherine's disappearance." He coughed roughly. "We ... we all are a bit lost without her. But she was something strong in him and now that her strength is gone, I fear for him."

"You fear a reoccurrence of ... it then?" Peter asked with concern, eyeing Jacob with a critical eye. They both knew that he spoke of a time long ago, dark days in the tunnels, when Vincent lost himself to the darkness completely. Catherine saved him that day, when no one else could, but now that she was not here, what would become of Vincent if he spiraled once more?

Jacob, whom the folks called Father, raised his eyebrows and frowned into his cup. He said so much more with his face than words could have, and Peter reached out a hand to lay it atop Father's.

"You mustn't fret, Jacob. I am worried about your health too, you know." He took up his tea again and drained the last of the warmth. "You mustn't worry yourself into your bed."

"When have I ever done that?" Jacob retorted, reaching for the teapot to refill his friend's cup. Peter waved it away.

"There is always a first time for everything, Jacob," he responded enigmatically. "No more tea, thank you, I must go Above. We have a small spread of the flu at the moment, and I have some visits to make."

Concern and dismay crossed Jacob's weathered face. "What about ..."

Peter held up a hand. "Remember, no fretting. It's just over on Staten Island and a few in eastern Queens. Nothing to worry about, and if the children are warmly-dressed there should be no trouble. If someone comes down with it, you know how to treat it, and you can always call me if you need to. You know I will come."

"Thank you, Peter," Father replied faintly, nodding once. "I depend on you; we are quite alone here when there is sickness."

"Call me," Peter replied, in no uncertain tone. "That is all there is to it. You know I do not mind. I will leave you

now, Jacob. If anything happens, and I am not at my chambers, I have a helper there to take messages from the pipes and she will find me and give me the message. Keep me updated on Vincent and his condition, will you?"

"I will," Jacob replied thankfully.

Peter then left, giving the older man's shoulder a gentle, comforting squeeze on his way out. The silence that followed his departure hung heavily in the air. With a sigh, Father also drained the last of his tea and made his way tiredly to his son's chamber.

"Mouse, hand me the glue," Jamie pinched two pieces of a shoe together with one hand, frowning at the odd assortment, the other hand flung out in Mouse's general direction, flapping her fingers to get his attention.

"Mouse busy," the young man grumbled, a few feet away, balancing an odd piece of metal against a rock for support and trying to fit another piece onto it. "Trying to bend metal to shape – busy."

"Mouse, the glue is next to you, just hand it over," Jamie replied impatiently. "Dorothy's shoes won't make themselves."

"Neither do tin men..." Mouse replied, clearly frustrated. "Mouse trying - but Mouse need more hands. Hands not busy giving glue to Jamie."

Jamie finally looked in his direction and the tension in her exasperated face softened. Mouse was hunched over two pieces of sheet metal, his hair flopped into his eyes, propping up metal pieces with both hands and one of his legs. Sweat had dampened some of the blonde locks to his forehead and he looked so endearing, even with the annoyed frown he was giving her.

"Mouse, how about I help you finish your suit of armor, then you help me with the shoes?"

Relief flooded the young man's face and he smiled. "Mouse would like that."

"Good, then it's settled." Jamie carefully laid down her project and climbed over rocks to where Mouse sat. "I am so glad we came down here to the waterfall," she commented, sitting down next to him. "With all the noise in the candle room, I couldn't think. Plus, with the competition this year for best costume, I think having the element of surprise would help us."

"Agree," Mouse nodded, moving his leg so she could take over propping up the metal piece. "Jamie and Mouse make good costumes. Fine costumed. Win contest. Be fun, maybe."

"Oh it will be!" Jamie's competitive nature had fueled the Wizard of Oz costume idea, and Mouse had jumped at the chance to use up some of the sheet metal he had brought from Above.

"Here, let me hold those together," Jamie offered. "Then you can glue it without having to hold them together too."

"Okay good, okay fine," Mouse nodded. "Be careful of edges, very sharp."

"I see that." Jamie examined the edges closely, then held them together while Mouse painted on the contact cement. "This will hold it together really well. Mouse, you are going to look great!"

The young man blushed, and Jamie smiled. He was so easily embarrassed by praise.

"What is Arthur going to be?" Mouse asked, ducking his head to hide his red cheeks.

Jamie thought for a moment. "Well, I don't know if he will wear it, but I could make him some ears out of burlap and a headpiece so they stay on, then he can be Toto, Dorothy's dog."

Mouse nodded emphatically, obviously pleased by the idea. "Okay good, okay fine! Arthur be Toto, will help win contest for sure!"

"Wasn't Vincent supposed to be doing the judging?" Jamie asked thoughtfully, while helping Mouse bend more metal for leg shields. "I haven't seen him out today, though. I wonder if he is going to be going Above with us."

Mouse shook his head, sitting back on his heels, his hands falling to his sides. "Mouse not see Vincent in long time. Vincent very sad. Miss Catherine."

Jamie sighed and sat back against a rock, wrapping her arms around her knees. "Yeah. I miss her too. Vincent loved her. I can't imagine how he feels. Mouse, do you think she just left him? Maybe she couldn't deal with all this ..." Jamie waved her arms around, gesturing to the tunnels. "Maybe she gave up."

"No," Mouse replied bluntly, his face confident. "Catherine taken away, news reports say. Mouse know Catherine. She good, very good. Not leave Vincent like that. She love Vincent, Vincent love Catherine. Nothing make them go ... away. Not even all of us here. Love – love always keeps trying, doesn't give up."

Jamie nodded, acceptingly, and sighed again. "You are right, Mouse, I know that. I just ... I just wish we could find her, somehow. I don't want Vincent to always be sad."

Mouse gazed at the girl in silence for a moment, something soft and tender in his eyes. He knew that if he was able to, Vincent would tear the entire world apart to find Catherine, and he had – all the familiar reaches and dark recesses of the night had been searched, no stone unturned. But nothing had turned up. The darkness that had fallen in Catherine's place had permeated the entire tunnels with its heavy weight. And on the night before Halloween, it seemed as if the darkness was gleefully at home among them. The hours marched by, while Jamie and Mouse glued and shaped metal, and built ruby red slippers from Mouse's pile of scraps and some paint. The tunnels might be sad, but they hoped that they could bring some light to the tunnel folk with their duo. It was all they had to offer the aching hearts.

"Vincent?"

This time the voice was expected. Of course Peter would have gone to the library, after getting no response to his encouragement.

"Father." Vincent made the word come out of his mouth, quickly tightening up his throat to restrict any further words or sounds from escaping.

"Can I sit down?" Father asked tentatively. Vincent hated that tone, knowing that he was worrying his father very much, but also being in no position to try to help that. If he even dared to move, he feared a torrent of pain was going to gush from deep within – and he wasn't sure that he could control it.

Vincent managed to nod once. The older man's face relaxed and he moved to carefully sit next to his son. He laid an arm across the broad shoulders and in silence, he passed the next hour, keeping his hurting child company.

The tunnels eventually fell silent, as the little ones, pleased with their creations, were put to bed, and eventually fell asleep dreaming of tomorrow. The tapping of the pipes too fell quiet, and Pascal made his way to the kitchen.

"Missed dinner," William greeted him, in his typically blunt way.

Pascal smiled mildly. "Busy day on the pipes today, seems all the helpers were busy delivering supplies to the tunnel communities for costumes. Some of the lower chambers needed more blankets and those arrived too. Staten Island is dealing with some flu, some in Queens as well, but nothing near us. There was a tunnel entrance that needed to be closed off; it appears that the city started construction of a small bakery nearby, and it was too risky to keep using that entrance. Other than that, not too much going on but the children chattering on the pipes in between the news sure kept me busy."

William had been working in the kitchen the whole time Pascal was updating him, and now he set a steaming bowl in front of the pipe master, nodding approvingly.

"Well, that beef stew should perk up your spirits, Pascal. Dig in. There's some bread around here somewhere if that blasted racoon hasn't carried it off."

Pascal chuckled and busied himself with the belated dinner. William took a few trays out of the oven and slid the cookies on them onto the countertop to cool.

"You, uh, you seen Vincent?" William asked finally, his booming voice notably soft and kind.

Pascal looked up from his soup, pausing a moment, then shook his head and resumed eating.

"Shame," William replied, and slid another tray of cookies into the oven.

"Now see here," Winslow grumbled. "I am too big to be doing this kind of work." He frowned at Rebecca who was, like him, on her hands and knees under the craft tables, picking up random feathers, sequins, and glue bottle caps. Rebecca smiled at the gentle giant of a man and continue the cleanup.

"Sequins." Winslow opened his clasped hand to dump his collected fragment into a container labeled "dekuhrayshuns" in Geoffrey's child-like scrawl. For a moment, Winslow remembered their first Halloween when the boy had been much smaller and insisted that he could write as well as any. They had kept the special label through the years, trying to explain to the children what it meant, while also explaining not to spell it that way, had been quite the adventure. Most of them were old enough to appreciate the sentimentality now, except for Winslow at this exact moment.

"Rebecca, can you make a rule next year that there can be no blasted sequins?"

Rebecca laughed outright. "Winslow, now tell me, are you going to tell Samantha and those other little girls that they can't have pretty sparkles on their princess dresses?"

The eager little faces popped into Winslow's mind's eye, and he knew he was beaten. "Well, get them bigger ones," he tried wearily. "Then maybe my fat fingers can pick them up without me losing my sanity."

"Ah, Winslow, you lost that a long time ago," Pascal's voice interrupted the tirade, and Rebecca promptly climbed out from under the table and smoothed her skirts.

"Pascal, how nice to see you."

The gentle pipe master smiled kindly. "You as well, Rebecca. I was wondering if you would care to take a walk above with me and see the moonrise?"

Rebecca threw a hand in Winslow's direction and replied regretfully. "I am sorry, Pascal, I must finish cleaning up. The children made a small disaster in their excitement for tomorrow. Winslow is helping me clean up the sequins but there is still glue on the tabletop to remove, and then I must finish gluing the basket handles together for them to take tomorrow."

"I'll finish all that," Winslow offered, his tone falsely grumbling. He wouldn't have admitted it, but he saw the blooming friendship between Pascal and Rebecca, and while he was outwardly quite a crispy fellow, his heart was as gentle as a child's.

Rebecca gazed at the large man in both awe and confusion. "You - you mean it, Winslow?"

"Why would I say it if I didn't mean it?" Winslow frowned in mock annoyance. "The moon rises about this time. Wouldn't be a moonrise walk if you did all that stuff then went, now would it? Moon'd be high in the sky by then. Now go, git, before I change my mind."

"Oh, thank you, Winslow!" Rebecca threw her arms around him and gave him a motherly peck on the cheek. "You are a dear."

"Don't you go spreading rumors like that," Winslow grumbled bashfully. "Wouldn't do to let the populace know that."

"My lips are sealed," Rebecca promised cheerfully, and Pascal nodded, making the motion that his lips were sealed, touched at the sacrifice of his friend.

Winslow felt proud of his good deed as he watched them scamper off in high spirits. Then he looked down at the mess still scattered across the dirt floor and frowned.

"Blasted sequins."

"Vincent, I know the burden you carry is heavy," Father finally spoke softly. "I do not ask that you pour your heart out to me. I fear this may be a burden your father cannot help you bear. But do not shut me out."

"Hurts," Vincent finally grunted, his teeth grinding into each other, in a desperate attempt to keep his brokenness locked inside.

Father winced at the sound and nodded sympathetically, not in pity but in understanding. Vincent could feel the difference, and he appreciated that.

"I know something about losing love, Vincent. I have lived long enough to know the pain. I cannot begin to fathom the deeper kind of pain you feel at her disappearance, and I do not intend to diminish it in any way. But remember, we are a family here. There are many willing to help you bear what you must for now."

"I know," Vincent responded, his voice strained and filled with pain. "What if she is gone, Father. What if she ..."

Father laid a hand on his son's and reached to turn the regal, lion-like head to face him. The agony in the blue eyes that looked back at him stabbed into his heart and for a moment he was speechless.

Taking a breath, he stumbled on. "You have lost your true love, Vincent. I feared this for you. Her world – it is cruel, dark, ugly. There was always a chance that cruel fate would play its hand and you would lose what you held most dear. I do not know where she is Vincent, but all our helpers are on the lookout for any word, any sighting, and even the smallest fragment of news. If she is in this state, she will be found."

"And if she is not in this state?"

Father's brow crumpled in thought, and he lowered his head. "We will not go there for now, Vincent. Assumption is often the quickest way to despair."

Vincent nodded, but his heart was not at ease. It would never be at ease again until she was safely back in his arms. Surely, he could not have lost that gift forever. The universe could not have been so cruel.

"The children are counting on you to go Above with them tomorrow," Father spoke hesitatingly. "I am sure they will understand if you aren't up to it. I just would like to tell them in the morning, rather than as they stand waiting to go. They do quite enjoy our presence among them. I can send Mary and Winslow, if you prefer."

Vincent shoved down the aching void inside and finally looked at his father, of his own will. "I will go to them, Father, in the morning. Forgive me, the darkness has been a constant companion of late. The ... Other ... is quite near."

"I will help you all I can," Father replied simply, the worry evident in his tone. The last time, he had been injured during Vincent's spiral into the darkness, and both men knew it would happen again if Vincent lost control. With the level of despair that he could fall into, it would even be possible that someone could lose their life at Vincent's hand if they got too close.

Vincent stood, a bit shakily, and reached for his cloak, sweeping it onto his shoulders. "I will go with the children tomorrow and ensure their safe journey Above and then back home. After that, I will go spend some time in the lower tunnels until this internal war is settled."

"As you wish," Father replied, standing and lovingly straightening his son's cloak. He ran his hands down the soft material and clasped the rough hands in each of his own. "But promise me something, Vincent."

His son gazed bravely into the older man's eyes, and Jacob's words faltered. He swallowed hard. "Catherine, or no Catherine – come back to me, Vincent. We need you."

Vincent dropped his head. "Father, you know the tunnel will survive without these killing hands. Winslow and William are quite capable, and even Pascal will be a watchman for all of you."

"Yes," Father replied, his voice breaking with emotion. "But leaving that aside, I need you, Vincent. You are my son, and I need you. A father needs his son."

Vincent nodded, placing a hand on the other man's shoulder. "I will return Father. It may be some time, but I will return."

Vincent stood at the entrance to the tunnels, herding the children back to Below. Jamie and Mouse, splendid in their Dorothy and Tin Man costumes, led the march back to below where candy would be counted, playfully bartered, and passed around. As the last ones disappeared inside, Vincent turned and made his way toward the park. The place he had first found her.

He planned to go Below, far into the deep tunnels, where only Narcissa dared to travel, where no one could hear him roar and yell his pain into the dark shadows of the Void. He would stay there until he felt that he had his emotions under control. He could not bear to injure anyone if he began to slip, and if he did, then he would rather the Void take him completely.

But one last time, he had to see the moon, had to see the place, had to see her in his mind's eye. He listened to the leaves crunching under his feet, crisp and gold and red. He heard the wind in the trees, saw the bats flying through the air, their familiar silhouettes stark for seconds at a time against the pale, full moon.

It was Samhain, the night when the spirits of the departed loved ones walked the earth, and the wall between here and there grew thin, and passable. If only he knew where that wall was, that so easily veiled itself against visibility, he would go, and beg to enter, and look for his Catherine there. At least he would know.

But fate did not afford him that luxury, and he stood alone, surrounded by the trees, the bright moon above him, at the place where he first met his Catherine.

And in the freedom that Halloween night allowed him, he roared. Pain tearing from his throat the brokenness of the last few months.

Some said there was a werewolf in Manhattan on that Halloween night, the stories largely blown out of proportion in the papers, while some dismissed it as a Halloween prank. Some said it was a vampire, torturing its prey, while some said it was just a wild animal.

But if truth were truly told, it was no agony or pain of lore - just a man and his broken heart.

And there can be no greater anguish than that.

END