

THE PURE SPIRIT

(Dark Spirit episode expansion)

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

She was sitting on the iron-wrought bench on her balcony, dressed in a nightgown and one of her silk night robes, the wind playing with her almost carelessly up-tied hair, her shoulders hunched as if the weight of the world was pulling her down, head down, staring at the little dark-striped, shiny shell in her hands. Such little thing holding such power of deception...

Catherine felt worse than ever before. She had said so many horrible things to those whom she cared about most; her behaviour in the last week was absolutely appalling. Yes, it was because she was heavily under the influence of a voodoo curse and drugs, but still, she felt horrible for hurting those who cared about her so much. Joe and Edie understood and said there was nothing to feel ashamed for, but the one person Catherine cared about more than anyone in the world, was the one she had hurt the most....

I said such horrific things to him... How can he ever forgive me?

She remembered their conversation just before all the hell started, almost a week ago, when she came home after spending her working day, first in prison, interviewing a prisoner involved with a voodoo cult about a crime, then contacting professor Alexander Ross to get more background information about voodoo. Then she spent the rest of the day in the office, gathering as much information about the case and the cult as possible. When she came home, she found her whole apartment turned upside down and the white wall in her living room was vandalised with a red painted picture of what appeared to be.... Vincent.

He came to her a few minutes later, feeling her fear when she entered her home and her strong discomfort when she found the painting.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I am now," she answered with a smile, looking into his eyes, finding comfort in his care and his hands on her arms.

"Who did this to you is trying to frighten you, control you with fear."

"I'm not afraid," she said, with resolution.

"Good," he said.

Catherine looked back at the painted picture on the wall.

"The drawing... what do you think it means?"

"It's a picture of what they're most afraid of. For them it has power... You must not surrender to it!" Vincent urged her.

"I won't...", she replied, convinced she was stronger than any cult.

But surrender she did, easier than she ever could have imagined. All it took was a convincing professor, a gift (a small shell) from him, which should have apparently protected her against evil spirits. but did nothing of the kind. Her own strong imagination had turned against her in the worst possible way. She failed not only herself, but especially Vincent, because she couldn't hold on to her promise of not surrendering to evil... On her worst night, when Vincent felt her horror and

hastily came to see her, the darkest magic overcame her totally and the words she spoke to him cut him deep like a knife, they must have, she was sure of it.

"I hate you... I hate you!!!"

Those were the worst words, the most terrifying ones, and despite her drugged state then, she could still remember the shocked pained look in his eyes, as if he had been stabbed in the heart. And yet...

"Even in this darkest time, I'm with you, Catherine..."

He was unreal, truly out of a fairy tale book. How on earth could he not have run away and left her there, without a single word? Even when she hurt him so much, Vincent still tried to comfort her in her state and project some peace into her heart through their bond. No one else would have done it....

It took Catherine a couple of days to remember anything from that horrible night, before waking up in the hospital. She knew she sought Alexander to help her from her nightmares and instead, black magic had totally engulfed her spirit - and she almost lost her mind. The next thing she was vaguely aware of, was a big fire and Vincent's arms carrying her out of the building, away from Alexander, who in his madness was in flames.

Then she lost consciousness completely.

Catherine spent three days in the hospital recovering from the drug influence, the first night having been the worst, as the nightmares were still in full swing and the medicine she got through the IV to help her stabilize her brain activity had an almost devastating effect. But she was strong indeed and in the end, the medicine worked and from the next day on, the route to her recovery was speedy.

When Joe (her father was out of the country) picked her up in the hospital after three days and nights, she was exhausted and gutted with herself and went straight to bed. She slept for ten hours, luckily with no more nightmares. Going to work next day was her idea. Joe had wanted her to rest more, but she insisted, and so she spent the day in the office catching up with her reports, before Joe sent her home at six p.m, shocked she was still there.

He noticed she looked well, considering the events a few days before, but he also noticed the sadness in her eyes and couldn't really account for it. But as always with Joe, he never pushed her to talk to him. She knew she could and so he thought that if she wanted to ease her mind, she would talk to him. But because Catherine just smiled at him, thanking him for his care and leaving the office, he assumed she was still under shock from what happened and would be fine in time.

When Catherine came home that evening, she closed the door behind her and leaned against it. Suddenly, she felt very weak and the sadness which had surrounded her heart ever since she woke up in the hospital, was even stronger. Vincent was the last person in the world who deserved such cruel words from her. Although she hadn't meant them, she couldn't take them back and it was killing her inside.

When Catherine gathered some strength, she tossed the briefcase on the small couch and slowly walked to her bedroom, shedding clothes to have a shower. The hot water helped her relax a little, but the sadness wouldn't leave her heart.

After the shower, in a nightgown and wrapped in a sky blue silk night robe, absent-minded, she took the shell and walked out to the balcony sitting down.

Staring at the evil thing in her hands now, her heart felt heavier with each breath. She wanted to cry, but realized she didn't have the strength. She started feeling hopeless, for if Vincent couldn't forgive her, her life from now on would just be a desert without water, purely existing but not living and that thought was indeed *the worst pang that sorrow ever bore (1)* to her...

She was running her fingers along the smooth surface of the shell when suddenly she felt and saw his hand landing gently on hers. She held her breath and her heart started racing when she looked up, immediately taking a tight hold of his wrist with her free hand.

Oh, that heavenly face restored... Those deep blue eyes, shining like diamonds in the dark, warming her inside and out without words, just piercing her right through to the deepest part of her soul and heart. *He came, he truly came...*

Vincent held both of her hands in his and pulled her close to him. She was desperate to say how sorry she was, to apologize, to tell him she didn't mean any of those cruel words she'd said that night, that without him her life has no meaning, that without him her heart and soul would die....

But she couldn't find the strength, just kept gazing at him with a pained look, saying all these words only in her mind hoping for them to reach him through their bond.

And Vincent heard her.

I know, Catherine... I know it wasn't you, you could never say you hate me because I know you care about me... And nothing can ever stop me from loving you...

She saw it all in his twinkling eyes, drinking in the mesmerising sight of him, the breeze playing with his beautiful golden mane, the angelic serenity and love reflected in the magnificent leonine features of his face, a hint of an enigmatic smile settled on his lips.

Then Vincent looked at his palm where he held the shell he had taken from Catherine's hand. His hand closed tightly into a fist, as he crushed the shell into powder and tossed it away from the balcony. Catherine watched it disappear into the night, almost hearing Vincent's words in her heart.

You don't need a shell to protect you, for I am here forever....

Then she looked back at him with the same pleading eyes, but this time there was something more - total devotion, passion, and love so deep it almost melted Vincent's heart. After a moment, Catherine finally lowered her head and laid it on his chest in relief, right beneath his chin, embracing his waist tightly.

Vincent closed his eyes and leaned his cheek against her head in bliss. She came back to him, the dark spirit was gone and he could love and protect her once more, not from a distance but from the place he belonged to - right next to her.

They stood wordless for a long while, just holding each other, savouring the lost and found again, their hearts beating as one again. Neither dared to break the silence for the bliss was too great.

Suddenly, Vincent heard a silent sob. Catherine's shoulders started shaking and he realised she was crying. He tightened his hold on her to offer her more comfort.

"Vincent... I... I'm so..." Catherine tried to speak, in between quiet sobs. but he interrupted her softly.

"Shhh... It's all right..." He felt her pain, the shame she was feeling.

She pulled back to look at him, her eyes full of tears.

"How come you don't despise me? How could you ever forgive me?" She was shaking her head, still afraid he might change his mind and run away from her.

Because I love you...

That was what Vincent *wanted* to say, but instead he said something else.

"Because I know those words were put in your mouth by someone else. It wasn't you speaking them."

He gently wiped a tear from her cheek and her heart trembled under his light touch.

"I could never despise you, Catherine, you know that..." His deep gravelly voice almost whispered.

Seeing his smile and the sparks in his lovely eyes, she couldn't help but to smile, too.

"I don't deserve your... kindness," she said, shaking her head again but smiling warmly.

Vincent's eyes darkened and his face grew more focused.

"You deserve *everything*, Catherine..."

God, when you say my name, I could melt...

Her knees suddenly felt weak and she wobbled a bit. Vincent caught her from falling and gave her a very concerned look.

"Catherine!"

She swallowed and smiled at him.

"I'm all right, just... a bit weak still. The doctor said I need more rest..."

"Then you should listen to him," Vincent said seriously.

"I will, I promise..."

He tilted his head a little, observing her pale face. Then suddenly, he swept her from her feet and carried her through the French door to the living room and sat her down on a couch.

Catherine was shocked. Not because of what he did, but because for the first time, he had entered her apartment. On all previous occasions, he had always refused her invitation and she still wasn't sure why. And now he did it on his own.

Vincent noticed her amazement and bowed his head shyly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't think, I just... I felt your weakness and it's getting cold outside and... you're not exactly dressed for a cold evening...", he explained.

Catherine held his hands, beamed at him and her green eyes caressed his deep blue ones.

"Don't say sorry, Vincent, I'm just glad you finally came in, that's all."

The corners of his mouth turned upwards slightly.

"Desperate times breed desperate measures..."

Catherine chuckled. "Shakespeare knew everything, indeed."

Suddenly a wave of tiredness ran through Vincent. He knew it wasn't his.

"You should get some sleep, Catherine, you're tired."

She smiled warmly at his care.

"I will but... could you do me a favour, Vincent?"

"You know I would do anything for you, Catherine..." he said, resolved.

She smiled and looked down for a moment.

"Could you... could you read to me a for a bit, please?"

His look softened and a smile reached the twinkle in his eyes.

"I would be happy to."

Catherine finally felt truly relaxed, free from the burden of her shame and regret, knowing that Vincent had looked through the surface and recognised the truth in her heart.

While Vincent started the fire in the fireplace, she grabbed the leather bound book from the coffee table and then sat down with Vincent, making herself comfortable next to him, leaning against his shoulder, looking into the slowly dancing flames.

Vincent took the book from her and opened it on the page indicated with a bookmark.

He looked at the first lines and his heart skipped a beat. Then he started reading and the typical deep gravelly velvet sound of his voice made Catherine melt inside again.

*When I saw you I fell in love,
And you smiled because you knew...*(2)

He stopped and Catherine smiled to herself. Then she raised her head up to him and her eyes regarded him so gently, so lovingly and with such devotion that he felt his heart beat in his throat. Yes, she knew, right from the start...

END

- (1) From the poem *Surprised by Joy* by William Wordsworth
- (2) By Arrigo Boito