

IT WASN'T COURAGE

(Shades of Grey episode expansion)

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

(Author's note: Certain dialogue was taken from the episode "Shades of Grey" from the series "Beauty and the Beast", written by Howard Gordon & Alex Gansa.)

Explosives. Just the word, mentioned in context with the tunnels and trying to free Vincent and Father trapped in the maze, made her shudder. When Catherine managed to get some for Mouse to use against the rock wall, she tried not to think of the worst consequences. It was their only hope and she was not going to fight Mouse's assurance that it was the only thing which could bring Vincent and Father back to them. Only once she saw the large area of the wall covered with explosives, Catherine was struck with the thought ... *how much is TOO much?*

She turned to Mouse. "It seems like a lot..."

The boy in Mouse replied in his usual matter-of-fact way. "Maybe."

"Maybe?! You don't know??"

"Read all about it."

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. "You've never used plastic explosives!"

Mouse stopped working on the wall and looked at her in hesitation for the first time.

"Yeah... Might blow Vincent and Father up... Might blow Mouse up... Might save their lives too... Hand me the little gizmo."

Catherine felt a freezing cold fear clamp her heart, as she held her breath but then passed him what he asked for. Something was telling her to trust this boy. And pray....

On the other side of the rock wall, Vincent sat up suddenly and listened. He had been resting beside Father, but all at once, his heart was overcome by a sudden feeling of great fear. He knew where it came from.

"Catherine is frightened..." he said, sensing her strongly on the other side of the wall.

"She's afraid... you're dead," Jacob said, gasping for quickly thinning air in between words.

"No, not sadness or despair... Fear..." Vincent contradicted, trying to determine what might be the reason for her feelings.

They had faintly heard the drilling for some time, but that had stopped about ten minutes ago, and no sound had come from the other side since then, although Vincent knew Catherine was still there. He was trying to focus on the possibilities.

Drilling, using pick axes, that's not dangerous... What IS really dangerous? Why did they need to drill at all? Drilling itself probably wouldn't break the wall, unless they...

When it finally dawned on him, it all made sense and he knew at once why Catherine was terrified. But he also knew it was probably their only chance.

Thinking at sonic speed, he grabbed Father gently under his arms and started pulling him away from the wall where they had lain.

When the explosives and the detonator were all set up, Mouse commanded Catherine and Winslow, who was also watching, to move to cover unless they wanted to blow up with him. The signal from the detonator wouldn't work from the tunnels and needed to be moved closer to the maze where Vincent and Father were trapped. After Winslow offered to do it for him, Mouse refused, saying only that they were *his* gizmos. Catherine stepped in bravely.

"Show me what to do and I'll do it!"

Winslow looked at her in amazement and respect. He had only met this woman a few hours ago, but the way she was fighting to rescue the two most beloved men of the tunnels, was beyond anything he'd ever seen.

Mouse looked at Catherine with a shy smile.

"He's my friend, too, Catherine..." Then he laughed. "You die and Vincent will kill me anyway! Go now..." His voice softened at the last words.

Winslow and Catherine both affectionately touched his shoulder for good luck and walked further back to hide with the others behind tall rock columns surrounding the maze, kneeling down and bracing themselves anxiously from the explosion.

Catherine's heart was pounding with immense speed, and she realized she was trembling. The fear had completely overtaken her. Fear not for her own life, but for Vincent's...

Please, Vincent, stay away from the wall.... Please, come out alive.... Come back to me...

She closed her eyes, just as Mouse pushed the button on the detonator. The next thing she was aware of was a huge bang and rocks and dust falling and flying all around the place where the wall had been just a moment ago. It didn't take more than ten seconds and the noise stopped and the dust started settling down.

Luckily, the blast hadn't caused a chain reaction, so the ceiling and the rock columns stood firmly in their spots.

Catherine stood up and tried to look through the dusty veil into the semi-darkness of the place, which, until just a few moments ago, had been behind the wall. She desperately searched the area for any sign of life. Wanting to call out, words got stuck in her throat, as she feared the worse.

Suddenly, she noticed a shadow moving, a figure coughing and rising from the ground. Catherine held her breath, then gasped and felt immense relief and joy when she recognized him

"Vincent!!" she whispered.

"Catherine!" he whispered as well when he turned around.

She started climbing over the rocks in haste, almost tripping while running to him. When she stood just inches away from him, she stopped for a second, as if making sure it was really him and she was not dreaming. Then they fell into each other's arms, holding tight for a moment. When they pulled back, their faces were almost touching and their eyes said more than any words could.

Vincent suddenly remembered Jacob and looked down at the man lying at his feet, then knelt at his side, while slowly releasing Catherine's hand.

"Father... he's badly hurt," he said, taking the older man's hand in his and trying to assess his state. He had covered his body with his own during the explosion to protect him and realized now, Father hadn't sustained any further injuries since the maze had collapsed and entrapped them hours before.

Winslow and Mouse approached them, kneeling next to Jacob, who had finally awakened and was looking around at the faces of the people he loved. He smiled, understanding they were safe now. He

reached for Mouse's cheek, then turned his to look at Catherine, slowly reaching out to cup her cheek with his hand, which she held immediately.

"Catherine... I have no words... to thank you," Jacob said quietly, but wholeheartedly.

She smiled at him, visibly moved, still holding his hand in hers, and then looked over at Vincent, who was watching her intensely, ever observant. She returned his gaze, relishing the sight of him, remembering she had come so close to losing him and he would have never really known... She swallowed the tears starting to form in her eyes and focused on Jacob again, as other tunnel dwellers started approaching them to help carry him to the Hospital Chamber.

A stretcher was brought and Vincent gently lifted Jacob onto it. Catherine felt deeply moved as she watched him, especially when he leaned down to kiss Father's forehead and Jacob stroked his head, before four men grabbed the stretcher and started walking towards the upper tunnels with others on their heels. A few more people embraced Vincent, including some older children, who had been allowed to come there with others. Catherine could see how much they truly loved Vincent and how happy they were that he was unharmed. A few of them even hugged her and thanked her for her help, leaving her overwhelmed with surprise.

When they were the only ones left, Vincent looked at Catherine, who wasn't able to say anything. She was still affected by the shock and she didn't know how to tell him about the immense strength and depth of her own feelings.

Vincent, seeing and feeling her highly-emotional state, just gently took her hand, which she squeezed tightly. He smiled and led her out of the maze, following the others.

When the men brought Jacob to the Hospital Chamber, a doctor from Above, a longtime Helper, established that Father had three broken ribs, but his oxygen level and breathing were back to normal, and he would be fine. Everybody sighed in relief.

Vincent and Catherine returned just after the doctor had left, and after hearing the news, Vincent was extremely relieved. He had been so worried all the time they were trapped, but hadn't wanted to lose hope for both their sakes.

Catherine, was happy too, for although she had rarely come down Below until that day, she felt quite fond of the old man, even though the few times they had met had been mostly under dramatic circumstances. She also knew how much he loved his adoptive son and the community he had helped to build decades ago.

She was still holding hands with Vincent, without noticing that it had already been over an hour. But he didn't let go of her hand either. It was as if their hands simply belonged together. Moreover, Vincent felt her need and wanted to comfort her.

As they walked into his chamber, Catherine stopped for a moment, taking in the beauty of the familiar private space of the man beside her. Everywhere she looked, she saw him, in the books, the old statues, the yellow and green stained glass window, the colorful lights of the chandeliers, the candles, his journal lying on the table in the center of the chamber, all the odds and ends on the shelves and chest of drawers which he had collected throughout his life... No luxury, but a warm comfort and simple beauty, reflecting the beautiful soul of their owner. *So close.... So close and he would have never returned here...*

Vincent felt the current of her thoughts, as she trembled at them. He turned to face her, still holding her hand and asked with concern.

"Catherine... are you all right?"

She looked at him, blinked and flashed a quick smile. "Yes, although...that's a question I should be asking *you* ..."

Vincent knew she hadn't said the whole truth, but didn't push her.

"I am fine, don't worry...", he smiled at her, touched by her care. "I will just quickly check on Father, to see if he has everything he needs, then I'll be back..."

"No!" Catherine interrupted him desperately, then shook her head in apology.

"I mean... I'm sorry, of course...." She smiled at him, but he could feel the deep emotional turmoil in her.

She was trying to let go of his hand, backing away from him slowly, but suddenly starting to gasp for air.

Breaking into tears, she threw herself into his arms, locking her arms around his neck and holding on to him for dear life.

Vincent returned her embrace tenderly, finally realizing what was distressing her. He leaned his cheek against her head, while she sobbed quietly into his dust-covered golden hair. Gently stroking her back, he whispered.

"It's over... I'm here... Always..."

Catherine tried to take a few deep breaths to calm down.

"The thought of losing you - " She couldn't finish. She was shaking all over and Vincent felt that. He held her closer and gently cradled her in his arms, until he could feel her muscles relaxing and her heartbeat slowing down again.

Then Catherine finally pulled back to look at him. She tried to wipe away her tears and smiled, wanting to return to a normal state and lighten the mood. But because they were both still covered with dust from the maze, when wiping the tears, she smudged the dust around her cheeks even more.

Vincent couldn't help but chuckle. Her look told him she was wondering why.

He smiled and explained. "Tears and dust don't go together well, I guess."

Catherine understood immediately and laughed. When she looked back into his eyes, she saw the twinkle in their blue depths, the one that always made her feel warm, cherished, loved... Before she could think further, she heard him say in a low quiet voice, his look turning more serious again.

"But you are still the most beautiful woman I have ever seen..."

Catherine felt weak in her knees, as she smiled and embraced him once more, this time more calmly, yet still putting her whole being into it.

When she pulled back again, she said with a smile. "Go now. Father would surely love to see you..."

Vincent gave her a tender look. "I'll send Jamie over with some hot water for you for washing."

"Thank you," she said gratefully.

Very slowly, he let go of her hand and started walking out, then turned to her and said gently, "I'll be back soon..."

Catherine felt a warm wave of peace coming over her. "I'll be here." She smiled at him and watched him disappear.

A few minutes later, Jamie, an 18-year-old blonde girl, with her hair tied in a hasty ponytail, entered the chamber with a pitcher of hot water and a linen towel hanging over her arm. Catherine already knew her, as they had worked together for hours that day in order to save Vincent and Father, and had helped Mouse finish his drilling machine.

Catherine smiled at her. She was the only girl she'd seen in the tunnels who wore trousers, instead of a long skirt or dress as the other girls and women wore.

When she remembered how skillful she was using different utensils, and how strong she was moving things around despite her thin frame, she understood Jamie was a more free-spirited, outdoor type. She knew Jamie looked for adventures and loved exploring new things, especially since she got along so well with Mouse. Catherine had realized very quickly that Mouse was a technical and logical genius, able to construct anything out of almost nothing.

"Thank you, Jamie."

The girl smiled shyly back at her and was ready to leave, when she turned on her heel and looked at Catherine again.

"Vincent said he will be back very soon," she said quietly.

"I know, he told me," replied Catherine gratefully.

After a moment of hesitation when the girl didn't speak and yet didn't leave the chamber, Catherine asked gently.

"What is it, Jamie?"

The girl looked down shyly and then up at Catherine again.

"What you did today... was very brave... I've heard about you before, but now I can see why Vincent loves you so much..."

Jamie's voice faded and a smile appeared on her face.

Catherine was stunned, at both Jamie's kind words of admiration but especially at her remark about Vincent's feelings. With wonder in her face, she managed to utter just one word.

"How...?"

Jamie chuckled and replied.

"It's easy to see, I noticed the way he looks at you. He loves us all down here, but he never looks at anyone the way he looks at you, not even at Father. And true, he's been going Above at nights for years, but I'd never seen him so quick and eager to do it before he met you."

Catherine swallowed, feeling her heart speeding up again. She knew Vincent had deep feelings for her and that he would lay down his life for her. She could feel it, but he had never stated his feelings out loud to her. They were obvious from his every embrace, word, gesture and look, but he never said anything directly, as if he didn't *dare* to name them aloud. They sometimes referred to their deep affection indirectly, or through the words of a poem, but neither of them ever actually said those simple, yet so meaningful, three words out loud to the other. But it made her happy that she didn't just imagine things, that someone else saw it too...

"Thank you..." Catherine said with a quiet voice, genuinely moved, as she smiled at Jamie.

"No problem," the girl replied. "Did *you* tell him that you love him?"

Now, Catherine almost choked on her own breath.

"You should, you know? You're pretty obvious, too... Anyway, I'm glad he found you," Jamie concluded and quickly ran out of the chamber.

Vincent walked back to his chamber. He was glad to see that Father was resting comfortably and was receiving the best care from Mary and others. He promised he'd be back soon, after he walked Catherine home.

Catherine....The thought of her stirred deep emotions in him again. He still couldn't believe she was willing to risk her life to save himself and Father. When Mouse told him how she offered to detonate the explosives, he felt a shiver run down his spine. Why would she risk so much? He knew from Catherine's own words that she cared about him deeply; he remembered how eager she had always been to embrace him, how comfortable and happy she always felt when he put his arms around her, the loving looks she always gave him. She had even given up a better job for him, but still, to risk her own life... All the signs were there, and she had truly made him feel loved for a long time now, but he still couldn't dare to make himself truly believe that what she was projecting to him could be real love.

But what if it could? The way she reacted just a few minutes ago, clinging to him so desperately... He barely noticed he was at his chamber until he stopped in the entrance and saw Catherine standing at the washing bowl. She had already cleaned her face, but he could see how her hand holding a sponge was slowly gliding up and down her neck to wipe the remains of the dust away. Suddenly, he wished that hand was his...

He blushed at his sudden loss of control, swallowed hard and looked down, waiting until she finished. Catherine sensed his presence and turned around. She smiled and laughed.

"Any better, do you think?"

Vincent looked up at her and nodded with a smile.

She put the sponge back in the bowl, quickly dried her face and neck, and fastened the top button of her blouse, which she had undone before washing. Vincent was astonished she felt totally comfortable doing it in front of him, but although a bit nervous, for some reason, he was unable to look away this time.

"How is Father?" she asked with care, misinterpreting his obvious unease.

"He is fine. Mary is being her usual self, trying to make him as comfortable as possible," he replied, relaxed now and chuckled. "At least until he becomes his usual self as a patient and starts driving her mad with his grumpiness."

Catherine laughed and then her eyes softened as she looked at him. She closed the distance between them and put her arms around his waist gently, resting her head on his chest to listen to his heart. Vincent sighed quietly and embraced her carefully, but with pleasure, breathing in the scent of her hair.

"You should rest, Catherine, I can feel your fatigue," his gravelly voice whispered softly. He didn't let go of her.

Catherine sighed, unwilling to part from him so soon, but knowing he needed rest, too. She pulled back to look at him, concerned about his health.

"So should you, Vincent... It was a... traumatic experience for you... Are you all right?"

Noticing and feeling her concern, he smiled.

"I am fine, don't worry yourself about me... Can I walk you home?"

Catherine was about to protest that he should lie down and that she could ask someone else to lead her to the threshold, but one look of his eyes quieted her. She saw the longing in them and she herself couldn't resist the thought of spending a few more precious minutes in his presence. Therefore, she just nodded and grabbed her jacket from the chair, and he took her slightly trembling hand, leading her out of the chamber.

They remained silent throughout the walk to the threshold, holding hands, deep in thought about the events of the day, but every now and then they glanced at each other. Catherine especially, couldn't keep herself from looking at him frequently, as if reassuring herself that Vincent was truly there and

not buried under the rocks of the maze. She shuddered at that thought, and he must have felt it as the gentle hold of his hand got suddenly tighter.

When they reached the last narrow passageway, Vincent let Catherine go first and let go of her hand. When he followed her, bending under the arch over his head and then straightening up again, he noticed she was watching him intensely. He stopped for a second before standing upright completely. He walked slowly past her until he reached the threshold ahead of her. Then he turned around to face her.

Catherine was still gazing at him with a serious look on her face, as she grabbed hold of his hands. Vincent sighed and lowered his eyes, shaking his head slightly.

"Catherine..." He still couldn't believe the risk she had taken for himself and Father.

"I have *never* been so frightened..." she said, before he could continue.

Vincent looked up at her again and saw it - the fear for him in her eyes, even now.

"Your courage saved our lives."

Catherine suddenly knew how to tell him at last.

"I felt like I was losing the best part of myself. I would have done anything... It wasn't courage, Vincent... it was love ..." She whispered the last word.

Vincent's heart trembled at her words and suddenly he felt like flying.

They gazed at each other for a few seconds, and then Catherine laid her head on his chest and put her arms around his waist.

Vincent held her close and rubbed his cheek in her hair, closing his eyes, as he wished he could just stop the hands of time forever and freeze this moment.

When she pulled back slowly, she looked up at him once again and gave him a little smile before turning away and walking towards the ladder.

He leaned against the threshold wall with his arm, watching her until she disappeared in the ray of light. And even afterwards, he kept staring into the light, feeling a strange peace, despite his heart beating faster than normally, and a new sensation awakening all his senses on a completely different level. *She truly loves me...*

The shade of his deep blue eyes darkened and the corners of his mouth turned slightly upward. Today could have so easily been an end. Instead, it was a true beginning of something beautiful...

END