They Shall Rise Again

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

Vincent woke up early morning from another nightmare. The events at the rooftop were haunting him for two months now and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get the last words of his beloved Catherine to him, and the final words he spoke to her, out of his mind. The loving look in her tear-filled eyes, the bittersweet smile when she was drinking in the image of him one last time, the soft touch of her cold hand on his cheek….

Though lovers be lost…

Love shall not… and death shall have no dominion…   (1)

His eyes were burning, his cheeks were wet again. The last image before his eyes was her lifeless body lying in her bed, the pale colour of her skin. The memory of the cool yet silky smooth feel of her lips when he kissed her goodbye, was tearing his heart apart anew…

After Vincent got hold of himself, he took a deep breath and got up from his bed to get dressed. He had slept only for about two hours, as he was out Above searching for any clues to find his son. He had been doing that almost every night since he found out of his existence from Catherine, when he had finally found her on that rooftop. He was afraid that if he fell asleep, he would dream the same nightmare, so he decided it was better to check the pipes Pascal had told him about the day before. His life would never be the same again but the world would not stop turning and Vincent was needed in it.

When he was about to leave, his look fell on the small brown leather pouch on the table. Catherine's rose was resting in it peacefully, as always at nights, joined now by the crystal pendant Vincent gave her on their first anniversary.

Remembering the events, when he had found it on the sandy ground of the cavern, where he almost lost his mind, and life sent shivers down his spine. With trembling hands, he took the pouch and hung it around his neck. Once it was pressed close to his body, he felt he could breathe properly again and walked out of his chamber to face a new day - without her…

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On the other side of Manhattan, a young woman woke up to the view of the golden sunrise in the window. She was lying in a comfortable bedroom, with peach-coloured walls, nice furniture and modern paintings on the walls. After two months, she finally felt strong enough to sit up without making an effort. She stood up slowly and left the bed to walk to the window.

Standing at it, she watched the golden glow spread around the city, longingly looking into the distance.

Why indeed does it seem sometimes that the world conspires to keep lovers apart?

Suddenly, the door opened quietly and a tall man in his sixties with a kind face walked inside.

"Cathy! You should be in bed, you're still not strong enough!"

The worry in his voice made her smile.

"Peter, I'm fine, I have been for days now… Please, when can I go…. home?"

Peter Alcott walked to the slimmer than usual figure of Catherine Chandler and took her hand, gently leading her back to the bed.

"You know I have to run your last blood test before you can go. It shouldn't take more than a day to get the results back. My friend is doing it for me confidentially as always, so don't worry."

Catherine sighed and closed her eyes, struggling to cope with one more day of aching for him.

"I know, Peter, I appreciate what you're doing, trust me, I owe you my life… I just…"

Her voice faded and tears started running down her pale cheeks.

"I know…You will see him, soon…" Peter said, with a quiet reassuring voice, stroking her cheek in a fatherly way.

"I miss him, so much…" she whispered, her breathing getting heavy again. "And I miss my… *our* son…" She couldn't stop the tears when Peter took her in his arms.

"I'm meeting Diana Bennett and Joe Maxwell today. Diana is doing all that she can to help Vincent find your son, but it's difficult because she has to do it secretly," he said, when he looked at her again.

Catherine sighed, calmed down now, and she wiped the tears from her face.

"I'm glad he has someone to help Vincent…. I just wish we didn't have to keep it secret from him… I *know* how much he is suffering, even without our bond… I can't bear the thought of torturing him this way…"

Her bottom lip started trembling again and she felt a sharp stab at her heart.

"I know, Cathy, but you know it´s been for *his* safety as much as yours. We needed to get you from death's door first, there was no way to do it down Below and I wasn't even sure you *would* make it through. If I gave him false hope for nothing…" His voice broke but then he recovered.

"I had to pull all my strings in the hospital to *not* reveal your identity… When you finally regained consciousness after a month and I could transport you to my house secretly, I knew it was the safest to keep you hidden. It gave Vincent the time to focus on looking for your son, with Diana's help, but without him having to worry about whether you were going to recover or not. I know what state he was in the last time he had a breakdown…"

"But how can he ever forgive me for not telling him the truth?" Catherine was becoming desperate.

"He *loves* you, Cathy, more than his life, I know that just like anybody who knows you two, so I know he *will…* Besides, it is *I* who is to blame," Peter finished and stood up.

"Now, let me draw some of your blood for the last time, so we can move on from this misery for both of yours sakes."

He smiled and left Catherine to her ever-present fears.

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When Peter entered the D.A.'s office later that day, he was greeted by Joe and Diana. As they sat down in Joe's office, Peter gently revealed to them the truth about Catherine being alive and the events of the past two months.

It took them some time to believe him. Especially, Joe was suspicious at first, but then, his absolute astonishment was replaced by excitement bordering on ecstasy. His eyes welled up as a huge incredulous smile appeared on his face.

"But why didn't you contact me?! I would have helped!" Joe exclaimed.

"First, I didn't know, if she was going to make it and second, I didn't think it was safe. She was kidnapped shortly after talking to you in the hospital… Gabriel's people saw you with her. You might have been observed from a distance. You still may be… In fact, I took extreme precaution that *I* wasn´t."

Joe sighed with understanding.

"Where is Cathy now? Can we see her?"

Peter sighed. "I will move her to a safe place tonight, I can't tell you where just know that she will be safe until all this is resolved."

He glanced at Diana who understood and nodded faintly.

Diana had been quiet since the revelation, but now she spoke calmly.

"We need to get Gabriel. That's the only chance to end this nightmare…"

She almost said *and to find Vincent's and Catherine's son,* but quickly remembered Joe had no idea about Vincent, the child or the world Below.

"I agree." Peter nodded. "*How* will be the harder part."

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

Vincent was impatiently pacing in Father's study.

"Could you, please, stop that, Vincent? You are making my head spin," Jacob said, although he was nervous too.

Peter's message had been quite unnerving to both of them.

Dear Jacob,

Diana and I will come at 10pm tonight. Please, ask Vincent to join us. I have some information regarding someone very close to him…

Peter

What could it be? Maybe about Vincent's son? But he would have mentioned that…

Father glanced at the antique clock standing on the mantelpiece. It was exactly 10pm and soon enough, Peter Alcott and Diana Bennett walked into Father's study.

"Peter, Diana! I'm glad to see you! What information do you have?" Jacob blurted all at once seeing how nervous Vincent was. *At least he had stopped pacing now.*

"Jacob, Vincent! So good to see you both… "

Peter looked at Vincent trying to mentally judge his state. He looked pale, surely from sleep deprivation for some time, the search for his son and especially the loss of Catherine. *God, I hope he will be able to forgive me…*

Vincent nodded to him and Diana in recognition though he didn't say anything, he was too tense in anticipation. Diana saw that his nerves were stretched to maximum and her heart ached for him, although she knew he was about to receive the best news of his life.

Peter took a deep breath and started explaining the events of the past two months.

"Vincent… before I tell you everything you need to know, I want you to know that some of it will be painful to listen to and that whatever I've done, I've done with the best intention of not causing you more grief, as I wasn't certain about the outcome.'

Vincent tilted his head, not sure what to think of it, dreading the topic of his information, but he kept silent as Peter continued.

"When police brought Catherine to the morgue in our hospital that day…"

He saw Vincent wince and shut his eyes in pain but he continued.

"…they called me, as her closest, well… the *only* family contact - and I just couldn't believe it… I wanted to see her, needed to see her to believe and to say goodbye… I got permission from a dear friend of mine who is managing the morgue and I asked to be left alone with her for a moment.

There was something which struck me right away. Her skin colour was pale but not as pale as… a deceased person's normally would be. Her temperature didn't correspond with that one of a dead person either, although it was very low. I couldn't find a pulse at first, but I was trying on different places several times and finally… I found a very faint one on her neck…"

Vincent's head shot up to look at him, Jacob's eyes widened in disbelief.

"I checked her heart and to my absolute astonishment, I could hear a very quiet and slow beat… You can't imagine how happy I was that the pathologist was overloaded with work and he postponed his …. work… on Catherine…"

Vincent's breathing was getting heavier, though he still hadn't said anything. Jacob's legs suddenly felt shaky and he slumped onto a chair.

After Peter had checked that they were both still holding up all right, he continued.

"I immediately went to my friend, and since I trust him, I explained the urgency of the situation to him, and that not a single soul could find out about Catherine being alive, for her own safety.

"He agreed to make the needed arrangements so no one would find out she had been taken out from the morgue and he helped me to transfer her to the ICU as a Jane Doe.

"I faked her chart of course, which I still can´t believe no one even questioned but anyway…

"I drew a sample of her blood and asked one of my closest friends in the hospital to analyse it. He discovered remnants of an unknown drug in the blood cells, but it was clear that it had caused the extreme slowing down of the heartbeat and minimal breathing, practically invisible to untrained, but even most skilled eyes.

"I realised, that whoever had done this to Catherine would not want to find out that she was still alive. They most probably didn't expect her to survive the dose, so I decided to check her into another hospital - just in case, anyone unwanted had seen us - where I had another close friend. Remaining a Jane Doe when they admitted her, I claimed, she was found on the street and that police were working on finding out her identity.

"I told my friend the her very life depended on keeping it a secret. Because we've known each other for many years, and we trust each other with our lives, he had helped me to transport Catherine secretly into his hospital, where they started working on her possible recovery right away…

"As for the funeral… let's say I'm glad I have friends at different places and they owed me some favours… And we managed to persuade everyone that the coffin had to remain shut for technical reasons…"

Peter paused briefly, and one could hear a pin drop in the chamber.

Vincent's legs were shaky, and he had to hold himself against an empty chair next to him. His breathing was still heavy, his head was getting dizzy from all the information. It all sounded almost ridiculous, almost unreal, almost…. too beautiful to be true.

"To keep her safe, I had to pretend she was dead…. It was the strangest and the most heartbreaking thing I have ever done, because I knew what it did to you, Vincent… But believe me when I say I did it all to protect her and to protect you…"

Vincent just kept staring at Peter and the older man could see the agony in his eyes, so he continued

"When I came back to the hospital to check on Catherine, it didn't look good… Hooked to every possible life-support machine you can imagine, being treated with every possible medicine relevant to her state, yet her condition hadn't improved for almost two weeks. Her breathing had finally regained some strength and her heart rate had increased too. The effects of the drug were far longer reaching than any other I've ever come across, My friend in the hospital allowed me to visit her every day and get updates about her state. It took a month until she had finally regained consciousness…"

At that moment, Vincent gasped and his eyes started burning. The chair he was holding on to was in danger of being crushed by the strong grip of his powerful hands.

"I moved her to my house for safety and it took another month until I took the last test of her blood to confirm she was all right. That was yesterday in fact…"

Jacob was unable to say anything, his mouth went dry. He just kept staring at Peter, as if he was listening to the story of the resurrection of Jesus, unable to comprehend that such a train of events could actually happen in real life. Of course, he had read about drugs causing a dangerous drop of heart rate, but never to an extent of actually appearing… dead….

Vincent's breathing was ragged and his eyes were on fire now, his heart rate accelerating with astronomical speed.

Still grasping the chair hard, he whispered, "Is… Is she…" Words failed him, his voice broke.

Peter looked deep into his eyes and a smile appeared on his face. But before he could say anything, a faint gentle voice spoke from the study entrance behind Vincent.

"I'm here…"

Vincent turned sharply - he would recognise that voice among a million others. The voice of the woman who had turned his world upside down and was so embedded in his heart, soul and mind, that nothing and no one could ever take her out of them. The woman who had opened the gates of a new world to him and showed him, that love doesn't know boundaries, has no limits and that it exists in its deepest and purest form, burning with flames hotter than the sun itself.

That voice belonged to *her*…

"Catherine…" He whispered the name like a prayer.

His heart rate was dangerously high by now. His legs suddenly regained their strength and Vincent ran to her, as she ran to him. When they finally met in a fierce embrace, they fell down to their knees and cried.

Vincent suddenly forgot about all caution and his arms were holding her slender frame so tight, she could barely breathe. But she didn't care, she was holding on to him for dear life too, tasting the salt of her tears running down her cheeks.

"Vincent!" she cried into his neck with closed eyes, holding tight, as if to make sure he was real, and it wasn't another dream or hallucination she had suffered from.

"Catherine…"

He kept repeating her name with a broken voice, his face wet from tears, breathing in the beloved familiar scent of her, that he had so sorely missed for so long.

All the pain, the agony, the suffering from the past nine months were vanishing at the sight and feel of her, the woman he would love to his last breath.

"Forgive me… Please, forgive me, Vincent!" Catherine couldn't stop crying when she pulled back her head to look him into the eyes.

He took her face in his hands and shook his head to stop her

"Shhh…. There is nothing to forgive, Catherine!…You're here, alive….. And I will never leave you again…"

He smiled through tears, running his fingers gently through her now long hair, absorbing the beloved features of her face, which was still pale from the effects of the illness. But her eyes were bright and projected the same warmth and love for him, as he had remembered from before, if not even more.

She tried to smile as well, trying to catch her breath, cupped his face with her hands and leaned her forehead against his. "*Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again…"*

"*And death shall have no dominion…"* (2) Vincent finished with a whisper, his eyes still glistening.

Catherine ran her trembling fingers over the beautiful leonine features she loved so much. He was overcome with emotion already, but the touch of her hands on his skin was electrifying. Catherine was still crying, when Vincent suddenly kissed her with all the passion kept hidden for years. His memory of their too few kisses flashed vividly through his mind and he had no intention of holding anything back from her any more.

"I love you… With all that I am, all that I could ever be… I love you…," he breathed when he broke the kiss finally.

Catherine gasped and closed her eyes for a moment in bliss, smiling widely through tears, revelling in the words she had been longing to hear for so long, and barely heard him say until that moment. Then, she pulled him into another kiss and his arms engulfed her again.

This was the happiest day of Vincent's life, she came back to him from the abyss of death, and he promised himself to give her the life they always dreamed of but most of all the life she deserved and *wanted* - a life with him and their son. They would find him and nothing will ever part them again.

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They were not sure, how long it took them to calm down, but when they did, they suddenly became aware of others in the Father's study, too. Vincent helped Catherine to her feet, and when she was finally able to part from his arms, she looked over to Jacob, walking over to him quickly with a grateful smile.

"Father!" She fell into the arms of the shocked, but happy older man. "I am *so* happy to see you!"

Jacob couldn't hide his own tears, as he took her face with his hands and kissed her on the cheek.

"My *dear* Catherine... You cannot imagine what seeing you here means to me..." He choked on the last words.

Catherine smiled, took his hand in hers and kissed it.

"There is no other place in the world I'd rather be, Father...," she said, moved by his loving reaction.

Vincent approached Peter with a still tearful smile, wanting to thank him, but suddenly he found himself lost for words.

"Peter... I... I..." The words got stuck in his throat, he swallowed hard and his deep blue eyes started welling up again.

"You're welcome, my boy...And please, forgive me for keeping you in the dark..." Peter said touched by Vincent's ability to understand the reason for his action.

Vincent smiled and the words he spoke then brought the older man almost to tears.

"When it´s dark enough, you can see the stars…" (3)

He shook his head silently and put his arms tightly around Peter, his eyes shedding more tears of happiness.

Catherine returned to Vincent, who put his arm around her waist, unable to let go of her any longer. He gently kissed the top of her head and exhaled loudly. His relief that this was not a dream was obvious to everyone. Finally, Catherine turned to look at Diana, who hadn't said a word since they had arrived.

Diana was observing the reunion with a quiet smile. On the outside, she seemed controlled, but her insides were like jelly. She had never seen so much raw emotion displayed in front of her. Though it was bittersweet for her, she couldn't help but be happy for both of them, especially since she'd met Catherine for the first time earlier that day. It was after talking to her, that she realised why Vincent could never forget her, why even if she hadn't lived, in his heart he would never let the memory of her go. She would have lived inside him forever. Catherine was like a strong, wide-reaching evergreen tree - deeply embedded and impossible to uproot.

She couldn't have been more different from Diana yet, Catherine Chandler was truly a special woman - courageous, kind, gentle, empathic, brave, fierce, devoted, caring, grateful, loyal to death and above all, able to see and feel absolute deep and pure love, where most other people never would. As Jacob told Diana once, Catherine was like a beacon, shining a light on everything and everyone around, making them feel warm, welcome and loved, no matter where they came from or who they were.

Diana awakened from her thoughts to the sound of Catherine's soft voice.

"Diana, I can't thank you enough for helping Vincent during this tough time... for being there for him, and for all that you've been doing trying to find our son..." She choked on her last words, Vincent tightening his hold on her in support.

Diana smiled briefly and replied.

"It has been the most extraordinary experience of my life... And the greatest privilege..." She glanced at Vincent and saw the gratitude and complete understanding in his eyes.

I know, I could never compete with her, but it's all right…

Then, she added with her usual, sober tone.

"We *will* find him. Both of you more than deserve a perfect happy ending."

She flashed a little smile, then turned to Father and asked him if someone could lead her back Above.

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They were walking to Vincent's chamber, Catherine leaning into him with her arm around his waist, his arm around her shoulders.

Father first thought of setting Catherine up in the guest-chamber, but to both, Vincent and Catherine's surprise, he said that Catherine staying with Vincent might be the best. She needed a good sleep, and there would be too much fuss if he woke Mary and asked her to make the guest-chamber ready. Surely, everyone else would love to see Catherine and she would never make it to bed that night.

Neither of them protested, of course, all they longed for was never to be parted again, and the prospect of spending the night in each other's arms after such a long time of separation and misery was more than they could have wished for.

Cullen and Edward, the two men on sentry duty, whom Peter, Diana and Catherine had passed on their way down, promised to keep quiet for now, despite being totally ecstatic about seeing Vincent's beloved alive. The happy reunion could wait until morning.

As they entered the chamber, Catherine stopped and looked around, her eyes welling up although she was smiling.

Vincent held her hand and asked in concern, "What is it, Catherine?"

She sighed and shook her head lightly.

"You can't imagine how much I'd dreamed of this every night, for so long… I saw you sleeping in your bed with the amber light illuminating the room from behind the window… And sometimes, in my dreams, I also saw a crib next to your bed, the crib where our son would lay…."

Her bottom lip started quivering, and she felt a hot tear running down her cheek.

Vincent pulled her close to him, his arms encircling her fragile body. He noticed that despite having given birth two months prior, she had lost weight since he had seen her last time. The result of the almost fatal drug effects, he thought. How she must have suffered in her captivity, and afterwards, made his blood boil and broke his heart again.

"We will find him, Catherine, I promise," he whispered gently into her hair and then kissed the top of her head.

"And then your dream will become reality."

She pulled back to look into the sapphire blue depths of his eyes. "*Our* dream," she corrected him with a smile.

Vincent smiled and then lowered his head to kiss her. How natural it seemed to him now! Shortly before her kidnapping, it was as if suddenly a veil had been lifted from his mind, the constant fears of the past abandoned in history. And now that she was returned to him, all he wanted to do was to be one with her, as they both desired for years and this time, he wanted to remember it. To be truly together with her…

Catherine was revelling in the sensuous kiss, unable to get enough of his nearness, his touch. She wanted to melt into him. The endless days and nights of solitude had made her suffer badly and now that she could finally feel his body next to hers, she never wished to part from him.

"Catherine…?" Vincent asked when he broke the kiss and leaned his forehead against hers, both of them trying to catch their breath.

"Yes…?" she replied in a trance.

"Once you'd asked me if there would be a time when we'd be truly together…" His gravelly voice was very deep.

Catherine's heart skipped a beat and she felt flush rising to her cheeks.

"Vincent, we have a child together… Don't you think the time has arrived already?" she almost whispered.

For the first time in months, Vincent laughed quietly and he felt completely weightless. He saw Catherine's beaming smile and couldn't contain his happiness - and his excitement.

"I think you are absolutely right… my love…" His voice trailed off in another kiss but then he stopped it and pulled back to look at her face again.

"You're still weak, Catherine and I…."

His eyes dropped down, a feeling of uncertainty and his protective nature struggling with his desire again.

"If I hurt you…. I'm a little scared…," he admitted quietly, when looking back at her.

Catherine smiled tenderly, her eyes radiant from such deep love for this wondrous human being. She remembered the time after her father had died, and she was seeking comfort and strength in Vincent's arms and heart down Below. As she was about to return Above, she had spoken exactly the same words as Vincent spoke now - her fear striking her suddenly, as she was about to cross the threshold to go back to her world.

She spoke softly, her smile never leaving her face. "I know."

Vincent, reminiscent of the same memory of that moment long ago, dared a little smile before he mirrored her question from back then.

"Isn't that strange?"

Her fingers tenderly stroked his cheek. "No…"

Her hand slipped to hold the back of his head and brought his face down to hers, pulling him into a gentle, but deeply loving kiss. As the last of his fears left his mind, and his arms hungrily snaked around her waist and shoulders to press her body close to his, no more words were needed that night.

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Vincent woke up at dawn and his first thought, when he opened his eyes, was fear that it was all just a dream. But the moment he lowered his head and saw Catherine's head resting on his chest, embracing him and still sleeping peacefully, he felt like weeping. *It is real. SHE is real!*

His arms tightened the hold on her in both a protective and longing way, and he couldn't stop smiling. Only when something warm tickled his cheeks, he realised he was crying - tears of joy.

He was mentally drained. If the past nine months were a living hell for him, then the last eight hours were an absolute emotional roller-coaster. But he was as happy as he has ever been. The only thing missing for perfect bliss was their child, but he was sure they would find him. They must…

Catherine stirred a little and Vincent knew she was waking up. She opened her eyes and sighed with relief when she realised last night wasn't just a dream.

"Good morning," she said smiling and only then she lifted her head up from Vincent's bare chest covered with soft golden fur-like hair.

Her smile faded as she saw his face wet with tears. But he was smiling and those blue eyes….

"Vincent!" She sighed with concern, lovingly caressing his cheek with one hand. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head still smiling. "Before I opened my eyes, I was afraid it was just a dream….. I still can't believe you are here, with me…"

Catherine smiled and her heart was fluttering from the waves of love flowing to her from him…. From *him!* The truth hit her immediately.

"Catherine?" Vincent asked automatically, as he felt a shock coming over from her. He noticed in the same second that her face hasn't changed, so how could he…? His eyes grew wide open.

Catherine quickly sat up next to him staring at him wide-eyed with hope, her breathing ragged. "Vincent, can you *feel* it, too??"

He sat up as well, totally oblivious of the heavy quilted blanket sliding down and revealing more of his bare body than covering. His hands held her shoulders and while closing his eyes, he held his breath, trying to focus.

Joy, happiness, excitement, slight physical fatigue, a hint of a headache, hunger - for food and for his body… His eyes flew open.

"Catherine!" he cried in disbelief.

"The bond… It's back!" She exhaled and threw her arms around his neck.

Vincent couldn't describe the happiness he felt. He just held her tightly, his head buried in her shoulder. He started trembling, unable to control his emotions, his joy reaching heights he long had forgotten existed.

"I told you it would come back one day!" Catherine exclaimed with a beaming smile, when she pulled back from him to look into his eyes, cupping his face with her hands.

"Catherine…" He was unable to say more, just shook his head once again and gave her such a loving warm smile, that it made her shiver.

He couldn't resist and kissed her inviting lips. His heart could bursting of happiness, but the fatigue of sleepless nights suddenly caught up with him and he slumped back to the pillows pulling her gently down with him. He rolled over, looking at Catherine, who laid on her back now.

When he gazed into her big eyes, which were drinking him in, his heart was swelling with love. He gently and carefully traced the features of her face with the pads of his fingers, as if trying to imprint her image in his touch. The words which he said then were those he was suppressing himself from telling her for long years, but he couldn't any more. He wanted to shout it to every cavern and chamber in the tunnels, to every house, tree and the skies Above.

"I love you… I felt bound to you from the moment I found you, but when you pulled down the hood of my cloak and truly saw me for the first time, I *knew* I loved you… *You became the sonnet that was etched in my mind's eye. Existing outside the dreams we shared in the presence of our eternal love*…" (2)

The beaming smile on her face, her racing heart he felt beating against his own, and the tear running down her cheek told him more than any words would do.

"I beat you there," she said then, with a playful tone and he tilted his head in curiosity.

Catherine laughed and then her look softened, as she caressed his stubbly cheek.

"The first time I loved forever was when you whispered my name…"

Vincent gasped almost inaudibly and his eyes glistened in the candlelight. And then they got lost in passion and each other again.

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An hour later, Catherine, resting on the chest of her beloved, lifted her face up to his. His eyes were closed and he was smiling in the afterglow, but only then did she realise the tiredness she felt coming from him. She had noticed last night already how pale his face was and that his frame was thinner than usual. For a month, she had been on death's door, but for nine months, Vincent's energy, love of life, and his strength had been gradually sucked out of him. Until she returned, he had been slowly dying inside….

Catherine suddenly felt a freezing cold running down her spine when she imagined what would have happened to him if she hadn't returned in time. Her arms around his waist were suddenly holding on to him tighter and a sob escaped her throat.

Vincent felt the turmoil in her, opened his eyes, and caressed her cheek soothingly.

"I'm all right… I'll be fine, now that you are here…," he said calmly with a lovely smile and kissed her softly.

"I was so afraid, Vincent… I knew how terribly you must have felt and I was scared you wouldn't forgive me for keeping you in the dark longer than needed… I almost killed you…" Catherine was crying now.

"No, no…" Vincent pulled her to his chest gently, caressing her hair to comfort her.

"There is nothing to forgive, Catherine, it was needed, it was not your fault… Peter was right, it saved your life, and in that, it saved mine too."

She stopped crying and her heartbeat slowly steadied, listening to the calming beat of Vincent's heart.

"So much pain, so much wasted time…," she sighed.

"And so much to look forward to." Vincent refused to sink into negativity again.

On his chest, he felt her lips stretch into a smile. "Yes," she whispered.

"When we find our son and when all this is over, there will be only good memories to make, I promise you…" Vincent said with a fierce resolve, the velvet in his voice soothing her ears.

"Jacob…" Catherine breathed.

Vincent was silent trying to understand her thoughts. She raised her head up to his eyes and repeated softly.

"I would like to call our son Jacob… after the man who made it possible that I could meet the love of my life and become a part of him forever."

Her smile and her decision warmed Vincent's heart like flames from a fireplace on a cold winter's night. Deeply moved, he smiled and caressed her cheek with his thumb. It was the name he would have chosen for their son as well.

"Jacob…," he whispered dreamily.

Suddenly, Catherine's eyes filled with tears again, and Vincent felt her momentary fear that they might not find their son.

"We *will* find him, Catherine, I can feel it now!" he said resolved. "In fact… there is one thing I haven't told you yet," Vincent continued wiping away her tears.

"Apart from the nightmares about that night on the rooftop that I kept having each night while you were gone…." Flashbacks of that deep pain were reflected in his face so that Catherine took hold of his hand and kissed it.

"Apart from that," he continued. "I keep having these dreams, where I mostly run through a dark forest as if looking for something or someone. At first, I thought it was you, but then a baby's cry appeared in it and I suddenly knew, it is our son calling for me…"

Catherine held her breath. "Is it always the same dream? Do you recognize any of the surroundings in it?"

"No, it keeps changing, the places are changing. Last time it was snowing heavily, but I could still hear the baby's cry… I told Diana all I remembered - she is very good at reading dreams. Not in a way that Narcissa is, but in a more… psychological way. She figured out a few clues relevant in the search for Gabriel."

Catherine shuddered at the thought of the monster, who was keeping her captive for six months and almost killed her.

Vincent held her close kissing her temple.

"I'm sorry, Catherine… I didn't want to bring back those black memories to you, forgive me…" he said painfully.

Catherine sighed and focused on his calming voice. "It's all right, Vincent… I hope those dreams will bring us to Jacob. If you believe it, I believe it too…"

Vincent smiled at the strength of her belief. They would really need it. Suddenly a thought crossed his mind and he couldn't shake it off.

She felt the unrest in him and raised her head up to him again.

"What is it, Vincent?" she asked with concern.

His eyes were piercing hers trying to find an answer without having to ask but he wasn't succeeding.

"How….. How did you manage to fight that terrible drug, Catherine? It should have---" Vincent couldn't finish the sentence, for the fact of what might have been (*should* have been according to Gabriel) made him shudder like the breath of death itself would.

She cupped his cheek with her hand and looked deeply into his eyes.

"What I told you… that night…." Her eyes were glistening remembering the almost tragic moment and feeling the sharp pain of the memory in his heart.

"When I was unconscious, I kept having dreams, mostly nightmares but also dreams of… *you*… My body was dying, but my brain and my heart were willing to fight for the only thing that really matters to me… for *love*…"

She smiled and stroked his cheek, wiping a tear which escaped from his eye.

"Death shall have no dominion…," he quoted quietly and his eyes were glistening.

"Never," Catherine replied resolved and her lips found him in a gentle, but deep kiss. Suddenly, she stopped the kiss and pulled back slightly.

"Vincent?"

"Hmmm?" He was still in a daze.

"I had one more dream when I was unconscious. I dreamt that you had laid me on my bed and … kissed me…"

Vincent gasped, and tears filled his eyes again when he touched her face.

"It wasn't a dream, Catherine… I couldn't bear to leave you in *that* place…" His voice broke. "I carried you home, I stayed by your bed all night… I wanted to die with you…" Tears were streaming down his face when he was re-living the pain which had been tearing him apart for two months. "Only the thought of our child

was keeping me alive…. And then the dawn came and I had to leave, but… I couldn't part from you without… saying goodbye…"

Now it was her turn to cry and she embraced him tightly.

"How, Catherine?… How could I had not *known* you're alive?…" His face was a reflection of agony and guilt from having left her behind.

Catherine felt the guilt and pain colliding in his heart and she cupped his face with her hands.

"Vincent, *don't*… You heard Peter, it was almost impossible to recognise even for a professional… You did a beautiful thing…" She smiled at him and her eyes were filled with love and devotion. "And I'm alive because of *you*… Your love, your courage, and your strength was with me even at death's door, in my worst nightmares – and it brought me back home…" She placed her hand over his heart. "To *you*…."

He took her hand in his, pulled it slowly to his lips and kissed it softly. The look he gave her revealed how much her words touched him.

Catherine suddenly felt that he was a bit nervous, as if hesitating to ask a question that was burning in his eyes.

"What is it, Vincent? What are you thinking?" she asked softly.

Vincent lowered his gaze and looked at their entwined hands as if gathering courage. Then he spoke quietly.

"Catherine, by now I remember everything I forgot after my… after the darkness almost devoured me, yet…." He paused briefly with a sigh. "I still don't remember how we…. when we…"

His voice faded, unable to say those words aloud, ashamed he couldn't remember such an important and deeply significant moment in their relationship, a moment which gave birth to another dream he never thought would come true for him - the dream of being a father.

"When we made love the first time?" Catherine's gentle voice finished the question for him.

"Yes," Vincent exhaled loudly, finally looking at her again.

Catherine tried to encourage him with a smile and sat up to be able to focus better on his eyes. He followed her and prompted himself up against the end of the bed next to her. She took one of his hands in hers, unwilling to lose physical contact with him.

"That day, when I came into the cave for you…" she started carefully and squeezed his hand a little, when he flinched, briefly remembering the mental torture he had suffered in those dark days. "… I had no idea what would happen, how you would react to me, what would you do… All I knew was that your roars sounded so desperate, so full of agony, that I couldn't leave you alone to deal with the nightmare you were going through… I could feel the struggle within you, between you and the…" Catherine paused and hesitated.

"The Other?" Vincent finished for her with a frown.

"Yes…," she whispered in agreement, pain reflecting in her eyes from the effect it had on him.

Vincent lowered his head in shame. "I never wanted you to feel it… I hoped… I promised myself to never let it happen and I failed…. "

Catherine felt his hands trembling and the sorrow in his voice cut through her. She reached for his face with one hand to make him look at her again.

"No, Vincent… In a way, I'm glad it did happen, for I could so much better understand the struggle that you have been going through all your life." She spoke calmly with a sad smile.

"When you noticed me entering the cavern, you reacted on impulse. Probably you thought someone was coming to attack you and you raised your hand to strike me…"

Vincent gasped in horror at remembering that moment and shook his head in agony.

"I will never forgive myself for trying to hurt you…," he whispered with a broken voice.

"Yes, you could have killed me, as you said the first time we talked about me going to you, but as I told you then, you didn't. I told you that when you recognized me, you stopped and were willing to stop your own life, rather than take mine…"

He sighed and stroke the back of her hand with his thumb when he felt the shiver running through her heart, at remembering how she felt thinking he was dead.

Catherine found it difficult to recollect the painful memory but fortunately, she was coming to the most positive part of the events.

"When you fell down unconscious, I thought … I thought you were dead…." She closed her eyes and winced. "I couldn't hear your heart, you had stopped breathing. I was terrified!"

"Catherine…," Vincent whispered softly, wiping away the tears running down her face.

"I… I was desperate, I felt like my heart had been clamped and I couldn't get any air… I would have done *anything* to bring you back…" Her watery emerald eyes were looking into his deep blue ones reflecting the despair from back then.

"I had no idea what to do, all I knew was that I couldn't let you go, not without me… If you had died, I would have too…."

Vincent couldn't bear seeing her in so much pain and pulled her in his arms again, gently stroking her head. He would never cease being utterly amazed at the strength of her love for him.

Catherine swallowed and tried to compose herself, then she pulled back slightly from him again to look into his eyes.

"It might sound silly, but suddenly I remembered a fairy tale, the one of the Beauty and…" She stopped a little unsure of his reaction.

"... the Beast," Vincent finished with a little smile.

Seeing that he wasn't offended gave Catherine the courage to smile shyly and continue.

"Yes… You see, in the story, Beauty brought her Beast back to life by telling him she loved him, no matter what he was, she loved him anyway because she knew *who* he was. I know we don't live in fairy tales, but when I imagined this world without you, I …. I thought of how much you embody the true meaning of the very same thing that saved the Beast in the story - *love…* You, Vincent, who you are, your passion and care for people and life are the perfect and total expression of it. When I think of love, the first image that comes into my mind is *you*…"

Her smile lit up her face like morning sunshine and Vincent felt deeply touched and humbled. His face lit up too and the velvet of his voice caressed Catherine deep inside when he spoke.

"What you see in me is the beauty in your heart, Catherine."

She gasped quietly, remembering him saying exactly the same words in the dream she had when they had almost broken up over two years ago.

"At that moment, when I thought you have left me, I knew there was only one thing that could bring you back, although I wasn't sure it would work, I just had to try anyway. Only love could help you, so I… I kissed you…"

Vincent's brain suddenly projected a flashback - Catherine kissing him desperately in the cavern, trying to revive him. The moment, when the touch of her lips sent an electric shock to his still heart, making it beat again in an instant. His lungs filling with air coming from her sweet mouth. His arms instinctively reaching out to embrace her and wanting more of her and then…

"Vincent?" Catherine asked softly with concern, seeing his eyes slightly narrowed, as if focused on watching some film projected onto the wall behind her.

He blinked and looked at her again, his face mirroring a sudden revelation.

"Catherine, I… I remember," he breathed in awe and the love, incredulity and joy she saw in his sparkling eyes almost undid her. His lips stretched into a wondrous smile.

"I remember everything… It… It was…" Vincent was searching for the right word to express the feeling from the experience floating in his memory.

"… the most beautiful experience ever,,," Catherine finished for him, her whole face glowing with happiness and love, before adding. "Until last night."

"Yes…," he whispered and the amazement and joy radiating from his face made Catherine throw her arms around his neck, pulling him close and closing her eyes with a beaming smile on her face.

"I knew you would remember eventually, you just had to," she said, her heart almost bursting out of joy and relief.

"You can be sure I will never forget it again," he replied smiling, with a tone of absolute certainty.

Then he became more serious again. "I understand why you didn't tell me back then."

Catherine pulled back to look at him. "You were so terribly weak, so hurt from all that happened before, so much in pain… I just couldn't, I was afraid it would confuse you and cause you a relapse."

"I know, and it's all right Catherine," Vincent said calmly, though with worry. "But when you found out you were pregnant… You should have told me. I can't bear the thought of you having had to deal alone with it, especially with what happened to you afterwards…"

He shivered, kissed her forehead and pulled her head under his chin, embracing her again. "Though I suppose, it's meaningless to think about what we should or shouldn't have done," he sighed, caressing gently her back.

"No," Catherine replied smiling into his chest. "The most important thing is that we are together again, we've endured."

"Yes, we have," he said quietly and cupped her face tenderly with his clawed hands, looking deep into her eyes again. "And once we find our son---"

"If we find him…" Catherine shivered again.

"*When* we find him," Vincent corrected her, never leaving her eyes. "Then, we will have *everything*…"

She felt a tear warming her cheek but couldn't resist his determination and smiled. The last word echoing in the chamber for a long time after was her soft reply.

"Everything…"

The END

(1)+(2) Dylan Thomas: *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*

(3)   Ralph Waldo Emerson

(4)   Truth Devour