

Need

by Angie

'Oh reason not the need'

- William Shakespeare (King Lear)



"We need each other, Vincent."

Vincent turned to her, his face and body language tense.

"Do we." It wasn't a question. He turned from her again and left.

Catherine watched the doorway for some time, stunned.

Then she moved to sit on his bed and think, something perhaps she should have done before saying anything.

It was inevitable that they would have this kind of disagreement at some point. They had come very close on several occasions, as she grew to know the man who meant so much to her, to realize he was everything to her. And that he was probably the most honest - and infuriating - man she had ever known. What he didn't say was often as important as what he did.

She DID need him - there was no question about that. But how did she need him? The word was fraught. He had saved her life on several occasions now, literally. Is that all he was to her - a saviour?

No, he was much more. He was the only person she could talk to about her dreams, about himself, his world, the people in it - because they were all entwined. Her friends now thought her distracted and remote - and she was, unfortunately. But she had gained something more, in Vincent. With him she didn't have to pretend, to skirt the part of her life that was now almost as important as her life above. She needed that outlet, and although she could talk to other members of the tunnel community, she had no confidantes there.

Vincent was the one she needed when life above became too pressing. He gave her strength, perspective, himself. In his arms, nothing else mattered and she could breathe again, think again.

Of course need often became want, or want need. In her world the two were almost interchangeable, because people often did not discriminate between them. If they wanted something, they bought it, found it, acquired it, telling themselves it was also what they needed, to live the lives they wished for themselves. She had some experience with that herself. Money being no object, she had rarely denied herself anything.

Some of the men she had known had wanted her - but had not needed her, except as an extension of themselves, not for herself alone. Rich women, or women with rich, well-connected fathers, attracted those kind of men, as she knew only too well.

Vincent was different. Did he need her? That was the question. He did not share a great deal about himself personally, hence some of their misunderstandings. He listened to her, gave advice when he could, gave her the comfort of his arms, and had made her a part of his world, one she could never have imagined existed before that fateful night - the night she had come to realize that Tom was not someone she cared to see again.

Vincent, of course, had saved her life later that same night, which had made all the rest of her lifestyle changes not just possible, but mandatory.

Had he needed her then? Perhaps. She had found out later that he could feel her emotions, that they had a connection, what they came to call a bond. He seemed to need that, value it at least. There were times he wouldn't have enjoyed it, others when he used it to find her and save her life. But he would also have shared her joys and happiness through their bond. Need was not necessarily those things, either. But they could be. He was reticent to admit it.

Want was not something they discussed, she and Vincent. She wanted him, in all the traditional senses of that word, certainly. She thought he wanted her also, but he had not said so, in fact seemed to be trying to avoid doing so. Any verbal hint of that kind of closeness made him uncomfortable, although he had no qualms about hugging her. So perhaps those hugs indicated he wanted her too. She doubted he hugged any other adult woman in quite that way. He seemed to have no close women friends below, or she would have noticed by now. He was polite, a friend to everyone.

He seemed to welcome their hugs, so it was a fair assumption that he needed them. That this amount of closeness with her was important to him. Yes, he had never pretended otherwise. His arms were not just a place for comfort, they were what bound them, perhaps even greater than the bond, and the physical closeness was impossible to fake. She had often heard him sigh and felt a warmth that was not just physical, but something she assumed came from him through their bond. That was a 'need' she felt, not just a 'want'.

Was her need of him completely pure, platonic? No, of course not. He would know that too, yet he still came to her. So it was a fair assumption that the need was his as well, that the closeness, whether physical or not, was important to him.

No point twisting herself into knots, she decided. It had been a long day. She could be patient. He would be honest with her when he thought it through. She could wait.

She sighed, stripped off her outer clothing and shoes, and placed them on a chair. Then she lay down on his bed, wriggled under his blankets, and surrounded by the smell of candles and himself, she went to sleep.

Vincent did not go far when he left his chamber. He wandered slowly and found himself at the Mirror Pool, surprised. His feet had taken him where his troubled thoughts often led him. He

sat down cross-legged beside it, to think. Staring at the still, dark waters often helped him to clear his mind. This time, he sighed, wondering if it would work.

He had made what amounted to an accusation, and a revelation, to Catherine on his exit. He had implied that they did not need each other, or perhaps that he did not need her. Neither was the truth, and he regretted saying it. Catherine had pushed him, and he had felt he had to push back, to give himself some room. Room for what, though? He was no longer sure.

They both knew by now that their relationship was much more than a casual friendship. He did not like to admit such things to anyone, yet Father knew, and so did others, because he saw their looks and their smiles when they caught his eye, when Catherine was around. Why was he reluctant to admit it to her? What did he fear from her? How could he willingly destroy her enemies when he had to save her, and yet be a coward when it came to admitting his need?

The contrast between the two shamed him, especially since he never enjoyed killing and paid for it in self-hatred for weeks afterwards. He had never told Catherine this, but he often needed her during that time, to anchor him and remind him that his remorse and guilt were not an unusual reaction - and to hear of her life, so different to his own. He had seen Catherine experience similar emotions when she had had to take a part in violent action.

He did not know how to explain this need of her, even to himself. He had never experienced a bond like the one that linked him to Catherine, and he knew that it could only have become what it was because he loved her. He needed her in ways that he tried not to dwell on, and she was aware of that too - he could feel it in her - even though she obviously did not feel the bond as strongly as he did.

She needed him too, of course, and she had never denied it. He knew she valued the time they spent together, and wanted more of it. He always knew when she needed him, especially when she was in danger. He could no more deny that, than he could deny his love for her.

The word 'need' though, was tricky - a word the children in his literature class used frequently, since he had introduced them to Tolkien. In the tunnel world, 'need' was always more important than 'want'. Everyone knew it - even the children knew they would not always get what they wanted as gifts. Their resources were limited and there was often something more important - and more practical - than, for instance, a skateboard for Kipper, or a pet for Samantha. Neither belonged in their world, but all children had their dreams. Kipper had found a pair of old roller skates - much safer - and Samantha had made herself a cuddly companion that she loved as if it were real.

In the world above, he knew, there was almost no difference between need and want, at least in the circles Catherine inhabited. He knew quite well that many New Yorkers knew the difference only too well. Their tunnel helpers received and gave as need demanded. They did not ask for frivolous things, and what they were given in return was what the community could spare, even if it meant small hardships. Small luxuries were always given when possible, but need was the most important factor.

What did he need from Catherine? He had discovered, in no uncertain terms, that he needed her in his life, that the thought of being without her was not only painful, but dangerous. He would have died had she not found him in that cage. He had been careless, and when captured had given up because he had believed Catherine had left. He had not thought to make sure of that. He had been trying to deny his need, and to force himself to live without her.

What she gave him, she gave freely and never asked for more than he was willing to give.

She was a woman of considerable patience, for which he was grateful. She needed him when he was there, sometimes when he wasn't. He couldn't always respond, but she knew she had a place in his heart, wherever he was, and sometimes that was enough.

He needed her as he would need sunshine, were that possible for him. Instead, she was his link to that bright world, the one he would never see on his terms. What he felt through their bond told him much about that world - the way she travelled, her reactions to it and those who peopled it. He enjoyed knowing more about the world above, through her, but generally that link was in the background. He could not let it affect him most of the time. His world had more than enough dangers for a distracted or careless person. But there was always a warmth around his heart, that he knew was Catherine, unobtrusive unless she suddenly felt something strongly.

He was afraid of violating her privacy ... remembering all too clearly her first reaction to the revelation about their bond. Clearly, she had not known just how strong it was for him, that he felt her falling in love with Elliot, and also her sorrow when she discovered the truth about the developer.

That particular closeness delivered by their bond was certainly something he wanted, perhaps even needed.

Their bond was almost an addiction for him, he mused ruefully. Was that what need was - the manifestation of a want? How could anyone tell the difference when they were so intertwined? He was relieved that she could not feel their connection to the same extent, as he was sure it could be dangerous in her world. He did not want to distract her from her job or her friends - or heaven forbid, when she was driving or walking the streets of New York and had to be aware.

But all that aside, something had to be done. He could not continue to deny himself, and her. Either they had to move forward, or stagnate. There was no going back now. Hadn't he said as much to her himself? What was he waiting for? He might once have worried about his physical prowess, or the danger of what he was, his nails, or his weight - but they were excuses now, he knew that. He could not harm Catherine, not under any circumstances. He was satisfied of that. The hunger in him, the one he had once mentioned a journal letter to her, one she never saw, he now understood better.

It was normal, even Father admitted all men had that hunger. He could hardly deny it after his seven days with Margaret, and it had made Vincent realize that people could change, that even Father could ... love. And it meant that he, Vincent, was a man, as far as that went.

Vincent saw no overwhelming reason for denying his needs - and they were a need, not just a want - any longer. That thought was new to him. Oh yes, there were certainly challenges, should he and Catherine become lovers, but they were overcoming those every time they met. He was sure Catherine would make more time, should he finally welcome her into his bed, as he did his arms. Yes, he was certain of that, but he too had a life to lead and work to do. Their juggling of their respective obligations would not end.

The conclusion reached, Vincent looked up at the hole above the mirror pool and saw a star. '*First star I see tonight*', he thought, and smiled. Yes, there was no doubt what he would wish for - and he did.

He rose and headed back to his chamber, not realizing until he got there that he had not even thought of where Catherine was. She was snuggled up on his bed, under the blanket. He saw no reason to disturb her. After removing his outer clothing and boots, he slid under the blankets with her. She murmured, but did not awaken. He closed his eyes and snuggled closer to her, happy to have her scent enwrap him.

That made her awaken. She turned enough so she could look at him, snuggling closer as she did so.

"Vincent?" she whispered sleepily.

"I need you, Catherine," he whispered back.

"Thank-you," she whispered, and turned back. She was soon asleep again.

Vincent chuckled to himself. He knew she had had a busy day. He felt her fatigue before their discussion. Well, now he would have to wait for her. The irony did not escape him, but it was only fair. And tomorrow was Saturday. She had been coming to visit anyway. All in good time.

He put his arm over her, and went to sleep.

END