

GIVE ALL FOR LOVE

by Amber James

(from Carousel Tales Two)

In the episode 'Ozmandias' Catherine tells Vincent she is going to marry Elliot Burch. It is the only way she can see to save the world Below. We are given a brief glimpse of Vincent's reaction, then the stories continues Above. The next time we are shown Vincent's involvement, is at the end of the story, when the two are reunited and all is well

There is so much we did not see.....perhaps this is what happened after the distraught Vincent returned to his world believing he would never see his beloved Catherine again.

"William, if I knew what had happened.... then perhaps I could help." Father sounded angry and frustrated. "He says nothing. He sits in silence, alone in the darkness."

"Has he told you nothing?" Mary asked.

"Mary, what I have gleaned makes little sense." Father raised his hands in a helpless gesture and looked around the chamber, as if the answer lay buried in the stone walls.

They were all here, his friends, those he counted on for support; Mary, William, Pascal, and as always, Jamie and Mouse. They had all gathered in his chamber unbidden, yet called by the unmistakable sounds of Vincent's distress, which had reverberated through the tunnel complex they knew as home.

Father had arrived in his son's chamber before Vincent reached it. He waited, knowing only the anguish he had heard in the sound which had torn itself from Vincent's soul.

As he entered the chamber, Vincent seemed in a daze, walking over to the large oak chair, he sat staring at the single candle burning on the table before him.

"Vincent.... What has happened? What is it?"

The young man looked across the table with eyes which spoke of the torment in his soul. He could only shake his head, unable to voice the fears haunting him.

"Is it Catherine?" Tears clouded the blue depths, then overflowed spilling down Vincent's cheek. Unable to speak he nodded his head.

"Is she hurt? Has something happened to her?"

This time the great head indicated, "No"

Father probed again. "Can you tell me... Please try Vincent? I want to help."

Vincent rose from the chair with such force, it toppled over. His powerful arm swept everything on the table to the floor and from deep within, there came a sound which struck terror into all who heard it Below. The candle was extinguished as it hit the floor and Father left his son, and the chamber he lived in, to the darkness which engulfed them.

When Father's weary steps took him back to his own chamber, his friends were waiting, he told them all he had heard and witnessed. Eventually, he convinced them Vincent would sort this out, in his own time, and they must give him the space he needed to do so. One by one, they left for their beds, but Father knew there would be no rest for him, until a way was found to ease his son's agony.

The darkness closed in around Vincent like a heavy cloak, Father had gone, now he was alone. The silence only served to taunt him with thoughts which reminded him that he would live in this darkness and silence from now on, without the light of her love, or the sound of her laughter. He wanted nothing more in the dark moment of realization than the oblivion of death.

As the hours crept by, the first shock of what had happened left him. He located the candle on the floor, found the match and soon the familiar flame flickered once more. His remarkable affinity with the passage of time told him it was mid-morning Above as, one by one, he returned every item to the table his rage had swept to the floor. Large hands closed gently around his journal, flicking through it he saw the words which told of his love for her and all they shared. Placing it on the table then putting the chair back on its four legs, he took his seat and picked up the pen.

Turning to the next clean page, he recorded the day, date and year at the top, then wrote in a clear hand;

Last night I said goodbye to Catherine, she is lost to me now. I can understand her desire to stop this tower - it is a threat to our very existence. But to marry him?

Now I do not know if I am strong enough to bear the consequences of her decision. Perhaps, if she loved him and would be happy with the union, I could find some consolation in her joy. I can only feel, for both of us, loss and desolation, until the grave offers release.

I am reminded as I commit my thoughts to paper, of Byron's words;

Oh, when shall the grave hid for

Ever my sorrow?

Oh, when shall my soul wing

Her flight from this clay?

The present is hell, and the

Coming tomorrow

*But brings with new torture
The curse of today.*

Vincent set down his pen then slowly closed the book. Rising from the chair, he walked wearily across the chamber to his bed. Exhausted, he lay upon the surface, not wanting to think, or breathe, or be. He soon drifted off into sleep, but not one which would bring healing - this sleep was haunted by a dream of the future in which his Catherine belonged to another man.

Trapped in this surrealist nightmare world, Vincent found himself on Catherine's balcony, watching her through the French windows. Stunned by the breathless beauty he found in her, he scarce dared to breathe. She stood, in the centre of the room, in a plain white silk dress, the high Mandarin collar creating an unbroken line as the light played down the long, fitted sleeves. It covered her from neck to toes, but clung to every contour of her body creating an aura of intoxicating innocence.

Vincent recognized Elliot Burch from the newspaper pictures he had seen in discarded publications that had found their way Below, but he would have known him without that information. Anyone could have clearly seen the love Elliot bore for Catherine, as he watched her moving amongst their guests. Adoration shone from his eyes and there was a morsel of comfort for Vincent in the knowledge that she would be loved and protected by this powerful man.

Those gathered in the room were all friends of the couple, only one man also knew of the existence of the uninvited guest who watched from the balcony - and that was Peter Alcott.

Catherine moved toward the balcony and Vincent melted into the shadows, yet he knew, somehow, that no one could see him, he was merely an onlooker. She came out into the night air, closely followed by Peter.

"Catherine ... can you really go through with this?" Peter asked, but she only gave him a nod for an answer. "I know you don't love Elliot," he continued. "How will you cope with a marriage when you can't return the love you're given?"

She looked angry as she turned to face him. *"Knowing Vincent is safe will give me the strength I need. Every time I look at the skyline and find there is no Burch Tower, I will be able to be all Elliot wants me to be."* Catherine's eyes did not smile as her mouth did, they were cold and empty as she told him, *"I didn't ask you out here to discuss my marriage, I have more important things to talk over with you."*

Peter looked uncomfortable and he was clearly unhappy with her words, but he accepted Catherine's insistence that he should not question the step she had taken.

"Peter, I want you to take this." She handed him a long thin box. "There's no one else I can trust with it... and you are the.... executor of my will."

He opened the box, inside lay the crystal Vincent had given her and a single sheet of carefully folded paper. He read the letter then, folding it again, he replaced it and closed the box.

"You understand what I want you to do?" she asked.

"Yes, I think you've made it all very clear. But why now? Very few brides think about their will on their wedding day."

Catherine's eyes became misty with unshed tears as she turned again to gaze out across the city.

"Because I needed someone to know, someone to understand the love I have left Below and the truth of all he means to me."

Peter sighed, "Surely we don't need to talk about this tonight, it doesn't seem right."

Turning back to him she said softly. "You commented yourself on the fact that I used my mother's wedding ring today. Quite a few of our friends thought it was a sort of ... romantic gesture... but it wasn't. I could never wear any man's ring, except one.... and now... that will never happen." Her slender fingers caressed the fabric of her dress as she ran them down her arm. "And this is certainly not my idea of what a wedding dress should be... it's more like... a shroud. Perhaps that's what I want it to be. Today my soul died... I think the rest of me will follow soon."

"Catherine.... this is madness!"

"No, Peter.... it's the truth. My soul is dead.... Vincent holds.... my heart in safekeeping Below.... There's nothing to keep me here now."

Peter could hardly speak, his voice husky and halting with emotion, he held the box out towards her. "The crystal... what do you want me to do with it?"

"Keep it safe for me. No one else in my world could ever understand how important it is. I will not see it again, but I'm trusting you to place it around my neck the day I die. It will guide him to me. We could not be together in this life, but I will not be parted from him again."

Catherine walked calmly through the French windows and into the room. Peter stood for some time staring out into the night, before he placed the box in his inside pocket then slipped silently back into the gathering.

Vincent could not hold back the tears which streamed through closed eyelids, moments passed, yet he knew, in this reality, hours had flown. All was quiet and dawn approached, the time had come to leave. As he walked from the shadows to the corner of the balcony, he glanced back and witnessed the scene through the bedroom window. A laughing Elliot lifted Catherine into his arms to carry her over to the bed. She looked over his shoulder and a flicker of awareness in her eyes, told Vincent that, for one brief moment, she had seen him watching.

Unable to think or see clearly, Vincent lifted himself over the edge of the parapet, lost his footing and began to fall.

Vincent woke with a start immediately aware of Father's presence.

"Vincent... it's all right. You were in the throes of a nightmare. I thought it best to wake you."

Looking up at his father, Vincent sighed then rose to a sitting position.

"Father... sit down please."

The older man settled himself wearily into the huge chair.

"Vincent, do you think you can tell me what this is... all I know is the terrible pain it's causing you."

Vincent lowered his head, unable to meet the steady, expectant eyes as he tried to explain.

"It is difficult, the words do not come with ease." Little by little, he managed to relate all that had happened and Father learned exactly how Catherine planned to stop Elliot building his dream tower.

"Vincent, you cannot permit her to do this!"

"You think this is done with my consent? I have tried... but Catherine has made it clear... this decision is not mine to make. She does not need my permission. I can do nothing."

Father limped over to him and said simply, "How wrong I have been."

Vincent lifted his eyes to his father's and the unanswered question in his gaze needed no voice.

"Yes, Vincent, I was wrong about so many things. You know I have feared she would meet some man in her world and, for him, she would leave you. I was so sure she would reject you for another, now I understand how much she loves you."

"I, too, have doubted... but now..." He sighed.

"I still find it... difficult to accept she is prepared to spend the rest of her life with a man she does not love, because she believes it is the only way to keep you and our life here, safe." He placed his hands on his son's shoulders. "Is there no consolation, no comfort in the knowledge of the greatness of her love for you?"

"No Father... none! There is no consolation, no comfort, there is only life with her or without her. Even the half life we had was more than I dreamed possible. Without Catherine, the dream has become a nightmare from which only death will arouse me."

The tunnel shook as another blast forced its way into the earth close above their heads.

Vincent rose, picked up his cloak and turned.

"Try to rest, I will find out what has happened."

The gleam of hope in Vincent's eyes was clear, the blasting had not stopped... and that had been the one condition Catherine said she would make. If the building continued, than Elliot had refused, the marriage would not take place.

As Vincent was making his way upwards through the labyrinth, he met Jamie. She was excited

and out of breath as she rushed Below with her news.

"Vincent... guess what? The work on the tower has stopped. I was up there, just now, the men had all been sent home. I just had to come back far enough to send a message to Pascal, then I'm going back up top."

With her next words, Vincent's heart contracted in agony. "Catherine was there, with the man who owns the building... perhaps I'll get to talk to her. She'll know what's going on."

As Jamie hurried off on her errand, Vincent felt confused and unsure. For one fleeting moment, as that first blast tore its way through his world, he had dared to hope that Catherine had not carried out her plan, now he had the confirmation that she had. The determination in her heart had been so strong, when she left him, he should have known she would not falter. She would give anything to keep him and his world safe, he had known that from the beginning.

Wandering almost aimlessly through the dimly lit passages, he found himself in the painted tunnels, where there had been noticeable damage. He saw with wonder the scenes from his life, his world, even the world Above told its stories on the once grey walls, and all because of Elizabeth's skill.

The old woman painted on in total silence, not even acknowledging his presence. Brush stroke by brush, stroke Elliot's tower rose stark against the dull background. He watched her rhythmic strokes, soothing and comforting, finding in their regularity a peaceful calm in the fury of his anguish.

Suddenly Mouse dashed towards him. "Vincent... no more danger... no more explosions... no more tower. Jamie has a newspaper, big story... has note too... from Catherine."

In less than a heartbeat, Vincent's feet began to haste him back to the central living area, he rushed into Father's chamber, certain Jamie would have gone there first.

Father smiled as he came through the door obviously out of breath. "Vincent... At last it is over. Look!" He spread the newspaper out on his desk.

The printed words spoke of an investigation, that was why the work had stopped. His heart pounded as the possibilities flooded his mind.

"Mouse said there was a note... from Catherine?" The hope in his voice was as clear as the printed words on the paper before them.

"Yes, there is a note for you... Jamie left it in your chamber," Father replied.

Within seconds, Vincent came through the opening into his chamber and stopped. The note was propped against a candlestick on his table, waiting for the unknown words to be revealed. Slowly he stretched out his hand, hesitating, unsure and afraid of what it might contain. Long fingers strayed across the letters of his name, letters she had penned, and with great care he opened it and read;

Dearest Vincent

All is well. The building has stopped and I wanted you to know my only involvement has been in a professional capacity.

I understand from Jamie that Elizabeth is now completing the tower Elliot will never be permitted to build. I would love to see her latest addition with you. I will come straight to the painted tunnels this evening. Will you meet me there?"

Until then, I am, as always,

Your Catherine.

The remaining hours of the day stretched on endlessly but, at last, Vincent knew Catherine had finished work and was making her way Below. Returning to the painted tunnels, he found Elizabeth had finished and departed. The tall, slender structure pointed to the world Above, a world which could never know the captivating beauty of point on grey concrete beneath their feet.

Before Catherine came into view, Vincent gazed along the tunnel expectantly. His patience was rewarded as she stepped through the opening and walked towards him. The blue of her jumper gave a translucent quality to her skin, and her beauty, as always, left him bereft of words. How could he tell her of the longing in his soul? Where would he find the words to turn the impossible dreams of today into the reality of their tomorrow? Perhaps one day he would overcome his fears and break through the boundaries he had set on their relationship. Then she would know the truth of his love, as he now knew the truth of her love for him. When that day comes, there would be no doubts, no fear, no impossible dreams, only the promise of a future together, secure in their love.

But for now, it was sufficient that she was here by his side, he could ask no more, the reality of her presence was enough. As she stood looking into his eyes, he was silent. He wanted to take her into his arms and say so much, but he could only stand and struggle for words which refused to come.

"I thought I would never see your face again." Was all he could say as the love emanating from her heart flooded his soul and overwhelmed him once again.

END