

# *Crossroads*

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova



It's been a great day. The most powerful and charming man in the city took me out. We walked the night streets together and got carried away by their charm and the sounds of saxophone filling the air; he kissed me... I should feel over the moon; I should feel like I'm back on track, back in the life I used to lead before someone decided I needed a lesson to learn. I should enjoy Elliot's interest, I should be happy. Why aren't I then?

The answer is staring me in the face as clearly as the fact that nothing could ever be the same again, that *I* could never be the same person as I was before the attack. It contains only one word, a name that shakes all my newly-found confidence in the life I could have again to the ground, leaving me confused and insecure once more – Vincent...

Just saying the name out loud into the darkness of my bedroom surrounding me now shifts something inside me, touching me somewhere deep with an invisible, gentle hand; it's the softest touch I have ever known, caressing my heart and warming it like no one else had ever done before. Yet again, I can feel your powerful but careful and gentle arms around me; I can feel the warmth and peace surrounding me like a blanket of love, keeping me safe from any harm and making my heart beat to the rhythm of the emotion the seed of which you had planted there when you saved me from dying for the very first time...

My brain is telling me to grab the chance life has given me and accept the comfort of the world Above offered me again with open arms. I finally have a job that allows me to make a real difference in people's lives; now I can have a comfortable and fulfilling personal life to match it. And yet, I cannot rejoice, no matter how much I want to. Despite all the glamour and

excitement, something is telling me this is not the road I'm meant to go, even though I'm trying to give it every chance to convince me otherwise.

Elliot is impressive. He is sophisticated, elegant, and very clear and open about what he wants from both life and love. I see a lot of my previous self in his ideals and the way he sees the world. However, no matter how much I'm trying to suppress it, I can see the differences between us as well, differences that might not have played a big role in the past, but they do now.

Once, before the attack, a man like Elliot Burch could have swept me off my feet with ease, leaving no chance for anyone else. Today, he will have a much harder task to do so, for someone else had already done it before him, in a much more inconspicuous way, without pomp and circumstance, without caviar and champagne, without stopping half of the town in the process of doing so. He has done it with soft but honest and eloquent words, thoughtful and considerate gestures, unselfish and generous acts of extreme kindness, with manners that every woman would consider more than noble...

Vincent...

You told me to follow my heart to choose my way to happiness. In your unparalleled generosity, you let me take my own path, regardless of your own heartache. I am free to live the life I have always dreamed of, a possibly married life with children, a happy life, and yet... Freedom is a relative thing, and I know I have to choose. And I also know that I don't feel free to break the most meaningful relationship I've ever had. I don't want to lose you, Vincent, I *can't* lose you, for if I did, I would lose myself...

I wish I knew what to do... I wish I could ask Daddy. He would surely give me good advice, but I can't; I can't compromise your safety. The only thing I can do is follow your advice and follow my heart, and hope that it will choose wisely and go in the right direction, wherever it may lead.

The memory of your haunted face when we parted in the tunnel still leaves a bitter taste in my mouth and a sharp sting in my heart. I can't bear the thought of having hurt you, you who have done nothing but soothe my own aches and pains ever since our path crossed... Will you ever be able to forgive me, Vincent? Will your noble heart be graceful enough to look past my causing you so much pain? You said I have to choose, but I feel like my hands are bound by a heavy chain and I can't figure out how to break it.

Help me, Vincent... Please, help me find the right decision in my heart, for both our sakes, for I could never be happy as long as you're suffering...

In all my life, I have never felt this way. I think I know the answer to this riddle, but something is still preventing me from saying it out loud. Is it fear of the unknown? Or is it fear of the known?

The past haunts me, the present overwhelms me. The future paints a quite daring and for most people unimaginable picture in my head, showing me *all* the cards in my hand that I could play. Despite the quite clear course of events at the moment, I know the true choice is mine.

I pray it will be the right one...

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Our world is cold but I'm on fire... I can't think clearly, I am choking with each breath I take, staring into an abyss deeper than the one in the tunnels. For the first time in my life, I am truly desperate...

I have felt love before, long ago when I was still a boy, but the stabbing pain in my heart I'm feeling now is like a dagger that someone twists with each passing day that takes you further away from me and closer to *him*...

Oh, Catherine...

I have no right to think you would ever consider choosing me over him. I know that very well. It's a fact I have been painfully reminded about daily, without the need to look into a mirror. You have every right to choose the life you were born to live. Above, with him, you could have everything you have ever dreamed of; he can give you anything. Still, I can't stand the thought of you in the arms of another man, in other arms than mine...

I can feel your confusion, insecurity, your fear of losing me. But is the fear based on friendship or something deeper? Is there any, even a tiny chance of it being... love?

I am a fool... Believing in you feeling anything else than deep friendship and gratitude towards me is more than foolish; it's inconceivable. *We are all fools in love* <sup>(1)</sup> and I am no exception, regardless of all Father's lessons about what a being like me can and can't expect from life.

I've told you I have never regretted what I am, until now that I have met you... Can you imagine, Catherine, can you look into my heart and see what turmoil, what thunderstorm your presence in my life has caused? Right now, it feels like a devastating tornado, taking everything in its way, tearing it from its roots willingly or unwillingly...

I have been trying to tell myself that the bond connecting us doesn't mean that you are bound to me forever. It is a precious gift that we've shared, but it cannot be anything more than that. You have a life Above, and I am bound by my fate to a life Below, a life in darkness. Our worlds are too different to blend, and I would be fighting my own reason by not acknowledging that. Why then do I keep nurturing the tiny seed of hope in my heart that things *could* be different, even for someone like me?

I am no one, a being of the underworld, doomed to a life of darkness, while you are destined to dazzle the sun itself. Oh, to be there and accompany you at least once, Catherine! To walk hand in hand with you and bask in the golden sun rays warming our skin and making it

glow... How I wish I could be *him* just for one brief day! I would lead you down the streets of Manhattan and no one would look twice...

Father warned me from the beginning; he foresaw my suffering and he was right in one thing - I mustn't give in to illusions. I am what I am, and although I helped to save your life, you owe me nothing. It is I who owes you everything, for no other human being ever touched my heart the way you have...

I imagine you with him, he who owns towers and people's lives and excites you, opening every door for you. I imagine the two of you walking the same streets I walk at night, but unlike me, he doesn't have to hide. He is safe out there, and you are too as long as you are with him. Would you be safe with *me*? My life without you will be an endless row of cold days marked by the deepest heartache, but I know that I will always watch over you, even if from a distance, even if you lead another life, with another man, always...

For many years, I have lived among friends, among family, and yet alone. I learned to find joy in many things, often the simplest things like a walk on a rainy night in Central Park.

Although I have accepted my fate, I quietly envied those who found someone to share their love with. I kept walking and living, finding solace in helping others and sharing my love with them, caring for them. But now... what do I do now, Catherine? Now that I have known love as deep and powerful as never before? Now that I have learned what it means to dare to hope?

Wherever I go, whatever I do, you're with me. I can't go back to where I have been; it's not possible. I am changed, forever...

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The night is dark as I listen to the voices of the stars Above. They speak clearly, whispering to me truths that haven't reached their destinies yet. Now I see! Now I understand! Now I know why the child is worried, why the child is afraid...

He hasn't visited me for many winters, not realising the answers he has been looking for can be found also in places away from the Home Tunnels... For days, I have felt his unrest, something troubling him deep inside, eating away at his heart and bothering his mind. The spirits told me he *will* find his way to me soon, but not yet; the time has not come yet.

Don't you worry, Vincent, you are always welcome here; old Narcissa is your friend like she was when you were a boy, searching for your place among the living. She has been keeping an eye on you in her mind, listening to the universe and learning about your adventures... and mischiefs!

Oh, the old man grew a few more grey hairs while looking after you, I bet! I know it was Devin who led you to most of the troubles, although he always loved you, but you were more than willing to participate. Despite being different, you were the same child as every other one in these Tunnels – playful and hungry for adventures, only a bit less daring than your brother.

Oh yes, brother! You don't know it yet, but you shall one day when the tides change and Father will have to face his past....

But neither can help you now; only you can choose your path. I am only a crazy old woman, but I know that you carried your destiny within you from the moment you were born and survived. Special souls have special destinies and yours will bring you so much... Joy and pain, happiness and sorrow, courage and fear... But you are strong, child, you *can* overcome everything; I knew it when you were just a little boy, full of curiosity and wonder, always believing that all things are possible – even if Father tried to convince you about the opposite...

Be strong, Vincent, and keep the faith in a better tomorrow! Your fear is short-lived; it can't survive without feeding. The sooner you throw fear away, the closer you'll be to reaching your destiny... It is written in the stars. Look up, child! You'll see it in the face of the night... Every path and step you have ever taken, every moment of your life shines forever in the sky.

Are you still afraid? That's all right; without fear, you wouldn't appreciate happiness when you find it. Trust yourself, trust the one who invaded your heart, for her destiny is also your destiny. I can feel her fear, too. She is confused, you both are. She too must make her choice to fulfil what was written for her a long time ago. Believe, Vincent, and you shall not regret it.

The spirits are talking to me again; the time has come when the worlds Above and Below meet and share the same path for good. They must be patient, they must not be afraid! They must follow the call of the heart.

People call me crazy, but they don't stop to listen to hear the voices from other worlds; they rather call them hallucinations or a figment of my imagination. I won't try to change their mind, I never have. Let them be more blind than I am, for they can see the whole world but many of them can't see the true power of their choices.

Don't make the same mistake, Vincent... Don't listen to your doubts but take your fate in your hands and take the first step in the right direction. The spirits and the stars will be there to guide you as they always have - and Narcissa will be there for you too, whenever you'll need her.

Can you hear it, Vincent? Your fate is calling you again, so hush and listen very carefully! Your whole future depends on it...



*I stood at a crossroads and fate came to meet me.*

*- Liz Greene -*