The Greatest Knight

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Note: Some dialogue was taken from the episode 'When The Blue Bird Sings' from the series 'Beauty and the Beast' written by Robert John Guttke and George R.R. Martin.

It had been almost two weeks since Catherine last saw Vincent. It was on her balcony, right after the events with Lisa - after Catherine had helped her testify against her husband in a trial, before Lisa left New York again to continue in her ballet career. Vincent revealed to Catherine the only secret he had ever kept from her - about him hurting Lisa accidentally when they were teenagers, when he developed feelings for her, unable to control his desire when the opportunity arose.

Catherine knew that despite her effort to console him and persuade him that it was an accident and that it didn't change anything about her own love for him and acceptance of his whole body and soul, Vincent needed some time to heal, to come to terms with himself, his greatest fears and his wounds from the past. He knew she was always there for him, but she couldn't force him to talk to her.

The last thing she told him before he left, looking him deep into his eyes, hoping it would strengthen his reception through the bond, was that she loved him. She hoped he would think of it whenever he felt down.

As days went by, she was missing him more and more. They were meeting almost every night by now. And when she came down Below to visit, they spent even whole days some weekends together, too. The lack of his presence started to affect Catherine gravely. She was still precise at her work and kept up appearances, but inwardly, she was feeling empty and cold.

Everything reminded her of Vincent - the books on her shelves at home, the classical music she heard on the radio, the view of the New York lights from her balcony, the candles she lit in the evenings in her apartment. Even when she was passing a toy store on the street one day and saw a beautiful wooden chessboard in the shop window, a shadow fell over her heart as an image of Vincent and Father playing a game together sprung to her memory.

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One day, when Catherine was on a lunch break with Joe as they were attending a trial, she entered an antique bookshop. When seeing her keen interest and hearing from the bookshop owner that there was a video store next door, Joe happily left her to browsing and agreed to meet her after the break.

She was eager to find something special for Vincent, something they could maybe read together again some day soon…. She took a couple of old editions classics from their shelves, before putting them back, deciding they were not exactly what she was looking for.

Suddenly, a young man in his early thirties, in a sports jacket and a baseball cap, stood next to her.

"How about this one?" he asked with a beaming smile, offering her a visibly old, red leather-bound book. S

Surprised at his sudden appearance, Catherine reached for the book and had a peek inside. It was a collection of poems by Alfred Tennyson, and when she noticed the publishing date, she gasped and exclaimed.

"This is *perfect!* Thank you! Where ----" She stopped mid-sentence when she raised her head to thank the man, but he had vanished.

Catherine looked in the nearby isles, but he was gone. She frowned a little, thinking how odd this was, but with the treasured book in her hands, she shook off the strange feeling and walked to the counter to pay for it with a joyful feeling spreading in her heart.

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She finished work late that evening, it was after 8 pm, and Joe literally had to kick her out of the office. The fact that he was also doing unpaid overtime almost every day went without comment.

Catherine didn't realise it was so late already, but she took a cab to Central Park anyway. She wanted to meet Vincent, to give him the book she purchased earlier that day, but she wanted to do it in a neutral place. The threshold of her apartment building seemed too personal if he still didn't feel up to it.

She *longed to see* him. Despite her effort to give him time and let him come to her, she felt lonely as never before and was missing his soft voice, his gentle embrace, his reading to her, his comforting presence, the feel of his warm hand holding hers, their walks in the tunnels… She missed everything about him, and her heart was aching.

When she reached the familiar drainage tunnel in Central Park, she found the nearest pipe and started banging on it with a rock always at hand there, signalling a call for Vincent. She repeated it three times and then waited. Twenty minutes went by without a response, and her happy mood started sinking. It never took him more than fifteen minutes to reach her from the Home Tunnels.

She walked out of the tunnel into the moonlight, though staying not far from its entrance, leaning against the wall and looking up. Remaining like this for about half an hour more, she finally decided to head back home, deeply disappointed, and turned to walk away when she heard the familiar rustling of a cloak. In a second, she turned around, and her heart started pounding when she saw the beloved tall-hooded figure standing at the tunnel entrance. *He came…*

"It's been so long! I was afraid…" Words suddenly failed her.

"...that I might not come?" Vincent finished the thought for her.

Catherine wasn't able to add anything at that moment. The look on her face was more than telling that she was afraid that he might not have come ever again.

Vincent took a deep breath before explaining with a lifeless voice. "I was away…There is a place miles beneath the city… a nameless river that runs through the darkness. Sometimes I go there."

To try to wash your sorrows away, Catherine thought immediately, relaxing a bit. So he wasn't avoiding her intentionally.

She slowly walked over to him, and a shy smile appeared on her lips when she was handing him the book. She wished so much to brighten his mood a bit; she couldn't bear to see him hurting.

His blue eyes looked tired and sad when he looked at her and Catherine was sharing the pain with him. She knew what he had been going through in his head over the past few weeks. The horrifying incident with the Outsiders and the brief return of Lisa in his life, had left a heavy mark on his soul.

"I wanted you to have this…"

Vincent took the book from her hands and looked down to see the title.

"Tennyson," he said. "First edition…"

His look remained fixed on the book, his fingers mechanically scanning through the pages. His face was expressionless, although deep inside, he knew how precious the book was, and he felt touched.

"I've always loved *Idylls of the King."* Catherine smiled. "I even knew some parts of it by heart. Sometimes I dreamt of Camelot. And Lancelot."

Her smile faded, and her eyes froze on Vincent's face at the mention of Lancelot.

Vincent, still looking down, remarked quickly with a voice coloured with every shade of sorrow.

"Lancelot was fatally flawed, destined never to find the grail."

Catherine didn't fail to see the true meaning of his words and replied gently. "Still… He *was* the greatest knight of all…"

Vincent gasped quietly, and his eyes shot up to hers immediately. His face was finally free of holding back from expressing any emotions, his mouth half-opened in awe, his eyes burning from tearing up, trying to convey to her the indescribable depth of his feelings towards her.

How do you always manage to leave me breathless, Catherine? What have I done to deserve your love…?

Nothing else needed to be said anymore. Catherine's eyes echoed her thoughts very clearly.

Can't you see? Can't you see that I could never love anyone else but you?

She closed the distance between them and fell into his arms, pulling him closer to her, comforting him, caring for him, loving him…

Vincent held her tight; a tear ran down his cheek as he put his head on her shoulder before she pulled back to look him in the eyes again. Their faces mere inches away, their foreheads touching, their eyes speaking volumes to each other.

Then, Catherine kissed him on the cheek and lay her head on his shoulder again in a tight embrace. She smiled as a tear escaped her eye. He finally found his way back to her. And to himself.

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They stood there quietly for some time, bathing in the moonlight, relishing their embrace and the nearness of each other after what seemed like an eternity and not two weeks.

It's strange how physically painful it can be to let go of holding the person you love the most in the world, and both Catherine and Vincent felt it when they finally pulled back from each other's arms, but couldn't stop hold hands (or Catherine's hands holding one of his, as the other was holding the book).

Vincent lowered his eyes, trying to find words of apology for not talking to her for so long. He was struggling to put his thoughts in order. All he knew was that he had hurt her, hurt them both, by trying to distance himself from the depth of their relationship to protect her.

Catherine's words, after he told her about the incident with Lisa, persuaded him about the strength of her love for him, but he couldn't erase his doubts about himself. That was why he left to the nameless river - to clear his head and restore order in his emotions or at least try to. He could feel her sadness and longing for him all the time they had been apart, and yet he couldn't gather enough courage to face her in the state of mind he had been. All the internal self-doubt and struggle with his other side was just too much to overcome easily.

"Catherine, I…" His gravelly voice was barely audible.

"It's all right, Vincent," she interrupted him softly with an understanding smile. "I know you needed time… Which doesn't mean I didn't miss you terribly…"

Vincent looked up at her, grateful for her understanding. "My heart was breaking from being apart from you…. I'm still a little scared, Catherine… My feelings, my…. *need* for you is overwhelming, stronger with each passing day…"

He closed his eyes and exhaled loudly, fighting the feeling of heat rising all over his body which reacted to her touch after such a long time. "I'm scared of my own emotions and my inability to control myself if I… if *we*…" his voice trailed off as he wasn't able to continue. *My need for you is overwhelming….*

Catherine smiled and caressed his cheek.

"I'm not scared. Because I know the man I love most in the world would *never* hurt me… Vincent, I've seen you at your best and at your worst and whenever darkness cast its shadow over you. Still, you *never* hurt me even when you had the chance."

She was looking deep into his eyes and willing him to understand. "Ever since I first heard your voice, I trusted you and you have never betrayed my trust no matter what the circumstances. I *trust* in our love, and you must, too. What we have is all that matters; it's worth everything…"

She smiled at the last sentence, remembering her own words from some time ago.

Vincent remembered, too, as a smile finally appeared on his face as well.

"Everything…" He mirrored his own response from back then, and the tone of his voice revealed that the dark shadow of self-doubt lifted from his heart.

"Shall I read for you a little?" he asked, sensing her answer already.

"I would love that," Catherine replied with a beaming smile, and they both leaned against the wall and drifted across time and space to the land of old myths.

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