

If Tomorrow Starts Without Me

By JessicaRae

A follow-up scene from S2 E22, *The Rest Is Silence*



The tunnels had long ago fallen silent. Once the children were put to bed, only the faint sounds of tapping on the pipes could be heard in the distance. Even those messages faded to near silence as the night wore on.

In the library, Vincent sat reading quietly in his chair. The flickering of the myriad of candles around the room cast a shadow across his face. His long lion-like tawny hair fall around his face and blocked out the outside world, leaving only the world upon the browned pages that he turned carefully every so often. He had come down to the library many hours ago to keep Father company, and after several games of chess and enough cups of tea to keep them awake for hours, he and the elderly patriarch of the tunnels had fallen into companionable silence with their books.

As he turned another page in *Hamlet*, the silence of the room pricked Vincent's senses and he raised his head to glance around. Having been so lost in the hardback that rested upon his knee, he felt a bit disoriented and had lost track of time. His confusion was further cemented as he met the searching eyes of Father, who was no longer reading. The older man sat in his rocking chair, one hand propped under his chin, gazing in Vincent's direction, frowning in pensive thought.

"Father?" Vincent spoke, his voice faltering at the single word. His tone carried a simple question, and a smile quirked the corners of Jacob's lips.

"Forgive me, Vincent, my mind had wondered for a moment."

Vincent glanced at the vintage copy of *Macbeth* that still lay in the older man's lap, his thumb poked between the pages to keep his place. He could not have been more than two chapters in, judging by the placement.

"That moment appears to have been hours ago," Vincent replied softly. "Something on your mind, Father?"

The silence that followed was deafening, the older man's gaze leaving his son's face to focus on the flickering wall of candles. For a moment, Vincent was not sure he intended to respond.

"If tomorrow starts without me," Father finally spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. "Promise me, Vincent, that you will not lose yourself in the void that follows."

"Without you? Father, are you unwell?" Vincent's tone became worried, and he sat up, gently closing his book. Father held up a hand to quiet him.

"No, my son, be calm. I did not mean to upset you. It just has been crossing my mind lately. You are my greatest treasure. And my greatest worry." He looked away from the fixed point in the candles and met Vincent's gaze. "I am getting older, Vincent, much as I hate to think of it. But when I am no longer here, the responsibility of these tunnels falls on you."

"Father," Vincent's voice was soft, but he was visibly troubled. "You have nothing to worry about. The council will make sure everything stays in order and I will be there too."

"But promise me that you will be okay, Vincent. You know sorrow, more than most men will experience in a lifetime. I need to know that I have not caused you to lean too heavily on me."

Vincent smiled, a comforting smile that did not reach his eyes. "You know I will be here, Father. What you have done for these people will never be lost."

"You can't promise me *that*, Vincent," Jacob replied. "We live in a world below one of the largest cities in our country. What happens if a team of developers decide to excavate the area, and find these tunnels? You would be forced to move them deeper into the tunnels. And Paracelsus, he may show up from somewhere and threaten -"

"Father," Vincent interrupted gently. "I will lead these people as you would have done. You have nothing to fear."

"I do not feel comforted," Father spoke again, softly, turning his face away from the flickering light, his features lost in the shadows. "Promise me, Vincent."

Vincent laid his book aside and rose, moving to the older man's side, and placed one hand on the lined forehead.

"Father, are you sure you are well?"

The older man made a noise deep in his throat, a chuckle that soothed Vincent's worries a bit. "Vincent, it – it's fine, I will be fine. Just – just need some rest."

Vincent knelt beside the chair, taking the older man's hand in both of his.

"Father, look at me."

Jacob finally relinquished his focus on the shadows and smiled down at the unique, gentle face of the man he called his son.

"I am looking, Vincent."

"What is the meaning of all of this, Father? You have something on your mind, and you know we can talk man to man."

"Yes, Vincent. I know. But tonight, I am talking to you not as man to man, but father to son. I want to know that if something were to happen to me, that you would not - lose yourself to - the darkness." Jacob reached his free hand to brush back the tawny amber hair that hung around his son's face. "I know it is still inside you, Vincent. Hidden, and well, but still there."

Vincent lowered his eyes for a moment, the recent events of his spiral into that void fresh in his mind. Father was worried. Worried that in grief he might -

No.

Unconsciously, his lips curled upward in a snarl, not at Father, but at the darkness that edged into his thoughts. No, he would never let it take him again.

“Even yet, it lingers,” Father spoke softly, laying his hand on Vincent’s arm and squeezing comfortingly. “A Father knows his son.”

Vincent bowed his head. “Father, some men are born with shadows that linger over their souls like ravens. They are at constant war with reality, with biased and discriminatory words and expressions that emanate from the world they live in. But in the Bond, there is Catherine – she - she quiets that darkness.”

Father nodded once. “I know, Vincent. I was wrong to have ever thought that she would bring harm to you. She has only brought you joy and comfort. You in turn have given her a place of belonging.”

“But you have been a part of that too,” Vincent was quick to remind him. “You gave your blessing.”

“Ah, that I did,” Jacob’s eyes crinkled slightly at the corners. “Your intent to always be fair is one of your strengths, Vincent. I appreciate the inclusion. But you were the one who saved her. And in turn -”

“She saved me,” Vincent finished the statement quietly, bowing his head again to rest it on their clasped hands. “Father, the darkness – the void – it may always be there. But I assure you,” he looked up at the older man again, a calm resolve in his face. “If it ever comes to touch me again, I will seek help – I will seek you and Catherine. I will not fight it alone.”

Father squeezed Vincent’s arm again, and leaned forward, drawing his son into a sort of half hug, his chin resting atop the bowed head. “That is all I can hope for, Vincent. I fear for you. I fear I have placed too much of your dependency on me, and I made you that way by my own selfish grasp on you and my worrying about your every move. Vincent, I am getting older, and each day, I feel less attached to this world. My only clinging resolve is to protect these tunnels and the people who depend on them to survive. One day, I will have to give up even that, when my time comes. I hope I have done enough to prove to them that you are capable of stepping into my place.”

“You feel as if my time in the darkness has changed that?” Vincent asked, alarmed, pulling away from the embrace, his shoulders stiff with a new fear.

Jacob was quiet for a moment. “No. I – I don’t think that has *changed* anything, Vincent. Just – people are human. They become afraid very quickly and lose trust even faster.” He reached out and gently touched the hood of Vincent’s cloak. “You are not so different from them in that regard.”

“I am not afraid or ashamed of who I am,” Vincent replied quickly, his tone much less sure than he felt.

“No, but you are afraid of who they think you are,” Father smiled in understanding. “That’s normal Vincent, unfortunately. But in the end, when things fall apart, I do believe they will look to you for strength and courage. Promise me that you will -”

“Be there for them?” Vincent interrupted, an edge to his voice that betrayed his unsure feelings. “Of course, Father, I will be there for them. I will protect them with my life. You know that. I always have.”

“I am not worried about you protecting them, Vincent. I have no doubt you will put them first above all else. You have always been there in the fray to defend and take the painful path, often to protect us, even at the risk of danger and trauma to your own self. You have taken lives with your own hands, to protect this community, and don’t think that it goes unnoticed. It is a burden, a blackness that you choose to bear, and no one can possibly understand the gravity of the chains that killing a man can create in one’s soul. But Vincent, I am concerned about you protecting yourself. Do not let the darkness take what you owe to yourself. Do not become a martyr for these tunnels, at the risk of losing what makes you good and beautiful.”

Vincent raised one eyebrow. “Beautiful, Father? Of all the words you had to choose from...” There was a twinkle of mirth in his blue eyes, and Father laughed.

“You are beautiful to me, Vincent. I apologize if this rambling has disturbed you. I am so very fond of you, and yet I know I cannot hold onto you forever.”

"I will do my best, Father. These people will come first, and whatever I must do to fight the void, I will do it. For you."

"You know I will come back and haunt you, Vincent," Father chuckled again. "If the darkness becomes too much for you, I will find you and I will remind you of this moment."

"I should expect nothing else," Vincent nodded, his amusement evident. "Can I ask what brought on all this discussion of you not being here?"

Father looked away again. "Vincent, when you – when you were – gone – I realized that I couldn't help you. None of us could. Except Catherine, bless her. Vincent, I felt so helpless, you were so broken, and lost. So very far away from all of us. And in that moment, I was afraid. Afraid of what you would be when I was gone. Afraid you might never come back to me the same as you left. Vincent, you are my son. Always. And I want to protect you from everything. From staring faces, from inferiority, from – the darkness."

"You always have," Vincent replied with conviction. "I am sorry that I made you feel as if I would forsake you, Father."

"It wasn't you," Jacob replied, setting aside his book. "It was the darkness. You could never forsake me. Perhaps I depended on you too much as well. Now, let us speak no more of darkness and tomorrows."

Vincent nodded once and for another long moment, they gazed silently at each other, more words being said with that look than any that they had just spoken.

"Promise me, Vincent."

"I promise, Father."

Somewhere in the deepest depths of humanity, the darkness heard the promise and snarled; fury cruelly black inside its isolating shadow. It reached out to bind the promise in chains of fear, before it could do much good. Gently, a touch through the bond quieted the shadow, reminding the void that Vincent did not stand alone. Vincent was broken, unpredictable, that was true. So was the void.

But Catherine feared neither. Fearlessly, she reached out and also promised.

To stand in the gap between the reaching darkness and the man she so completely loved.

Today, tomorrow, and always.

END