

The Power of the Dream

by Barbara Anderson

*This story occurs not long after the events of Song of Orpheus as it appeared in airing order and was inspired by the wonderful graphic art of Judith Nolan and Lynette Parker that appears in this tale.

*The future belongs to those who
believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Vincent had come to the Whispering Gallery to be alone, something he had been doing a lot lately. There was a spot on the bridge, one of the ‘magic places,’ where he could listen to echoes from the world Above swirling in the wind. *It is her world*, he reminded himself... *where the wealthy and the powerful rule. A world I know I can never be a part of. And yet, I can’t help dreaming of being a part of her.*

“Catherine,” he whispered to the swirling wind.

He heard the halting footsteps well before anyone arrived at the mouth of the tunnel that opened into The Whispering Gallery. The sound of the aided footsteps was unique and betrayed the intruder’s identity.

“Hello, Father,” Vincent said without turning around as Jacob approached the bridge. “Is there something you need from me?”

Father stopped just short of the bridge and leaned on the rail post. He wasn’t used to walking this far and his gammy hip was complaining loudly.

“Mary said I would find you here. She’s worried about you. Mouse has informed her that you’ve been spending a lot of time here of late... alone. He’s worried about you too.”

There’s no hiding from Mouse, Vincent thought wryly.

“And what about you?” he asked, still staring into the Abyss. “Are you worried about me as well?”

“Why... yes... my boy... I suppose I am. I assured Mary I would seek you out... and find out what’s troubling you. I apologize for being unaware, I... I’ve been somewhat preoccupied of late.”

“You’ve been grieving, Father. You have suffered a great loss. There is no need to apologize. It’s only been a short time since Margaret’s... passing.”

Father was silent for a moment as the pain of losing the love of his life only a few short days after they were reunited washed over him.

“If something is troubling you, son, perhaps talking about it would help.”



Vincent sighed. “It’s Catherine...”

Catherine! Jacob thought indignantly. *I might have known it had something to do with that woman again!* He had to bite his tongue to keep from saying it out loud.

“She hasn’t come Below since...” Vincent’s voice trailed off. Speaking of it made the possibility too real... *Perhaps I have taken advantage of her friendship once*

too often... I fear I have asked too much of her... my last request for help put her in very real danger once again.

“Since she rescued me from prison,” Father suggested. “She hasn’t come Below since she reunited me with Margaret.”

“Yes... not even to check on Ellie and Eric.” Vincent sighed again and shook his head. “I can feel a growing distance between us... there is a shadow hanging over her heart... but she insists that all is well.”

Well, Jacob thought, perhaps she has finally grown bored with Vincent. I certainly hope that is the case. But he knew that no good would come of saying it out loud. Vincent had made his feelings for her quite clear.

When Jacob didn’t reply Vincent turned and looked up at his father. His empathic gift told him that Father knew something about it. “Did something happen when you were Above? Did something occur between you and Catherine?”

There was something in Jacob’s silence that told Vincent his father knew something he was reluctant to share.

“Father,” he urged. “If you know something... *Please...* tell me.”

Father squinted. His expression was one of suspicion. “She hasn’t told you of our exchange just before I returned Below?”

Vincent shook his head. “Do you believe it was something significant enough to keep her away?”

Jacob stared off into the Abyss below them and cleared his throat loudly. *You might as well tell him, you old fool,* he chided himself. *There is nothing to be gained by lying now.*

“As I recall...” he said. “I thanked her politely for her... uhm... her assistance in securing my release and then I bid her goodbye.”

Vincent was taken aback by the description his father was painting. “You thanked her politely? What does that mean?”

“It means that I was civil to the woman,” Father replied defensively.

Vincent stood up and walked toward his father. Jacob backed up toward the mouth of the tunnel to give Vincent room to exit the bridge. Vincent stood on solid ground facing his father.

“What happened next, Father?” Vincent prompted. “That can’t be all there was to it.”

“No, no it wasn’t,” Father replied nervously. “But I’ll have you know I was perfectly content to let sleeping dogs lie. It was Catherine who broached the subject. She called to me as I neared the bottom of the stairs at the subway station. When I turned to her, she assured me that she would never hurt you. Hmph! She even professed her love for you.” The contempt in his voice was unmistakable.

“What was your reply?” Vincent asked, trying to keep his temper in check.

“I told her that... that she can only bring you unhappiness!” Jacob admitted sharply. “...because part of you is...”

“A part of me is what?” Vincent asked.

Jacob hesitated before he finally said, “... *a man*. I told her that part of you is a man.” *There*, he thought, *it’s out. I’ve said it.*

“Were you under the impression that she was unaware of that?” Vincent asked sarcastically. “Catharine knows perfectly well what I am, Father.”

“Does she?” Jacob countered. “Are you quite sure of that?”

“Catherine put herself in grave danger,” Vincent pointed out, his voice rising with each word. “...because *I* asked for her help. She gave it freely, without hesitation, and she was nearly murdered for her trouble! **How could you say such things to her after what she did for you... and for Margaret?**”

“Because it’s true! You and I both know it! Do you think I couldn’t see how miserable you were when she was with that ... that man...”

“Elliot Burch.”

“Yes, Elliot Burch! And then when she accepted that job in Providence...” Father pointed out. **“I saw how it tore you apart... you nearly died, Vincent!** And she has the nerve to tell me she would never hurt you... **when she already has!**”

Vincent clenched his fists in an effort to control his temper. “This is none of your affair, Father! It is between Catherine and me!”

“It is my affair! Your relationship with this woman puts us all at risk! You must know that!” Father insisted. “And yet you stubbornly persist in this... this... *flirtation*... knowing the danger it poses for both of you!”

“Flirtation?” Vincent was incensed at the very idea the word implied. “Whatever is happening between Catherine and myself, Father... it is **NOT** a mere flirtation!

“Maybe for you it isn’t...” Father countered. “...but for *her* it most assuredly *is!* You cannot convince me otherwise! Sooner or later, she will come to the conclusion that the limits the two of you face simply *cannot* be overcome! Vincent, you **must** listen to reason. You are both dreaming of a life that can **never** be! This path can only lead to more pain... enough pain to destroy you... and everyone around you.”

Vincent was silent.

It was clear to Jacob that his son was trying to control his anger. Father braced himself for more heated debate on the subject. But to his surprise, Vincent turned on his heel and stalked away.

“Vincent!” Father called after him. “Vincent, come back here. We are not finished with this discussion!”

But it was too late. Vincent was gone. Jacob let out an exasperated breath and began the slow walk back to the main tunnels.

By the time Vincent reached the portal beneath the park it was after 10pm. The days were short this time of year, and there was a definite chill in the air. He knew there would be few people, if any, wandering the park at such a late hour. After his discussion with Father, he needed the crisp, fall air to clear his head.

Exiting the tunnel, Vincent instinctively sought the shadows. Even though the park was virtually deserted, he knew he must be cautious at all times.

He searched his heart for Catherine. *She isn’t far from here*, he concluded. *Somewhere on the west side of the park... Lincoln Center, I think. She’s not alone* he realized. *Good, I want her to live her life. But she isn’t enjoying herself*, he concluded. *She is pretending to enjoy herself, but her heart is heavy.*

As he walked among the shadows of the trees, he replayed the argument with his father. *I shouldn’t have been so disrespectful*, he thought with some remorse. *But Father has no right to speak of Catherine the way he does. He doesn’t know her.*

He does not understand how wrong he is about her. I must speak with her, he decided. I must speak with her tonight.

Vincent's moccasin shod feet landed noiselessly onto Catherine's balcony. The balcony as well as her apartment were dark. It was clear that she wasn't home. *That's all right, he decided. I'll wait until she returns. I will wait as long as it takes.*

It was just after 1am when the lights in Catherine's apartment came on. Less than a minute later she opened the French doors and stepped onto the balcony. She moved to the edge and took a deep breath of the brisk November air as she took in the view.

"Catherine," Vincent said softly, not wishing to frighten her. He felt her spirits lift a little when she heard his voice. *That's encouraging, he thought. But she hasn't turned to greet me with open arms and her usual warmth.*

"Is there something I can help you with, Vincent..." she asked without turning around. "... something you need?" She hoped that there was. She'd come to realize that being able to help Vincent or those he loved was one way he would allow her to be in his life.

Vincent winced a little at her question. *Has she come to believe that the only reason I come here is to ask for her help?*

"No, Catherine, there is nothing I particularly need," *Except to be near you,* he thought. "It's just that I... I feel that I owe you an apology."

She turned and looked at him with a confused expression. "I can't think of a single reason why you should apologize," she replied.

"I have abused your friendship... I've taken advantage of your goodness...your willingness to help... and I have asked you to do things that have put you in harm's way on more than one occasion."

"You *haven't* taken advantage," she insisted. "And you certainly haven't *'put'* me in harm's way. I haven't done a single thing I didn't want to do. You've saved my life on more than one occasion, Vincent. Anything I have done to help you or those you love, is small in comparison."

How can I tell you that it's you who have saved my life every day since the moment we met? he wondered.

“I didn’t know we were keeping score,” he managed to say. “If you are trying to repay me, you must know, you *owe* me nothing.”

She turned away from him again. *So, he no longer wants help from me, she thought. I wonder what that means?*

“Your heart is troubled, Catherine,” he said, hoping she would tell him why.

I don’t know why I’ve even tried to hide it from him, she thought. He can feel whatever I’m feeling.

“I still find it a little... disconcerting that you can feel what I’m feeling,” she replied without giving him any indication of what was troubling her.

Vincent closed the gap between them and stood just behind her. “Father told me what he said to you, before he returned Below.”



She shook her head as she continued to look out at the sparkling city lights. “He believes that I can only bring you unhappiness. I don’t want that, Vincent. I don’t ever want to hurt you... but I fear... there is some truth in his words. I know I have already caused you pain... *and* unhappiness.”

“Is that why you’ve been so distant these last few weeks? Why you didn’t tell me what Father said to you?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“I thought we promised we would never withhold the truth from each other.”
*Even though I **am** withholding things from you... things I can never speak of... things that would surely frighten you away.*

She rubbed her arms against the November chill. “I withheld the truth because I...” Catherine began. “...because I have no desire to be the cause of a rift between you and your father.” She shook her head as she recalled the sting of Jacob’s words. They had struck closer to the mark than she wanted to admit. “What he said... he said out of concern... out of *love* for you. He’s trying to keep you safe... *from me.*”

Vincent moved to stand beside her on the balcony’s edge. “Bridget O’Donnell said that ‘Sometimes we must leave our safe places and walk empty handed among our enemies,’” he said, quoting his favorite Irish author.

“I hope you don’t think of me as your enemy,” she replied.

He was silent for a moment as they both stared out at the lights of the city. “All my life I have been taught to fear strangers from your world... to think of them as enemies. But, no, I do not consider you, or Bridget among them.”

“Bridgit O’Donnell,” Catherine said softly, smiling at the memory of the remarkable woman they had met on Halloween night. “I think she, more than any other person we know, understands our struggle.”

“Yes,” Vincent replied. “I believe she does. She told me that she and Ian were from different worlds too. So, they tried to build a new world... one they could both live in together.”

“It didn’t end well for them,” Catherine reminded him.

“No,” he agreed. “Not a fairy tale ending to be sure.”

Will there be a fairy tale ending for us? Catherine wondered. She didn’t know how to respond, so she let Vincent’s words drift into the night air beyond the soft light of the balcony.

When Catherine didn’t speak, Vincent continued. “And yet Bridget wrote that even though the price of their love had been high, she would pay it willingly to the end of her days. That she would change nothing... regret nothing.”

“She has great courage,” Catherine observed, silently wondering if she had that kind of courage.

They both fell silent for several moments.

“You look beautiful tonight,” he observed, trying to breach the widening gulf between them.

Catherine huffed softly. “Yes... I do, don’t I?” she agreed. There was no hint of conceit in her voice, only a touch of melancholy. “It’s so strange... how I can slip so easily back into my old skin, and no one seems to notice that I’m... that I’m not *her* anymore.”

“What do you mean?” he gently prodded.

She thought for a moment, wondering how to begin. “When I was a little girl,” she finally said. “... I had a winter coat that I dearly loved. It went down past my knees and was made of soft gray cashmere and lined with light pink satin. It was trimmed with soft white rabbit fur that tickled my face when the hood was pulled up to keep out the cold. It was the most beautiful coat I’d ever seen. It was wonderfully warm on snowy days. Whenever I wore it, I felt like a princess.” She paused for a moment and said, “In a way... I suppose I was. I was so sad when spring arrived, and my mother put it away with my other winter clothes. She assured me that it would be safely stored and ready for me to wear when winter came around again.

“The next fall, I was so excited when the weather began to turn cold. Mother brought down the box of winter clothes, I pulled the coat from the box and put it on... only to discover that it no longer fit. I had to hunch my shoulders to even get it on and I could no longer button up the front. I’d had a growing spurt over the summer and my arms stuck out too far from the sleeves. I looked ridiculous... and I was devastated.

“Daddy promised he would get me a new coat just as lovely... and he did. But it wasn’t the same. There was something magical about *that coat*. I’ve never had another coat that made me feel like that one did.”

“It’s a bittersweet memory,” Vincent said, wondering what made her think of it.

“I went to the opera tonight with some old friends,” she said, seeming to change the subject completely.

“What opera was it?” he asked.

“Rigoletto,” she said, simply.

“Did you like it?” he asked, wondering how it would be to go to the opera with Catherine by his side. He felt a stab of jealousy toward the unknown man who had been the recipient of that privilege.

“It was lovely,” she said. “They served champagne and caviar. Afterward we went out for a late lobster dinner. It was just like old times... almost.”

“Almost?” he repeated. “What was different?”

“Me...” She paused, unsure of how to put it into words. “*I was different,*” she finally said. “I slipped into this dress and made myself beautiful... and then I met my friends as I have many times before... but I didn’t fit...”

Vincent looked admiringly at the dress she was wearing. He’d never seen her look more beautiful. She was almost angelic. The dress sparkled and appeared to fit her perfectly, clinging to every alluring, feminine curve of her body and draping lightly down her legs giving the illusion that she was floating weightlessly just above the floor.

“It appears to fit just fine to me,” he said, feeling himself blush at the feelings of hunger her image invoked in him. For the first time since she had arrived home, he was thankful she wasn’t looking at him.

Catherine nodded. “Yes, the dress fits... *but I don’t.*”

“I’m not sure I understand,” Vincent said, attempting to concentrate on her words and not the vision of beauty standing before him.

“It’s like that cashmere coat I had as a child...” she explained. “I don’t fit into that life anymore. I’m changed, I’m a different person. I was surrounded by my old friends. We were drinking wine, and laughing, and talking incessantly about trivial, meaningless things, just like we always have. I used to enjoy it so... but tonight... the entire evening I felt... as if I was surrounded by absurd, two-dimensional characters from an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel. None of them seemed to even notice that I...” She paused again and sighed heavily.

“What, Catherine... what is it they didn’t notice?”

“... that I am *not her* anymore... that shallow, conceited, selfish woman I used to be. I’m not *that* Cathy anymore... and none of them noticed.”

“I’m not sure what you are trying to tell me,” he admitted.

Finally turning to face him she looked at him earnestly. “Father is trying to protect you, Vincent... from the woman I *used* to be... someone who would amuse

herself by toying with your emotions and then carelessly leave you with a broken heart when I got bored. I'm trying to tell you... I'm not *that* Cathy anymore. I hope you know I would never intentionally hurt you."

"Yes, Catherine, I do know that." Then Vincent shook his head. "I find it hard to believe you were *ever* like the woman you've described. I can't imagine you would ever be that cruel."

"Maybe I wasn't as bad as *that* ..." she conceded. "...but I *have* hurt you, Vincent. I know I've caused you great pain. Perhaps Father isn't so very far off the mark after all. Please don't be angry with him. He's trying to protect you the same way my father is trying to protect me every time he tries to convince me come back to Chandler and Coolidge."

"But we are not children, Catherine," he pointed out. "We cannot allow them to dictate the choices we make."

"I agree. This dream we share... we cannot allow anyone to take it from us. The choices we make must be ours and ours alone."

"Father believes this dream... has the power to destroy me," Vincent told her. "...and possibly even those around me."

"What do you believe?" Catherine asked earnestly as she held her breath.

He looked longingly at the woman who had captured his heart. *What I believe and what I want to believe are very different things*, he thought.

He sighed heavily before giving her an answer. "Dreams can be powerful, Catherine. Dreams can lead men to achieve great things... sometimes even great and terrible things. I do not know if this dream has the power to destroy me... What I do know is... when I thought it was ending... I felt great pain."

"When I was dating Elliot?" she offered. "When I thought I might be falling in love with him?"

"Yes... and then when..."

"When I was going to Providence?"

"Yes," he said simply. "The pain was... overwhelming." Even the memory of it still took his breath away.

"I'm sorry, Vincent," she said, with deep regret. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I was—" Catherine was close to tears.

Vincent could feel her deep remorse and closed the gap between them, taking her in his arms.

Catherine's heart soared when he put his arms around her. She accepted his embrace gladly and buried her face in his chest.

"Catherine," he whispered. "There is no need to apologize. I was the one who encouraged you to find someone else to be a part of. I want that for you... *truly I do*. You were only doing what I asked you to do. And if you recall, it was also *me* who insisted you go to Providence to fulfil your destiny."

Lifting her head so that she could look into his eyes, she said, "I know now... that I *can't* do those things. I know you've said you want me to find someone else to be a part of... that you want me to fulfill my destiny. Please don't ask me again to date other men or accept a job in another city. I *can't* do it, Vincent... I *won't* do it."

"But Catherine, you must live the life you were meant to live. You must be open to opportunities when they arise."

"Vincent, do you or don't you always encourage me to follow my heart?"

"Well... yes," he answered hesitantly. He sensed he was about to fall into a trap... *and he was*.

"You don't seem to understand," she explained. "...that my heart keeps leading me back to... *back to you*."

She buried her face in his chest once again, and they stood there embracing each other for several minutes.

Finally, Vincent sighed heavily and kissed the top of Catherine's head. "Holding you like this, Catherine, is like a dream come true. You have made me happier than I ever imagined possible... for someone like me. But one day we *will* have to wake from this dream and return to our separate lives and our separate destinies, whatever they may be."

"No! I don't want that," Catherine exclaimed as she wrenched herself from his arms. "Vincent... *this connection*, this Bond we share... it's *more* than just a dream... it's the most genuine thing I've ever known. I've *never* been happier or felt more... complete than I have since I've known you. That *has* to mean something... doesn't it?"

“Catherine, we both know that this dream can never be more than what it is... a dream of a life that just isn’t possible for me... for us.”

Catherine shook her head. “I *don’t* know that. I won’t accept that.”

“But Catherine—”

“Vincent!” she interrupted. She couldn’t bear to hear him say it again. Looking into his eyes, she continued, “Earlier you said that dreams are powerful things.”

“Yes... I did,”

“Will you listen... if I tell you how the powerful this dream has been in my life?” she pleaded.

He acquiesced, doubting that she could say anything to change his mind. “Tell me, Catherine.”

Catherine took him by the hands and led him to the corner of the balcony. “Come sit with me, please” she beckoned as she sat on the brick ledge.

Vincent sat down, recalling the first time he had come to Catherine’s balcony and sat on these very same bricks. *She welcomed me*, he recalled, *with open arms and an open heart*. The sweetness of that memory washed over him. “Tell me, Catherine,” he urged again. “Tell me about the power of this dream.”

Sitting there facing him, Catherine smiled a little, but there was a sadness in her eyes that pulled at Vincent’s heart. She held his hands in hers and asked, “Do you remember the night you found me in the park after I... after what hap—”

“Of course, I remember. How could I ever forget?” *How could I ever forget the night my life changed forever?* he wondered.

“Your voice was the first thing I heard when I woke up. I was injured and so terribly frightened... and you told me I was safe. Somehow, I knew it was true. I felt almost as if I knew you from somewhere before.

“That was the beginning of the dream... for me, anyway. For those ten days, whenever I was in pain, or afraid, or worried, the sound of your voice helped me get through it. When I couldn’t sleep, you read to me. Vincent, your voice... your beautiful voice was the only light in my darkness.”

Vincent could only look at her in wonder. *How is it possible?* he wondered. *That I was her light when all that time I was basking in her light?*



“Even after I returned Above,” she continued. “...and I thought I would never see you again... it was the dream of you that gave me the courage to heal.”

“What do you mean?” Vincent asked.

“When I would wake from my nightmares, I could hear your voice telling me I was safe. When I was afraid to go out into the world again, I could hear you telling me that I was strong enough to overcome what happened to me... that what happened to me would make me stronger. It was the dream *of you* that gave me the confidence to leave my father’s practice and apply for the job at the District Attorney’s office where I’m actually making a difference in the world... because of *you*, Vincent... and the power of *this* dream. It’s *that* powerful! Don’t you see? I’m a different person than I was... a *better* person... because of this dream... because of *you*.”

“But Catherine,” he replied. “I have felt your pain. I know that this dream we share has made you unhappy. I feel it... even now.”

She nodded. “Yes... it’s true. There is no point in trying to hide it from you, is there? There *is* a part of me that’s unhappy.”

“Can you tell me why?”

She looked away staring again into the darkness. “I find it... difficult... lying to my father... I’ve never kept so much from him before... but I know I must. There is a growing distance between us. Yet I know there is no other way.”

“Is that the only cause of your unhappiness?” he asked, sensing there was a deeper reason.

“This dream of ours... this connection we share... it’s a miraculous gift. I feel we owe it to the universe or wherever this gift came from... to see it through... wherever it may take us... but at the same time... everything seems... so impossible. There is so much against us. You must live in your world... and I must live in mine. Sometimes it feels... so hopeless... as if I’m swimming against a great current. Sometimes I want to quit fighting, but I feel that if I stop... I’ll drown.”

“And yet, you persist... you wish to continue holding onto this dream in spite of the pain?”

She squeezed his hands tighter and drew a little closer to him. “The joy of having you in my life, Vincent, far outweighs the pain. I’ve never been happier in my life than I am right now.”

How can this be true, he wondered. *That a woman as wonderful as Catherine could feel this way about me?* But he couldn’t deny it. He sensed the sincerity of her words, and the depth of her love. She literally glowed with it. He lowered his face and kissed her delicate hands.

“What are we to do, Catherine?” he asked.

She kissed his hands and looked into his sapphire blue eyes. “A wise man once told me, ‘The only thing we can do, we’ll endure the pain and savor every moment of the joy.’”

Vincent smiled, ruefully. “Ahhh... now you are using my own words against me,” he said.

Catherine grinned sheepishly. “Well, I am a lawyer, after all.”

“If we are to continue on this path, Catherine, we must promise each other one thing.”

“Anything,” she replied eagerly. *I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you in my life*, she thought.

“We must promise each other... that if the pain ever becomes too great for either of us to endure, that we will let it end. We will both agree to wake up from the dream and return to our lives.”

They both leaned into each other so that their foreheads touched.

“I promise,” she whispered, hoping against hope that that time would never come.

“I promise,” he replied, as he opened his heart to the realm of hope.

Vincent didn't return to the Tunnels until nearly four in the morning. He was thankful that his world, including his father, was slumbering, and quietly made his way to his chamber without being accosted by anyone. Sleep came quickly as he slipped gratefully into bed.

Later that morning as he was dressing for the day, Father entered his chamber.

“Vincent, we need to continue the discussion we began yesterday. This is something that must be resolved bef—”

“I have a class, Father” Vincent said impatiently. “The children will begin arriving any moment.”

“No, you don't,” Father informed him. “I have canceled your class for this morning,”

Vincent looked up from lacing his vest. “You... cancelled... my class?”

“Yes, I cancelled your class,” he repeated. “It's imperative that we settle this matter of Catherine Chandler once and for all. So, I have sent the boys to William for a cooking lesson, and I have sent the girls to Rebecca for a candle making lesson.”

Vincent finished lacing his vest. “You shouldn't have done that, Father. Catherine and I spoke last night, and the matter has been settled.”

Jacob breathed a sigh of relief. “Well, that's good to hear. I'm glad you have come to your senses and put this impossible dream behind you. I take it you told her you would no longer be going Above to see her?”

“I'm sorry, Father, you don't understand. Catherine and I have decided to continue seeing each other. I also intend to invite her to come Below anytime she wishes.”

“What?” Father demanded angrily. “You can’t do that without my approval! The council should be informed and vote on this matter, at the very least.”

“No, Father! This matter is between Catherine and me! No one else may decide for us... not even you... and certainly *not* the council!”

Jacob was appalled. “Why are you being so obstinate, Vincent? Do you realize that you could receive the silence for this? You could even be banished... for continuing to bring a stranger down here and putting us all in danger!”

“She is NOT a stranger! You will not call her that! If it wasn’t for Catherine, you might be spending the rest of your life in prison! You even went to her yourself for help when I was missing! And this is the thanks she gets from you?”

Father stubbornly stood his ground. “This has nothing to do with gratitude, Vincent. This is about the danger you are in... we are all in... if you continue to pursue this woman when you know it can lead only to disaster.”

“I am no longer a child, Father. This is a choice that Catherine and I must make together. It’s **our** choice...” he said slapping his chest. “...and no one else’s!”

Father sat down in the large chair beside Vincent’s bed, raking a hand through his hair. He was exhausted from worry, and tired of fighting. Looking up at his son, he said, “I don’t understand what would make you risk everything just to be with her? What does *this* woman have to offer you, Vincent?”

Vincent sat back down on the edge of his bed attempted to calm himself.

“Catherine has given me *a dream*, Father. She has seen me... and *all* that I am. And still, she has given me a dream more beautiful than any I ever imagined. It’s the best dream I have ever known.”

“And if this dream destroys you, what then?”

Vincent nodded. “It may one day have the power to destroy me... I don’t know. What I do know is that it has already had the power to *rescue* me from a darkness I sometimes fear will consume me.”

“How... What do you mean?”

“There are things I must tell you, Father... things *I need* you to understand. I’m asking you to listen... to hear me out.”

Father settled himself and gave Vincent his full attention. “I’m listening,” he said.

Vincent took a deep breath and began. “You know... better than anyone the struggle I have always had... my struggle with the darkness within me.”

Father nodded. It was something they rarely spoke of, but it was something he was always aware of.

“There are things...” Vincent said. “Things that I have kept hidden from you... from everyone... things I didn’t want to burden you with.”

Jacob leaned forward. “What things?” he asked, with a sense of foreboding.

“In the past few years... my struggle with the darkness has become, at times, almost unbearable... there have been times when the darkness seemed to be pulling me in beyond my ability to resist.” Vincent could feel that merely speaking the words drew the darkness closer.

“Vincent, you should have told me,” Jacob replied, with obvious concern for his adopted son.

“Why?” Vincent asked. “So that you could worry even more than you already do?” Vincent shook his head. “No, you carry enough weight on your shoulders as it is. I did not wish to add more, especially when there is nothing you could do to help.”



Jacob opened his mouth to disagree, but Vincent cut him off.

“The night I found Catherine, beaten and bleeding... near death... was one of the darkest nights of my life. I had resigned myself to the inevitable end of my struggle... the end of... my life.”

Jacob was shocked. “Good Heaven’s, Vincent—”

Vincent continued as if he didn’t hear Father’s voice.

“...I could feel the Abyss

pulling me in... and I was so tired of fighting... I knew the end was near... and then I found *her*... I found Catherine... and brought her here.”

“I had no idea it was that bad, Vincent. I... I...”

“In the days I nursed her here in this chamber, I began to realize that it wasn’t me who saved Catherine at all... *It was Catherine who was saving me.*”

“I don’t understand,” Father said. “How was she saving you?”

“Even as she lay here... broken and frightened... after all that she endured... she trusted me, Father... from the very first moment. Can you imagine how that felt to me? During those days she talked to me... she opened her heart to me. She made me feel, for the first time in my life, what it was like to be an ordinary man. Because she was blinded by the bandages, that is what I was to her. Do you know what she told me last night?”

Jacob shook his head. “No... what did she tell you, son?”

“She said that during those days, *I* was a light in *her* darkness. Can you imagine?” There was a look of wonder on Vincent’s face as he spoke. “***Me***... someone who has spent my entire life in the shadows... sheltered by the darkness... *I* was her light in the darkness.”

“I’m not really surprised. After all, you are an inspiration to many who live here, Vincent.”

Vincent shook his head. “It’s not the same, Father. They know me... they have grown up with me... but Catherine... she is from that world Above... a Topsider... and from the very first moment... she trusted me... even after all she had been through. And then after... when she saw me... and all that I am... she was frightened for a moment... her trust in me never wavered.”

Father shook his head. “That must be a wonderful feeling, Vincent. But is it reason enough to continue with this friendship? To continue taking these risks?”

“There is more. You *must* listen, Father. I must make you understand.”

Father sat back again, even though he doubted there was anything Vincent could say to change his mind about the situation.

“You blame Catherine for causing me pain... but it was me who encouraged Catherine to find someone... someone other than myself... to be a part of. She began dating Elliot Birch because of me. And when I felt her beginning to fall in

love with him... I was in such pain. I could feel my heart dying as she became closer to him.”

“Yes, I remember,” Father said.

“When Mitch shot her, I felt it again, even more keenly. When I left her on the steps of the hospital, I knew then that if she died... I would die too.”

Jacob was gripped by fear for his son. *Can this really be true?* he wondered.

“Then after she was offered the job in Providence... I knew, without a doubt, that it *was* true. She came to me, and I told her she must take the job... she must fulfil her destiny. Catherine only accepted the job because I insisted upon it. When she found me in that cage at the university, I was near death. If she had gone to Providence like I asked her to... I would have died.”

Father shook his head. “I... I’m sorry, Vincent. I was ignorant of the true circumstances. I only knew that you were in great pain, and I assumed it was *her* doing. I misjudged the situation... I have misjudged her.”

“So, you see, Father... this Bond... this dream we share... is *that* powerful. My life depends upon it. Catherine holds my life in her hands.”

“Have you told her this, Vincent?” Father asked with a furrowed brow. “How much does she know?”

Vincent shook his head. “How can I tell her, Father? I would have to tell her everything. *What* could I tell her that would not frighten her? It’s too great a burden for me to ask her to carry.”

“But if this is all true, Vincent... if she truly does hold your life in her hands, shouldn’t she know?”

“**No!**” Vincent stood and began pacing back and forth. “If I told her, it would only bind her to me more than she already is. Catherine *must* be free to pursue her own destiny, to live her own life. I won’t rob her of that.”

“Even if it means you would lose yours?”

“I feel as if I’m walking a tight rope, Father. I know this dream... can never be. And yet, I know it is the only thing keeping me alive. Catherine has already brought me more happiness than I ever imagined possible. I cannot in good conscience ask her to carry that burden. She cannot know that my life is hanging by the dream she has so generously given me. But I must ask you, Father, to stop

trying to drive her from my life. After all she has done for me... for us... she deserves better than that.”

“Yes,” Father replied humbly trying to digest all that Vincent had told him. “Now that I understand the situation... more fully, I promise, I will welcome her with open arms.”

He stood as if to leave. “I’m frightened for you, Vincent.,” he confessed. “I’m frightened for you both.”

Vincent put his hand on Jacob’s shoulder. “So am I, Father... so am I.”

Vincent sat alone in the Whispering Gallery, listening to the echoes from the world Above. *It’s her world*, he reminded himself... *where the wealthy and the powerful rule*. He searched his heart for her presence. *There she is*, he thought to himself, *she is working, and her heart is at peace*.

“Catherine,” he whispered, adding his voice to countless others in the swirling wind. “I may never be able to be a part of your world. But I am forever grateful that you want me to be a part of you.”

All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.



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