

# The Truth

*Judith Nolan*



*"The truth is rarely pure and never simple."*

*~ Oscar Wilde*



It is a truth universally acknowledged, that when any woman finally makes love for the first time, with the man she adores beyond all words or reason, she would prefer he was awake for the whole process! Loving someone with desperately silent intent can be a lonely, soul-destroying affair.

But Catherine was not about to give up, not now when they had come so far. With Vincent beside her, she was whole. Without him to guide and protect her, she knew she would wither and die.

She had been denied the luxury of her love's whole-hearted participation in their first lovemaking due to Vincent's unknown illness. But she could not retreat from her self-appointed task. She would not allow him to be taken from her.

The only way to bring him back to her from whatever darkness had tried to claim him, was to love him back to her. Wordlessly and with frenzied, unbounded passion. She prayed that wherever his body was taken, surely the broken remnants of Vincent's mind would follow.

And finally he did return to her, in some fashion. But the blue eyes that opened and finally locked with hers in the darkness of that rock-hewn chamber did not seem to belong to someone she knew and loved. Confusion hovered in their depths, and a frowning question she did not know how to answer. She drew his body unresisting into her lap, watching him watch her. Vincent was alive, that was all that mattered now. She had to believe everything would return to normal, given sufficient time...

After what seemed like endless hours of anguish, she had allowed Father and the others to assist Vincent from the blackness of the cavern and back up to his chamber. Sitting beside him on his bed as she tucked the covers under his chin, Catherine tried to keep her eyes open. But everything that had gone before had exhausted her in both

body and soul. She should have felt elated that they had finally made the ultimate connection. Instead she felt defeated and very much alone.

In the same moment she moved back, intending to rise and to leave him to rest, Vincent's fingers closed around her hand, drawing on it wordlessly, pulling her back towards him. He had pressed the flat of her hand against his chest, his blue eyes open and staring, seeming to beg her to stay. That frowning question remained.

Helpless against his soundless pleading, Catherine nodded before sliding onto the bed and lying down against him. Vincent sighed, long and low. A shudder rippled through his whole body, seeming to well up from the depths of his very soul. His head rested back onto the pillows, his eyes closing.

After a long silence fraught with tension, he finally gave a soft groan. Behind his closed lids, Vincent rolled his eyes from side to side, as if searching for her. His low moan of distress filled Catherine's heart with sadness. Her love was still lost and alone, somewhere in the roiling darkness of his own mind and she was helpless to assist him.

"I will leave you for now. He needs you. Thank you, Catherine, for giving my son back to me. If we had lost him down there..." Father's voice broke and he compressed his lips tightly, swiping a hand across his eyes. Nodding brusquely, he turned away and left them alone.

“I will never leave you again...” Catherine tucked her head in against the side of Vincent’s neck, lying still and listening to the shallow sound of his breathing. Her hand was still pressed tight against his chest, held there by both of his. She could feel the slow, steady pace of his heartbeat, so reassuringly normal.

Though Vincent appeared to be sleeping, she had no intention of moving away. She pressed closer still, her leg sliding over both of his in the unconscious possession of the lover who had known the joy of complete connection with another soul.

She sighed against his moist skin, wondering how, when and where she would find the words to tell him all that had happened between them in that dark cavern far below them.

“I love you...” The words slipped out, whispered against the faint pulse that beat in Vincent’s neck. “I will always love you...always...”

She yawned, finally surrendering to the struggle to keep her eyes open and her body aware of every movement of his. A couple of hours was all she needed before she had to go back Above...Catherine’s breathing lengthened and evened out as she finally fell into an exhausted sleep.

Sensing her slender body pressed close against his, her heartbeat matched with his own, Vincent stirred. His hands tightening its grip on hers. He did not know where he was, or even who he was. He knew

nothing beyond a strangely primal sense of connection to this other precious creature who lay with him, her body claiming his.

He moved away slightly so he could turn his head to stare at her. His battered mind could not recall her name, yet his soul knew hers as it knew no other. She was the woman he loved. He was aware her touch had brought him comfort and solace. Her warmth had drawn him back into the light from some vast, chilling blackness that had beckoned to him, tried to swallow him whole. He nodded. That was enough for now.

“Mine...” He sighed the word. Still frowning over things he did not understand, he drew his sleeping companion closer still, wrapping his arms around her slender body to keep her with him. Then his eyes drifted shut once more, and the restorative power of sleep finally reclaimed them both...



Vincent replaced the winged figure on his mantelpiece where he had found her. He cast wondering eyes over it and then all the contents of the chamber he stood in. Nothing made sense, but he felt a sensation of belonging here. It comforted him to know that.

Catherine entered quietly, watching her love move slowly around the room, as if it was all new to him, and confusing. She smiled, sadly but with love. “How are you feeling? she asked softly.

Vincent started before turning towards her, spreading his arms and sighing deeply. "I'm not sure..." He looked so lost and alone.

Her eyes stinging with unshed tears, Catherine hurried to say, "Try to tell me."

Vincent sighed again. Then the words rushed from him. "Like a stranger..."

Catherine tried to understand even as she worried the point. "What seems unfamiliar?"

Vincent appeared to debate how to tell her what was in his mind. "Many things. Many things I can't..." He looked around helplessly. "I don't remember."

Catherine watched him closely, trying not to cry. "Do you feel like a stranger with me?" It felt as if her heart was breaking. They had come so far, and yet, now...

"No, not with you." Vincent rushed into speech even as he stepped forward quickly. "You're the woman that I love." He uttered the words without hindrance or hesitation. As if he had been saying them to her throughout their relationship. This new Vincent seemed determined to keep nothing from her.

Catherine nodded quickly, her heart singing. "I'm glad," she breathed. She could not help wondering about how much of their recent love-

making had stayed with him, somehow giving him the courage to finally tell her how he felt. It was all so new, and unknown.

Vincent looked down, hurrying away from her. "But there are things in my mind. Things I can't reach...I reach for words for things..." His shoulders slumped and he looked lost. "But they're not there..." He sat down heavily on the bed.

Catherine moved closer, crossing the chamber to sit on the bed by his side. "Vincent, the words will come." She prayed they would, and soon.

"Names..." Vincent said softly, turning to look at her, his blue eyes deeply troubled.

"I wouldn't worry," Catherine reassured him quickly. She decided she might have to stay with him once more. It was becoming a habit to spend the night with him, and her work was suffering. But she could not help it. *I could get Kipper to send a message up to Joe...*

Beside her, Vincent shifted his position to turn and look at her more fully. "Your name..."

Catherine drew a sharp breath. She stared at him in stunned silence, then said, "My name? You mean, you can't...?" Tears filled her eyes then.

Vincent stared at her, shaking his head in wordless confusion.

“Catherine,” she replied softly. She so badly wanted to hug him.

Vincent smiled, huffing his relief as he looked down, capturing her linked hands, losing their slenderness within his larger grip. “Yes,” he breathed.

“Vincent, don’t worry. I won’t let you forget.” Catherine leaned closer to rest her forehead against his, breathing the same air as he, warm and scented with candles and leather. And his warm masculinity enfolded her tired senses once more to the exclusion of all else. If only they could stay like this forever...

Vincent’s hand covered both of hers, holding onto her tightly, as if he dared not allow her to pass from his sight ever again. Lifting his face, his lips brushed lightly over her forehead in benediction, before he dropped his head once more, his frowning eyes studying the faded pattern of Aubusson carpet beneath his feet.

Catherine felt the moment slipping away, and she could not afford to allow this opportunity for renewed closeness to pass her by. She needed to seize it with both hands, be brave and bold as her love had taught her to be.

“It is all right, Vincent. Truly.” Catherine moved closer to her love, taking his downcast chin in the palm of her hand and lifting his face to hers. “But I have to know. Do you...can you remember anything of the first time we loved? Anything at all?”



“I...we...we loved?” Vincent held himself erect for a long moment as he stared down at her, his mouth moving in silent torment, but he didn’t continue.

Then his great shoulders slumped in defeat. His breath rushed between his lips on a gusty sigh of intense regret. “No, not...exactly...”

~ *FIN* ~

