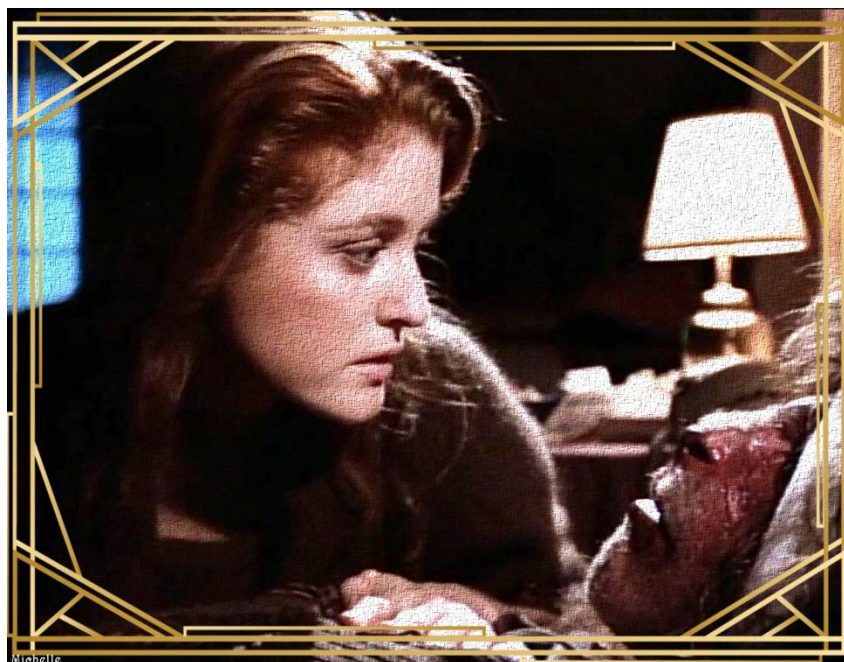


Words

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova



Note: This short story is based on the premise and some events of S3. However, a few facts were changed to adjust the story to the SND arc I wrote as an alternative version of S3.

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He's here; the man I've been trying to track for weeks is right here, bruised and battered, sleeping in my bed. I found him by the river unconscious, not far away from the place of the explosion that ripped through the night. I thank providence that I couldn't sleep tonight.

The man... Is he a man? I'm sitting here with my revolver within reach, for whatever he is, I can't be sure of his reaction when he wakes up.

I shouldn't be even typing this. I'll have to delete it right after I release my thoughts from the prison of my mind because if anyone found out about him, it would be the end of his life, and I would never be able to forgive myself. But I must talk about what is going through my mind now, at least for a while. Even if it's only to the mute screen of my computer, or else all the words bombarding my mind will choke me...

Rational, intuitive, understanding of minds and psychology, knowledge-driven, emotionally detached. These words describe what I should be as a criminal profiler, and that's what I am, even with this man. Apart from one thing - however I try, I *can't* be emotionally detached... I've seen many leads revealing something about him, the mystery that has intrigued me from the moment I found the first clue mentioning his name. Yet seeing him in person, watching him breathe - at times quietly, other times heavier - being so close to him that I can even touch him...

In all my years of profiling, I've seen despair, tragedy, victims of violent and appalling acts that defy the very idea of humanity and wash it away from the face of the earth. I thought I'd seen it all and was ready for anything that may come next. I was wrong. Nothing could have prepared me for *Vincent*.

I've seen his name signed in books, notes, cards and letters. All these have helped me to join the puzzle pieces together, at least some of them. I never found a picture to match the name with a face, but I'm sure that it's he who is lying in my bed right now. I've known from the first clue that he is someone very special to Catherine Chandler, and when I find him, he might lead me to *her*. I've been hired to find Catherine Chandler. That's what I've been pursuing for the past months, yet suddenly I feel my focus shifting from her to him.

Who is he? *What* is he? Where does he live? How was he always able to find and rescue her when she was in danger? Why couldn't he have saved her this time?

There are so many questions I'd love to ask him, though I am not sure he will even talk to me. I am nobody to him, a stranger who has invaded his life and the life of the woman he loves, for I'm sure that's what binds them together - love, the only human emotion I've never been able to fully understand, although I've seen enough, sensed enough to understand, that they share it. Vincent doesn't know that I want to help find her, that I want to help *him* too.

It's strange, but for the first time in my life, I can't think clearly. He's been sleeping for hours now, but I find it difficult to take my eyes off him. It's not just his appearance and the mental pain reflected in his face that is striking; words truly can't describe the inexplicable power that surrounds him, a power that draws me to him in a way I've never felt before. I'm trying to fight it, but I'm not in control this time. *He* holds control over me without even being aware of it.

Something is happening to me. I've been assigned to a case, and suddenly, *I am* the case. It might be the hardest case of my life...

Words, so many words are invading my mind and robbing me of sleep. I'm trying to find meaning in them, but I'm failing. His face is so rough and yet so gentle... A terrible urge to touch him more than just to tend to his injuries is eating me up, the urge to assure myself time and time again that he is real and not just a fantasy, a ghost created by a missing woman craving romantic love. That's not the only reason, though, and it scares me.

I wish he would wake up, and at the same time, I'm afraid of it, not of what he might do to me but of how I would react, what I would say. Talking to strangers is part of my professional life and I've never had a problem with it. Talking to Vincent is something completely different, though.

When the time comes, I will need to use words that will reach him, make him understand why he's here, why I'm here, and that I need to know everything he's willing to tell me to find Catherine. Those words will determine the fate of all three of us, although I have a nagging feeling that my fate will not do me any favours.

I'm sitting here, surrounded by a heavy silence; the air of nervous expectation is making it harder for me to stay focused and professional. And among all those words ringing in my head, I can't help but hear one of them calling louder than all the others, refusing to let my mind rest: *Vincent...*

END