

# Walk With Me?

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*"No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path..."*

**Gautama Buddha**

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Deep in distracted thought, Vincent sat in the Chamber of the Falls, staring at the rushing waterfall. Nestled in his open palm he held Catherine's rose. He dropped his disconsolate gaze to it, studying every curve and nuance.

*Is this all there is to be, now...? Must I always live with this unfillable void inside me? Can I live with it? I wish I knew...*

He sighed deeply, resisting the urge to cast the precious gift into the rushing waters below him. It *was* all he had left of Catherine. If this was all he was going to have of her, then he would make it enough.

Moisture that didn't come from the rising mist from the falls, glistened on his cheeks. He felt utterly lost, and alone. Careless of his plight, the rushing waters covered the rising sounds of his inconsolable grief.

Suddenly Vincent stiffened, as a warm and loving sensation rushed through him, heightening and sharpening every sense. He lifted his head, frowning in concentration as he listened to something far beyond the cavern. Some inner voice that told him that all would be well...

*Could it be? Is it possible? Dare I believe...?*

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Far away in Westport, Catherine slid eagerly behind the steering wheel of Nancy's car. She started the engine and drove swiftly away. Her good friend stood on the doorstep watching her. She looked happy to see Catherine leaving.

"Good luck, Cathy. Say hi to Vincent for me. I would like to meet him one day..." she whispered, as she turned and went back into the house.

Far beneath the city, Vincent jumped to his feet, quickly returning Catherine's rose to the pouch hanging around his neck. He began to run as if his very life depended on it. Rising ever higher through the tunnels, he raced toward the park entrance.

Catherine drove into and then through the city at speed, breaking more than a few limits as she neared her destination. But the rising sense of urgency that had begun in a dream pushed her onwards. She knew she had to get back to Vincent before the dawn. Before the sunlight forced him Below and she would miss seeing him.

Turning into the park entrance she took the corners quickly, finally stopping the car on the road shoulder, near to the drainage tunnel entrance. She jumped out, turning to lock it, before she began running across the park toward the culvert.

In the same moment, Vincent came racing out of the tunnel entrance at a full run, and bounced to a stop, when he saw her running toward him. His cloak floated around him as he braced himself for her arrival.

Catherine sprinted down the slope, laughing joyously as she crested the final swell of the ground and flung herself carelessly forward, landing in his open arms. She gasped with joy as he crushed her to him. They stood holding each other close, for a long moment of shared joy.

Finally, Catherine pulled back to look up at him, in wonderment. "Oh, forgive me... Forgive me for doubting! What we have is all that matters. It's worth everything!"

Vincent stared down at her almost as if he could not believe his eyes. "Everything!" he agreed fervently, on a gusting rush of grateful breath.

They stood together gazing deeply into each other's eyes. *Is there anything more to be said?*

Catherine rose high onto her toes, reaching her hand to his great head, drawing his mouth down to hers. Vincent couldn't resist her urging. He had no will, beyond their shared consciousness. Their lingering, mutual kiss sealed their agreement.

*What we have together is truly everything, and nothing else matters...*

Finally, Catherine drew back from him, her eyes full of wonder. She smiled softly, before burying her face in his shoulder, and throwing her arms around him. He pulled her back into his embrace, and they stood silent, lost in the beauty of the moment they both thought had been lost forever.

Finally, Catherine slid her hand down his arm, lacing her fingers through his. Her eyes gleamed with anticipation.

"I know it's late, but it's such a lovely night. Vincent, if I asked you, will you walk with me? I have something I want to show you. Something I've always wanted to show you."

Vincent stared down at her beautiful face. The warm taste of her lingered on his lips, like illicit magic. His gaze flickered over her smiling mouth, and he found he craved more.

The sensation made him hesitate a fraction too long in answering. "The sun will be up soon..." he demurred softly. "You must be tired. I should be taking you home before we are discovered."

"I'm not tired." Catherine shrugged and shook her head. "Besides, tomorrow is Sunday, so I can sleep in. We have the last of the darkness."

She turned to look at the cityscape gleaming beyond the park. "I want to share the city with you again, as we did on Halloween. But, this time, I want to do it my way." She looked back to him, tugging at his hand. "Please, Vincent..."

*Her way? What is her way? What is she planning for us?*

But, how could he resist? "Very well..." His fingers closed tighter around hers.

"Thank you, Vincent." Catherine slid her arm through the crook of his, before clasping his bicep with both hands. "Don't look so worried."

"Worried?" Vincent arched his brows at her. "I am simply being cautious. The park can be a dangerous place, at night."

"But, I'm with you," Catherine reasoned, as she hugged his arm against her, watching him closely. "Trust me."

"You, I trust," Vincent replied simply.

Together, they walked away from the shelter of the culvert. They moved across the grass and up the slope, to the edge of the roadway. Catherine pulled him to a stop as they were about to pass Nancy's car, parked under a street light.

"This is what I wanted to show you," Catherine said, fishing in her coat pocket for the keys.

Vincent stood stock still, staring at the vehicle. "It's a car," he said, rather unnecessarily.

"Yes, it's a car. It's Nancy's car. I borrowed it tonight, to get back to you as fast as I could. I know I broke more than a few speed limits along the way."

Catherine tried not to smile at his bemusement. "But, for tonight, it can be our carriage."

"Ah, I see." He looked up at her. "You're planning on driving home in it. Good idea. I will bid you goodnight then, Catherine."

He hesitated, obviously disappointed that their reunion was so short. But he would not be Vincent if he didn't always think to put her needs before his own.

"I was planning on it taking both of us. On a tour around the city." Catherine watched his expression. "It's okay, Vincent."

"I... are you sure about this?" Vincent's expression settled into one of deep uncertainty. He covered his confusion with an expansive wave of his hand. "Forgive me. Of course, you're sure." He shook his head, but his expression remained bemused.

Catherine smiled, as she inserted the key and unlocked the passenger door. She held the door wide open. "Get in," she said softly. "It will be all right, Vincent."

"A horseless carriage..." Vincent hesitated a moment longer, before getting into the car and settling himself gingerly in the seat, gathering the folds of his great cloak around him.

He looked all around the interior, as Catherine circled the hood to unlock her door before opening it to get in behind the steering wheel. Vincent was looking up when the overhead light came on and it momentarily blinded him and made the outside world disappear behind his own reflection in the side window. He didn't comment but a slight growl of unease whispered deep in his throat.

"Sorry, I forgot about the light," Catherine apologised, as she closed the door and the interior light went off, leaving them in the welcome darkness, once more.

She put a hand on Vincent's arm, feeling the tension in his body. "Vincent, trust me. We've walked miles together. Both Above, and Below. We've run, and we've climbed. I've leaned on you, and at times, you've carried me. We trust each other implicitly. I want you to trust this now, and me."

"You, I trust," Vincent replied honestly. "But this contraption..." He looked all around. "It appears to have a mind of its own."

Catherine patted the steering wheel. "It's just a machine. But, it's going to protect you, protect us. And if it doesn't, for some reason, I swear I will. I would never allow any harm to come to you."

Vincent glanced at her. "Very well, Catherine." He made an attempt to ease the tension from his shoulders.

He reached back to grasp the hood of his cloak, drawing it up and over his hair, concealing his unique face in the depths of the folds. He settled deeper into the seat, pushing his long legs forward as much as he could, beneath the dashboard.

"Where shall we go?" he asked softly, staring through the windscreen at the park spread all around them.

"Anywhere and everywhere," Catherine replied happily. "I want to show you everything. But first, seatbelt."

"I'm sorry...?" Vincent looked mystified.

"You need to put your seatbelt on..." Catherine reached across him to secure the safety device into its slot before she did the same with hers.

Vincent tested the woven strapping. "Are you afraid I'll run away?" he asked with a lift of one eyebrow.

"Something like that." Catherine laughed.

She turned the key and the engine came to life. She disengaged the hand brake and applied her foot to the gas pedal. The car began to move forward, slowly. Vincent resisted the urge to clutch the edges of his seat as the car gathered speed. He sat still, feeling the power of the engine vibrating through him.

"Don't worry, Vincent." Catherine slanted him an encouraging look. "You're safe with me. I haven't had an accident yet."

From out of nowhere, a car came through the park, passing them in a rush of noise and a swirl of dried leaves. The sweeping headlights glared and dazzled.

"It's not you I'm worried about." Vincent turned in his seat to stare at the fading tail lights of the other car.

"But you've ridden on the top of the subway cars before?" Catherine glanced in the rear-view mirror. "When you rescued me from Belmont and his men. You said that was the only way you could get to me so fast."

"Yes, but the subway cars have rails to run on," Vincent admitted honestly turning back in his seat. "They have a prescribed path they must follow."

"That's a valid point," Catherine admitted. "I'd never thought of it that way before."

She took a corner with ease. "My dad first taught me to drive when I was seven. I was barely old enough to see over the steering wheel, but I'd never been so happy, and felt so important."

"Your father is proud of you." Vincent relaxed enough to take his eyes off the road in front. "He only wants the best for you."

"As Jacob does for you," she affirmed, as she turned out of the park entrance and onto Fifth Avenue.

They drove down the thoroughfare without speaking. Vincent leaned forward, fascinated by the cityscape, as it moved past the car window. It was a vantage point he'd never seen before, and the life on the streets intrigued him. He'd never dared to venture so close as to be able to almost touch some of the pedestrians.

Despite the late hour, the city was full of life. The walking public pressed past the car as if impatient to have it move out of their way. None of them looked into the car, their focus was entirely elsewhere.

Somewhere high above, a clock chimed the hour of five o'clock. Catherine ignored it as she drove on, taking turn after turn, and losing Vincent's usually keen sense of direction in a myriad of sights and sounds.

The blinking neon lights burst across Vincent's eyes, their harsh fluorescence illuminating the deep night as nothing else could have. They made shadows on the streets, and the shadows moved, just as Vincent was. Scattered taxis prowled in and out of the lanes, perpetual denizens of the New York night. The constant, impatient blares of their horns punctuated the darkness. Everything appeared to be in perpetual motion, nothing stood still for long.

People streamed down the sidewalks on either side, talking or laughing. At times shouting to be heard by their companions, over the traffic noise. They crossed the road in front and behind, not caring for the gestures or shouts of dissent from some drivers.

None of them seemed to care about the fact it was almost morning, or had any thought about the day to come. They were living in the moment and enjoying themselves hugely.

The city was vitally alive, pulsing with energy. Alive and breathing, even as it was at its own version of rest. Vincent sensed it all around him as Catherine drove beside him, silently, allowing him to take it all in.

As their car turned yet another corner, heading back the way they'd come, Vincent turned to look at her. "I thought I had seen something of your world."

He shook his head. "That night we shared at Halloween, walking these very streets, showed me things I had never seen before. Now, this..." He spread both hands, in puzzlement.

Catherine briefly took her attention off the road ahead, to smile at him. "Until tonight, I'd never considered that there are places and sights you haven't seen. It's such a pity there is only one night a year when we can walk together, unafraid."

She looked back to the roadway. "But now we have another way, a new way to be together."

Some time passed and finally, Catherine could no longer suppress a yawn. She used the back of her hand to cover her mouth. But Vincent saw the movement.

"You're tired. It has been wonderful, but we should stop, now."

"Yes, but I haven't shown you everything I wanted you to see. We can go down to Greenwich Village, and go back, up along Broadway. I know you love the musicals."

"Another time," Vincent replied softly. "You're getting too tired to drive. You should be in bed. You can drop me off in the park."

Catherine slanted him a look, but she didn't comment. She simply nodded, as she took yet another corner, and headed back towards her apartment building.

Before Vincent could protest, she stopped at the code box for the underground carpark and pushed the required buttons. The roller door rose with a clatter and she drove down into the bowels of the earth. She parked the car in a space next to her own car and got out.

Vincent followed suit, standing uncertainly beside the car as she reached to lock it. "Come on," she said, taking his hand. "We'd better be quick, with this part."

"Where are we going?" Vincent allowed her to pull him along.

"A place that should be very familiar to you," she replied, as she reached a steel door on the side of the garage. "There shouldn't be anyone around at this time of the night."

They went through the door and along an echoing corridor, towards another door at the far end. Catherine stopped Vincent with a hand on his arm.

"Wait here. I'd better go first, just to check we're alone." She pushed him back against the wall, before opening the door and stepping through.

Vincent looked all around him, his usually sharp sense of direction well and truly confused. But he now had an idea of where Catherine was taking him.

She reappeared almost immediately. "The coast's clear. There's no-one around, not even the night-man. Come on." She grabbed his arm, leading him through the door she held open.

It closed behind them with a muffled clang that echoed. Catherine led him across the next corridor to another door. She turned to smile at Vincent. "This leads down to the basement level."

Vincent nodded. "Where you go down to my world."

"Yes." Catherine opened the door and took him through.

They descended a set of steps, going below the garage level into a world of concrete and steel uprights. Catherine opened another door and they entered the large concrete basement, with its tumbled collection of boxes and piles of cast-offs from the world above them.

She stopped at a seemingly random group of large cardboard boxes, stacked against the far wall. They moved as one when she pushed them aside, revealing their secret. A large hole in the concrete wall that showed nothing, but echoing darkness. A trace of damp warmth rose through the hole.

Catherine reached above her head to turn on a switch, and a single, overhead lightbulb created the long shaft of blue-white light that speared down into the

darkness, illuminating the uprights of a single metal ladder pinned into the concrete at the opening.

"This is where you go down." She straightened and stood back.

"You should go home." Vincent extended his hand toward her. "I know my way from here. Get some rest and I will see you tomorrow... ah, tonight."

"Suddenly I'm not tired, Vincent. I'm glad you trusted me enough to come driving with me, tonight."

Vincent nodded. "I am glad I did."

Catherine smiled. "And you didn't protest... much."

"Oh, there were times when I wanted to shout, look out!" Vincent replied honestly. "The people up there seemed to walk about as if lost in their own worlds."

"Most of the time they are. Many of them live in the darkness and sleep in the daylight. I'm glad you decided to trust me. It can't have been easy."

Vincent pointed up to the building above their heads. "Those people walking the streets above us, they were living their dream, Catherine. They're not living mine, nor living ours. We all dream our own dream."

"Yes..." Catherine nodded slowly. "I can't guarantee you that there are times when I won't feel... unhappy, Vincent. Maybe there will be other times when I feel I must put distance between us. But it doesn't mean I will love you less. In fact, I think I can only love you more. I wish..."

"I know..." Vincent exhaled slowly, drawing her closer by taking her hand. "I can understand that for I too, at times have felt the need to hide my thoughts and feelings for fear of hurting you." He squeezed her small hand gently. "But now is not one of those times for either of us?"

He could sense it through their bond. From being distant and remote, Catherine was now completely happy and at peace. It eased his mind after the strain of the last few days when he thought he'd lost her forever.

Catherine watched him. "I think you know it isn't. I think you know a lot more than you're saying." She raised her free hand to cup his bearded cheek and Vincent turned his head to press a soft kiss into her palm.

"Perhaps... I would say that we are both happy now," he whispered, closing his free hand around the bag that held the porcelain rose his love had given him.

"I would be even happier if I could go Below, with you. I'm too wide awake now to sleep. And today is Sunday. I have nowhere else to be."

She watched his expression closely. "You could read to me..."

"That might put us both to sleep." Vincent smiled as he shook his head ruefully.



"I'm willing to risk it if you are." Catherine turned her hand within his grasp to slide her fingers through his. "Or we could go back up to the garage and I could take you driving again. We still haven't seen everything and there is still time before sunrise."

"Ah, no..." Vincent shook his head. "I think I have had enough of the horseless carriage for now. I don't like the uncertainty of it all." He leaned forward to look down the shaft of light into the darkness below. "If you are sure you're not too tired..."

"How could I ever be tired when I am with you, Vincent?" Catherine replied, stepping forward to descend the ladder before he had a chance to change his mind and deny her entry to his world.

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*"What hath night to do with sleep?"*

*John Milton*