

HINDSIGHT

What if Elliot continued his pursuit of Catherine after the events of 'A Kingdom By The Sea'?

by Lyn Roewade

Vincent gasped in pain as a struggling Catherine managed to jab him in the ribs, and he found himself desperately wishing, not for the first time, that he had normal nails; his concern about inadvertently harming the woman he loved now uppermost in his mind. Briefly, he considered letting her continue her assault on the man who lay supine on the floor, struggling for breath after his near suffocation. Vincent let a low growl of pain escape as Catherine kicked and punched, trying to escape his hold; her desire to continue her assault on the man, who had compounded his crime of destroying her dream by attempting to rape her, almost overwhelming him in its intensity.

Considering his options, Vincent reluctantly removed one arm from the writhing woman, and unclasping his cloak, swung it up to envelop Catherine completely within its folds. As the material settled around her, concealing her adversary, Catherine began to calm and awareness of who held her so firmly yet gently, penetrated. At the same time pain from her injuries began to clamour for attention, and she felt Vincent shudder as he experienced it through the bond.

Feeling Catherine relax within the depths of his cloak, Vincent trembled as awareness of her injuries registered within them both. A low growl of anger began, and he allowed himself a brief glare at the struggling man on the floor, a part of him gleefully acknowledging that, although this man had hurt his beloved, she had managed to injure him as well. Lifting her, Vincent moved to sit Catherine on the bed, placing himself so that her view of the other was blocked. Unwrapping her from the cloak, he gently touched her tears before reaching over to the phone and dialing.

"Peter...." Vincent allowed himself a brief smile at the shocked gasp from the other, upon hearing his voice. "Yes, it's me.... You had best come quickly to Burch's place.... Yes, he broke the terms of the agreement. They both need medical attention.... Thank you." Hanging up the phone, Vincent turned his attention back to Catherine. "Peter will be here in half an hour. Can I do anything to help?"

"Just hold me.... Hold me, Vincent, and never let me go." Catherine's exhausted, tear-filled voice caught Elliot's attention and his head fell back as the enormity of what he had nearly done hit him.

"Vincent...." Talking was painful; it felt as if several ribs were broken. "Cathy...."

Feeling Catherine's anger flare and her body stiffen, Vincent hissed at Elliot. "Burch, if you value your life, keep still; and above all, keep silent!" Opening his mouth to argue, Elliot was silenced as Vincent continued. "She wants to kill you. If you keep silent, she will remain calm. Now, lie still. Dr. Alcott is on his way."

Letting himself into Burch's house with the key Catherine had given him, Peter hurried up to her bedroom. Pausing briefly in the doorway, his gaze quickly scanned the room. He noted the broken doorframe, Elliot Burch lying, his face white with pain, on the floor, a pillow beside his head and Vincent, holding onto a weeping Catherine.

Hearing the doctor at the doorway, Vincent turned. "Peter, come quickly.... I think she has broken ribs and

her jaw may also be fractured."

"Damn!" Glaring at the man on the floor, Peter quickly moved to Catherine's side, where with Vincent's aid, he convinced her to lie back, allowing him to examine her. Gently probing, he determined she did indeed have injuries to her ribs; but that her jaw, while there was no doubt the bone was bruised, was not broken. Giving her a painkiller, he and Vincent sat quietly until the drug took affect, then Peter moved to check Elliot.

"Doctor, how is she?"

Peter looked in disgust at the man, his feelings in conflict with his physician's training. "Do you really care? Wasn't it bad enough forcing her to marry you?"

"Doctor, please...." Elliot reached up a hand to grasp Peter's wrist as he bent to check him.

"She's badly bruised with at least one, possibly two fractured ribs." He glared at Elliot. "If it wasn't for the fact Catherine wants no publicity.... Burch, so help me, I would have you charged. You deserve every injury Vincent gave you!"

Vincent's clearing of his throat drew Peter's attention. "I didn't touch him, Peter."

"But, how....?" Peter's voice faded as his gaze moved to take in the quiescent form of Catherine. "You mean....?"

"Yes." Vincent moved to stand over the two as Peter continued his examination. Sighing, he asked, "Tell me, Burch. Did you think I was *'talking for the sake of talking'* when I asked you to remember Catherine was once an assault victim and had taken steps to ensure it would never happen again?" He shook his head. "The slowness in the development of our relationship was as much for Catherine's sake as it was mine; although she was never consciously aware she might have a problem."

Sighing once again, he returned to Catherine's side. "You are a fool, Elliot Burch." Surprised, Elliot heard sorrow in Vincent's voice. "You have lost everything now. By breaking the contract, you have signed the annulment papers, and given Catherine some very valuable real estate; but, more importantly...." he paused, gazing silently at Catherine before turning his attention once more to Elliot. "More importantly, you lost her friendship."

"Vincent," Elliot licked his lips. "I...." Tears threatened and he let his head fall back.

"Vincent," Peter's voice drew Vincent to his side. "I'm through here. Could you carry him to his room?" Nodding, Vincent bent and picked Elliot up, as if he were a child, carrying him gently to his room.

Placing Elliot on his bed, Vincent covered him with a blanket, put the pain killers Peter had given him on the night table and turned to leave.

"Vincent, wait!" At Elliot's call, he turned to look at him. "Vincent, tell her.... I'm sorry. I didn't mean it, I.... it was the booze."

"Didn't you?" Vincent shook his head as he turned once again toward the door, briefly he paused and looked back over his shoulder at Elliot. "I wonder how many other rapists have used that excuse. You know the dangers of drinking, Burch. It was your responsibility. There is no excuse."

Tears started to flow as Elliot whispered to Vincent's retreating back, "I know."

Moments later, movement caught his attention and Vincent, carrying a sleeping Catherine in his arms, appeared in the doorway.

"Peter is taking Catherine to his home. Your lawyers can contact her there." At Elliot's nod, he turned and left; leaving Elliot to grieve and ponder how he had lost the woman he loved.

He wished he had never seen her at the art show, so radiantly happy at her engagement. He remembered how, *when she had described her 'fiancé' in only the most general of terms, his jealousy had led him to rent an apartment in a building across the park from which, with high-powered binoculars, he could spy on her.* He recalled his shock at her enthusiastic greeting of the strange man-creature; their kisses enraging him beyond anything he had felt before. How he had ranted, demanding an explanation from the empty room - needing to know what that 'THING' offered her that he could not! When he had calmed, he speculated, wondering where the creature lived. Memory of Catherine's desperate need for explosives; her desire to end the building of his tower; and, most importantly, her knowledge of the tunnels beneath the city, gave him a pretty good idea of where her 'fiancé' dwelt.

The desire to possess her overwhelmed him, anything would be better, he had thought, than her taking that 'THING' as a lover. The idea repulsed him, and so he had planned. One of his people watched her closely and then, at a time when her unhappy expression hinted her fiancé was unavailable to her, and she was exhausted with the heavy workload, he had dropped his bombshell.

Remembering, Elliot realized he should have backed off then. *'Instead of consenting to all of his demands, Catherine had agreed to only two and then added conditions of her own; the most important being that Elliot was to make no sexual demands because 'she was not a prostitute!' and, should he do anything to break the conditions of the contract, the marriage would be dissolved and the ownership of the Burch Tower property would revert to her.'*

Wearily rubbing his eyes, Elliot had to agree with Vincent. *He was a fool. Because he didn't want another to possess her, he had lost Catherine's friendship. She hated him from the moment he threatened to expose Vincent and his world. Her behaviour towards him changed from friendship to cold rejection, to such a degree that when she spoke to him, if at all, the words were terse and harsh. If he hadn't experienced it himself, he would never have believed that the warm, caring person he knew could be such an ice queen.*

His mind flashed through the events from their wedding - to which Catherine had invited none of her friends, refusing to have them view her participating in a farce - to the party they hosted a few weeks later when given false courage by the crowds and alcohol, he had intimately kissed his wife. *She came close to biting him; and it was shortly after she disappeared from the party, that on following her, he met Vincent face-to-face.*

'Catherine had flown at him, her desire to scratch his eyes or heart out evident in both her straining arms and hissed entreaties to Vincent, to let her go; to let her wipe the existence of Elliot Burch off the map. Shaken by her vehemence, he had prudently withdrawn and stood listening at the door while Vincent calmed Catherine down, comforting her. When she was back in control, Vincent stood outside the door, hiding Elliot from her view as she went down the stairs, to play her role of hostess once again.'

Uncomfortable with his memories, Elliot shifted slightly, grimacing at the pain this caused him. A derisive smile flittered across his lips as he forced himself to continue remembering; *He had been so sure of himself that night. He had accused Vincent of being the one who would harm him, should he, Elliot, attempt a consummation of the marriage. It was the first time Vincent had called him a fool; but it would not be the last during the following eight months and, looking back, Elliot had to agree with him.*

First, he had made the suggestion to Moreno that, as a married woman, Catherine's workload should be lightened. Elliot shuddered as he recalled the vitriolic response 'that' little attempt at controlling her had engendered. It had even backfired, sending her more frequently to the tunnels, where she did her New York style fight training with Vincent every night that week. The extreme violence of those sessions led Vincent to request of Elliot that he not try to come between Catherine and her job in the future. Seeing the livid bruise on Vincent's left jaw, where he said Catherine had hit him during their most recent workout, should have given him pause; as it confirmed that Catherine was indeed keeping her street survival skills up to par.

Memories flashed on and on, culminating at the events of the evening before, leading to his present situation. Cursing, Elliot could only berate himself for his actions and for what....? *Nothing had happened, except Catherine's Halloween party had been a success. For some reason, it had grated; maybe because his own business dealings were suffering setbacks. The most recent due to two major contractors pulling out of an important deal; openly stating their wives had spoken against them doing business with a man they suspected had forced Catherine Chandler into marrying him. Since this was the truth, Elliot, looking for a way to offset his disappointment, focused on his main frustration - Catherine, and Vincent; who had come on Catherine's invitation to organize and control the children's party. It had rankled when Vincent turned out to be as popular with the adult guests as he was with the children. Elliot drank too much, and shortly after all their guests had left, made his way to Catherine's door, knocking loudly; demanding entry. When she refused, he had thrown himself at the door, breaking through and grabbing and forcibly kissing her. Catherine's violent reaction had him retaliating in kind. That she quickly got the upper hand and was suffocating him, when Vincent came and had to physically peel her away from her intent to kill him, still surprised Elliot.*

Sobbing aloud in his loneliness, Elliot whispered to the red glow of the sunrise. "You were so right, Vincent. I am a fool." On that note, Elliot leaned over and taking the painkillers Peter had left, let sleep overcome him.

Catherine sat stiffly erect in her chair, determined to let no one, especially Elliot or his people, know how much she hurt. Peter had warned her to wait at least another day, but she was adamant, she wanted to be free; free to claim the love of the man she valued above all others.

Elliot gasped, shaken to the core by the sight of Catherine's ramrod straight figure. She refused to look his way, but Dr. Alcott did; his eyes clearly expressing his disdain for the man before him. Silently, Elliot moved to sit in a chair separate from the others, facing the two lawyers.

A knock on the door drew Peter's and the lawyers' attention to the back of the room. Both Elliot and Catherine were unable to shift due to their injuries, so Catherine was startled when Peter almost shouted, "Jacob!" Briefly forgetting her pain, Catherine turned and Elliot winced when he saw the vivid, swollen bruise on her right jaw.

The man Peter called Jacob uttered a soft "Good God!" as Catherine cried out "Father!" and launched herself into the older man's arms. Father quickly dropped his cane and hugged Catherine to him, as hard as he dared, Vincent's warning of cracked ribs holding his enthusiasm in check.

"Jacob," Peter's voice brought their attention to him. "Why?"

For the sake of the lawyers, Father gave the rehearsed explanation. "Vincent was called away to deal with an emergency, but he wanted Catherine to feel our support. Also...." Father paused, looking askance at Elliot. "Since I acted as chaperone when Catherine visited our home during her '*marriage*' to Mr. Burch, Vincent felt I should be here, in case Mr. Burch decided to counter-accuse Catherine of breaking the contract herself, by having sexual relations with my son." Releasing Catherine from his embrace, Father smiled and helped her return to her seat, then collecting his cane, sat at the back of the room, listening as the lawyers went through the contract, questioning Peter as to his observations on his arrival at the Burch residence two nights previous, when the marriage contract was allegedly broken by Mr. Burch.

Elliot, deciding the only way to get out of the situation his own foolish pride had placed him in, with any dignity at all, offered no defense, his only attempt dying upon his lips when Catherine, turning her damaged face his way, glared at him. *No*, he thought. *Best to cut my losses and disappear for a while. Perhaps a trip to the Grand Caymans.* His decision made, Elliot sat, lips compressed as the lawyers finalized the cancellation of his marriage and he and Catherine signed both the annulment papers and the documents

turning the Burch Tower land over to Catherine.

The signing completed, Elliot rose to leave, directing one longing last glance Catherine's way before he left, his grief at her frigid attitude towards him bringing him close to tears. That, and the knowledge that he couldn't blame her.

Catherine clambered down the iron staples, ignoring the pain of her ribs in her desire to hold Vincent.

"Catherine!" his soft voice admonished her from behind as his hands gently supported her descent to the sub-basement.

"Oh, Vincent!" Catherine turned, throwing herself into his arms, her joy at holding him flowing to him in ever-increasing waves, as it met and fused with his flowing to her. For an unmeasured length of time they stood, holding each other, giving thanks they were now free to pursue their dream of a life together.

"Your ribs, Catherine, are you...." Vincent gently rubbed the still vivid bruise on her jaw.

Smiling at him, she answered. "Admittedly, I'm still tender, but oh! The joy of seeing you makes the pain incidental."

Shaking his head, Vincent smiled gently. "Did Peter give you the okay to come Below?"

Grinning at him, Catherine responded. "Well, sort of.... I think after seven days of trying to contain me while you were fixing pipes was a little fatiguing and he bade me a fond '*adieu*', along with a pithy remark to take care when my engagement ring arrived. He knew once you were back there would be no keeping me Above.

"Oh, Vincent!" Reaching up to wrap her hands around his neck, Catherine felt their tears of joy mingle and mix as they kissed, reaffirming their commitment to each other. They reluctantly parted as the need to breathe became paramount and grinning broadly at each other, they turned as one, hands clasped, to return to Father's chambers, where the Council awaited to help plan their marriage. This time, both were determined, nothing would come between them and their dream.

END