

The Eyes of the Beholder

by Brian Longstaff

Set in a time before Catherine entered Vincent's life, in which Vincent is saved from a mob by a blind girl

The mob was close on his heels. He could smell them - the scent of their fear, of their hatred for the abnormality that he represented.

He was weakening, as blood seeped out from the wound, where the knife thrown by one of his pursuers had embedded itself in his shoulder.

Father had been right, he'd discovered, in warning him against walking the city streets at night. His hood had caused a couple of drunken youths to mistake him for a woman, but when they confronted him, they'd discovered the beast in their midst and their cries of terror had brought the local neighborhood watch to the scene. That was how the hunt, and his current race to preserve his own life, had come about.

Now, due to the knife in his shoulder, it seemed that the hunt - and his life - were about to come to an end.

Vincent took the next corner at speed, and ran full-tilt into the girl.

"I... I'm sorry," he stammered, helping her up. "I hope I didn't...." The noise of his pursuers caused him to glance back. "I must go."

"Wait!" Something in the tone of her voice made him pause. "I can help. Go up the steps behind me and along the corridor to number 21B - that's my apartment," she said, handing him the key. "Wait for me there."

"I...."

"I'll divert them," she promised. "Go!"

Having no other option open to him, Vincent complied, taking the steps two at a time, and hoping the girl was not going to betray him.

Down in the street, the girl purposely slumped to the floor as the mob arrived. Seeing her there, its leaders rushed to her aid.

"Which way?" one asked. "Which way did it go?"

"There," and she pointed to an alley mouth. "He went in there."

"You gonna be okay?" asked another.

She nodded. "He knocked me down," she replied. "That's all."

"Need some help getting home?" asked a third.

"No," she answered. "I live here."

With admonishments for her to go inside and bolt her door, they left her to follow (*they thought*) their prey.

Waiting until sounds of the mob had faded into the distance, the girl went up to her apartment and bolted the door behind her.

"Boy, have you got them worked up!" she exclaimed.

"So it would seem," Vincent replied. After a pause, he added, "Why did you help me?"

She shrugged. "I dunno. I guess I just reasoned that someone who was *'really'* bad wouldn't worry about someone he'd knocked down, and *'certainly'* wouldn't stop to help her up with an angry mob on his heels!"

She flopped down on the couch. "Why were they chasing you?"

"Because I'm different," he said, head lowered.

"Different?"

He looked up sharply. "Can you not see?"

For a long moment, she didn't answer, then; "No, I can't see - I'm blind."

It was at this point when, due to the loss of blood, mingled with exhaustion, Vincent fainted.

He woke with an ache in his shoulder and a buzzing in his ears. Then he realized that it wasn't his ears that were buzzing, but something else to the left of his head!

Cautiously, he opened an eye, and smiled as he caught sight of a small ginger kitten lying on the pillow next to him and purring away with a volume that belied its size. He chuckled and opened his other eye, the better to look around.

He was lying on a solitary mattress against a wall, a single sheet covering his naked body, in what to all intents and purposes was a small bedroom. A couch and chair were opposite the mattress, while to the right of its head was a wardrobe, a full-length mirror, and a doorway with the door missing. To the right of its foot stood a dresser, over the side of which his clothes had been laid.

"So, you're awake then," came a voice from the doorway.

He turned his head to see the girl standing there, smiling.

"Yes."

She gestured to a cup on the dresser. "I made you a coffee a while back. It's probably cold, though."

"Thank you."

"Your wound's been washed with almost a full bottle of antiseptic, and I've bandaged it as best I could. You should see a doctor though. You're very hairy," she finished.

"Thank you," he repeated.

She paused, as if waiting for him to continue, but when he didn't, she turned to go.

"Wait," he called softly. "Please." She turned back, and he said, "My name is Vincent."

Her smile was back and wider than ever, as she moved to kneel down by his side. "Mary Dzvornak, and the one purring so loud is Jerry - he's a tomcat."

"Mary Zvornik?" he repeated, questioningly.

"I'll tell you later," she said. "What do you want for breakfast? Toast? I hope you like brown bread."

He smiled. "Brown bread is fine."

"Back in a jiffy," she said and bounced out of the room.

Vincent shook his head and sat up, but he was still weak from loss of blood and his head began to

spin. He decided against getting up just yet.

On the pillow, the kitten stirred, then in one quick movement sped down to where Vincent's foot had moved under the sheet and pounced on it!

Amused by this action, he moved his other foot and the kitten responded by pouncing on that. Then he moved his hand under the sheet.

By the time Mary returned, Jerry the tomcat had grown tired of trying to catch Vincent's hands and feet, and was now playing with a long piece of elastic that hung from the handle of the wardrobe door. It twanged loudly every time the kitten let go of it, with the result that Vincent's sides ached through laughing at the antics.

She carried a plate with a pile of toast on it, and another cup of coffee.

"Not getting up yet?" she asked.

"I am not yet strong enough," he replied, taking a piece of toast from the pile.

"No?" she asked worriedly, and moved her hand towards his face.

He held her back. "No!"

"I was only going to check how hot your forehead was," she said, sounding hurt.

Vincent bowed his head. "Sorry."

"What is it you're afraid of?" she asked.

'Of your reaction, should you discover what I am, how different I am,' he thought, but said nothing.

"Vincent," she said, moving up beside him again; "You said that the mob were chasing you that night because you were different." She moved a hand towards him, hesitated, then withdrew it again. "Not everyone's like that. Not everyone persecutes people because they're different - because they're coloured, or of the wrong sex, or disabled.... or blind," she whispered wistfully.

For a moment, neither of them moved, then Vincent reached out and gently pulled the girl into his arms, rocking her as she cried her pain into his embrace.

After a while, Vincent said, "I heard a poem once.... I don't remember its title," and he began to recite;

*'O say what is that thing call'd light,
Which I must ne'er enjoy;
What are the blessings of the sight,
O tell your poor blind boy!
You talk of wondrous things you see,
You say the sun shines bright;
I feel him warm, but how can he
Or make it day or night?
My day or night myself I make
Whene'er I sleep or play;
And could I ever keep awake
With me 'twere always day/
With heavy sighs I often hear
You mourn my hapless woe;
But sure with patience I can bear
A loss I ne'er can know.
Then let not what I cannot have
My cheer of mind destroy;*

*Whilst thus I sing, I am a king.
Although a poor blind boy.'*

(The Blind Boy - C. Ciber)

While he'd been reciting the poem, Mary's sobbing had grown quieter and had eventually stopped. As he finished, she looked up and whispered, "Thank you," before laying her head back down on his chest.

"Teach me about your world," he asked of her.

"My world?" she asked teasingly.

"Yes," he replied, taking her hand. "Your world."

"Okay," she agreed brightly. "What do you want to know?"

He smiled, shaking his head. "Mary...."

"Wait a moment," she said, getting up from his side and moving to a hanging above the couch. Pulling the hanging aside, she ran her fingers quickly along the row of books in the alcove behind it, and finally pulled one out.

Returning with it, she flipped it open and began to read;

*'Sleep on, and dream of heaven awhile ...
Tho' shut so close thy laughing eyes,
Thy rosy lips still wear a smile
And move and breathe delicious sighs!
Ah now soft blushes tinge her cheeks
And mantle o'er her neck of snow;
Ah, now she murmurs, now she speaks
What must I wish - and fear to know!
She starts, she trembles, and she weeps!
Her fair hands folded on her breast;
... And now; how like a saint she sleeps!
A seraph in the realms of rest!
Sleep on secure! Above contrond
Thy thoughts belong to heaven and thee;
And may the secret of thy soul
Remain within its sanctuary!'*

(The Sleeping Beauty - S. Rogers)

Having finished, she closed the book and faced expectantly towards Vincent.

"Braille," he said.

"Smart boy - go to the head of the class!"

".... and the poem was *'The Sleeping Beauty'* by S. Rogers," he continued.

Mary applauded. "And for your finale?" she prompted.

".... I'd like to learn braille," he finished.

Her expression suddenly became serious. "I dunno, Vincent," she replied. "Why braille?"

"Is it not a part of your world?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes," she nodded. "But don't you see? That's also one of the things that point blind people out to others. It's the standard image of us, along with dark glasses, white stick and seeing-eye dog." She turned and paced the room, hugging the book to her, then stopped. "When we met down on the street, up to the time I told you of my condition, you had no idea I was blind, had you?"

"No," he replied softly.

"You asked me to teach you my world, Vincent," Mary continued. "Well, it's just the same as your world - except that I don't see it with my eyes, that's all. I just read from a book to you - does it matter how?"

She waited as Vincent digested this particular piece of wisdom. Then he asked. "Teach me about our world."

She smiled, satisfied, and opened the book, settling herself down beside him once more. "Give me your hand," she directed. He complied, and she pressed his index finger gently down on one particular configuration of raised dots. "Feel that? It's the letter 'A'," adding conversationally; "My, but you're hairy!"

".... *on her sweetly scented road/ The....,*" Vincent's brow furrowed in concentration as his fingers moved slowly over the page, his eyes shut. "*No....Thou star of evening's purple drome/ That lead'st the nightingale abroad/ And guid'st the pilgrim to his home.(The Evening Star--T. Campbell)*

"Good," said Mary. "Very good."

"Thank you," he replied, opening his eyes. "I had a good teacher."

"Oh yeah?"

"And some small knowledge of other languages using symbols does help," he admitted.

She waited expectantly.

"Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphics - even German, with its umlauts and s-z symbol...."

"Sprichst du Deutsch?" (*Do you speak German?*) she interrupted.

"Ja, und du?" (*And you?*) He asked.

"Ich habe fünf einhalb jahren deutsch in volkshochschule gelernt!" (*I learned German at a community college for five and a half years*)

"Five and a half years?" Vincent questioned.

"Mmmmm. The classes were discontinued after that. Lack of interest," she explained.

"But you kept....," he began.

"Shhhhh!" she suddenly hissed, looking worried. After a moment of listening, she smiled wryly.

"Nothing. I guess my imagination's playing up."

"Why?" he asked. "What is it you thought you'd heard?"

"There's been a prowler reported in the neighbourhood," Mary explained. "So far he's done nothing - harmed no one and stolen nothing but...." she shrugged.

"Perhaps, I should see."

She shook her head, smiling. "My brave knight, Sir Vincent the Victorious, wounded but still willing to risk his life for his lady." She hugged him and whispered, "No, my liege, I would not have thee risk thyself in thy current state."

Vincent reached up and stroked her hair as she lay against him. "My, but you're hairy," he whispered.

Mary nearly choked with laughter at that.

The thought of it had surprised Vincent, the reality of it totally amazed him, but here they were, watching a film on Mary's video from the small collection she'd put together over the years.

It had all started the first day he'd felt strong enough to get up. He'd walked into the lounge and had noticed a television set there. Though having only limited experience of this form of entertainment, Vincent was well aware that TV was a visual medium, and wondered what role it could possibly play in a blind woman's life.

Of course he asked her.

Mary paused, as if rolling the question around in her mind before choosing the right words with which to reply with - but Vincent's unique ability to sense strong emotions in others had picked up an echo of pain, from memories long past within her.

"If you don't mind me asking," he added, showing his willingness to forgo an answer, if it was her wish.

She smiled and shook her head. "No, it's all right. It's just that...." she took a deep breath, ".... some things aren't easy to forget."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's all right, it's not your fault. You weren't to know," Mary replied, reaching out a hand, which Vincent took. "My boyfriend left it when he moved out. I guess it was his idea of some sort of sick revenge, to leave me with something I couldn't use." Her face turned grim. "But I showed him." Then she smiled and asked, "Wanna see a film?" Without waiting for a reply, she got up and went to a cabinet, inside which were a row of video tapes. She selected one and put it on.

The film was an old one from the forties. Mary informed him, "Old films are generally better," she explained. "They are more wordy and the few scenes where there are no words usually contain music that convey the mood of the scene." She paused as soft orchestral tones permeated the film's soundtrack. "That's romantic music if I ever heard it. The hero and heroine are probably in each other's arms, kissing at this very moment."

Vincent gazed at Mary in admiration. "Yes, they are," he confirmed softly.

Mary smiled again, then the smile faded and the pain was back.

"Tell me," he said, taking her hand once more.

In reply, she began to quote the bard;

*'Oh me! What eyes hath love put in my head
Which have no correspondence with true sight;
Or if they have, where is my judgement fled
That censures falsely what they see aright?
If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so
If it be not, then love doth well denote
Love's eye is not so true as all men's; No.
How can it? O how can love's eye be true,
That is so vex'd with watching and tears?
No marvel then though I mistake my views;
The sun itself sets not till heaven clears.
O cunning love! With tears keep'st me blind,
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find!'*

(Blind love--William Shakespeare)

At his last, Mary hung her head.

"I loved him," she said. "I loved him and all he gave me was pity. I was probably the least demanding girlfriend he'd ever had, but it was always a case of doing what he wanted, going where he wanted - never what I wanted, never where I wanted. When I complained, he said that one of us had an attitude problem. He treated me like a liability!" She paused then. "I put my heart into that relationship, Vincent. Did everything I could to make it work. He did nothing... so I asked him to leave."

"Love..." began Vincent.

"Love," she interrupted harshly. "Is..." then wistfully. "Love is out there, somewhere, waiting for me."

Vincent bowed his head, sorrowfully. It was only now, hearing Mary say those words, that he realized how close he'd come to falling in love with her because of her blindness and her strength in coping with that disability, than for any other reason.

Noticing his silence, she added, "And love will find you too, one day, my friend, and it will be so wonderful, so beautiful..."

Still Vincent said nothing. He was thinking of Lisa, and how he'd hurt her those long years past.

"Vincent?"

"Yes...?" he answered sadly.

"Tell me."

"I..." he paused. "There was someone once..." He found himself unable to go on.

"Never give up on love," she said. "It will happen - you'll see."

"Perhaps," he said, but could not help smiling.

She smiled as if in reply. "Now what say I introduce you to the polyphonic motets of Lassus? (*a composer of the late Renaissance*)

A dark figure scurried along outside the apartment building in which Mary lived....

"Yes, sometimes when one sense is handicapped, nature makes up for it by increasing the range of another," she told him. "But more often than not that only happens with those born blind. The rest - myself included - find our other senses increased only through special training and the fact that we've had to rely on them more than a normal person would."

"I see," said Vincent.

"Since I have no sense of smell to speak of," she explained. "I've had to rely on my hearing. Thankfully, I've always had been gifted in that area, and was being trained in classical music before I started losing my sight."

"Ahhhh!" he exclaimed, light dawning.

"Yes," smiled Mary. "That explains my love of music and how I know of Lassus and Korngold and Miklos Rota. I've also learned to hear the moods conveyed in tone and inflection when people speak."

"And what moods have I conveyed to your excellent hearing?"

"Warmth, caring..." she paused, "... and, somewhere deep down, a loneliness - no, not a loneliness, a solitude the like of which I've never known."

Vincent stared, startled.

"There's a place, though, where you feel accepted, isn't there. with people who care for you?"

"I feel accepted here."

"You are - don't ever feel you're not - but I'm talking about your home."

Home. The word brought images of the labyrinth of tunnels under the city, and of its inhabitants, his friends, his family. *'Father. He must be worried for him, staying Above for so long.'*

"Yes," he replied.

"There is leaving in your voice," she said sadly.

The silence with which Vincent answered her comment conveyed more meaning than any words he might have used.

Mary and Vincent walked quietly through the night-lit city streets. They went hand-in-hand. Few words passed between them. Soon they would part.

Earlier, Vincent had tried to convince her to come with him to the secret place where she would be accepted because of who she was, not what she was.

Mary had declined. "I will not give up on this world," she had said. "I want to prove to people that the blind do have a legitimate right to be a part of this world; a productive, useful part."

With all she'd done for him, taught him, Vincent could find no arguments to counter this, so he gave her choice the respect and acknowledgement it deserved.

As they walked on, she moved to put her arm around his waist. He was somewhat surprised at this sudden move until Mary whispered.

"We're being followed."

Vincent almost turned, but managed to restrain himself. Instead, he tried to pick up the sound of their shadow's footfall - to no avail.

"Let me guide you," he whispered, altering the direction they were going, to move towards a darkened store window. At the window, they stopped and, under his instructions, both leaned forwards as if to examine the goods therein.

Sure enough, Vincent caught the reflection of a figure scurrying furtively in their direction, then hiding in the shadows at the sight of them standing there.

He smiled grimly, and outlined his plan to Mary.

Their pursuer moved quickly and quietly up to the corner around which they'd vanished. He was good at avoiding being seen, and was proud of the fact that no one in the city had ever come close to catching him.

His cautious glance around the corner revealed the hooded figure alone, waving in farewell down another street where the girl had obviously gone.

Good! Now he could act.

The hand that landed firmly on his shoulder at that moment was a total surprise.

"AAHHH!" he yelled, as he was spun around. "Mouse do nothing! Mouse not...." then the talented thief from below ground stopped as he recognized his captor as Vincent, standing there with a bemused expression on his face. "Okay, good. Okay, fine," he said. "Friend Vincent, just scare life from Mouse. No '*sorry Mouse*,' no '*hello Mouse*'...."

"I'm sorry, Mouse," interrupted Vincent, unable to hide his amusement at his friend's reaction.

For a moment, Mouse stood unmoved, then broke into a wide grin himself. "Just like you catch Mouse first time," he said, and clasped Vincent's arms. A more serious expression on his face, Mouse continued, "Father worried. Hear from Helpers, beast seen here. I tell Father I find."

"And Father would have forbidden you to try," admonished Vincent.

Mouse looked guilty. Head lowered, he said softly, "Vincent Mouse's friend."

Vincent shook his head, smiling. Patting the youth's shoulder, he said, "Come, there's someone I'd like you to meet."

But Mary was gone, and Vincent's cloak, which she had been wearing, lay torn and dirty in the road.

The water flung harshly into her face brought Mary back to a painful reality. A stab of agony lanced through her head, bringing the knowledge that someone had hit her. She lay still for a while, waiting for the pain to ease and wondering why Vincent hadn't prevented the attack. Then came the thought that he might not have been able to, that their stalker might have.... That even now, Vincent was.... Dear Lord, no!

The thought that something had happened to him brought a low moan to her lips.

"Ah, our guest awakes!" a youthful voice said, somewhat sarcastically.

"Vincent," she groaned. "What have you done to him?"

"Vincent?" asked another voice, one she recognized from somewhere. Oh, if only the pain in her head would stop.

"So, it has a name," said the first voice. "So what? We want to know where it is, not who it is."

Mary breathed a sigh of relief. '*They haven't got him, they haven't got him....*' she repeated to herself silently, over and over again, clinging on to that knowledge as someone who was drowning might cling to a piece of wood floating by.

"So, where is it?" asked the first voice in her ear. "Where's this '*Vincent*'?"

She tried to move her hands to push her inquisitor away, only to find them to be roughly tied to something, and slowly but surely she became aware of her surroundings as her head cleared.

She realized she was on a camp bed, her hands tied to the rails at either side of it, though her feet were free. From the echo of their voices, they were in a fairly large, empty room - probably a small, deserted warehouse or the like.

"You are going to tell us where it is," said the second voice, breaking into her observations, "aren't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she bluffed.

"We're talking about *'Vincent'*," he snarled. "The thing who's cloak you were wearing."

Mary had no reply to that.

Then the first voice was back, whispering in her ear. "Why make things hard on yourself? You will tell us, one way or another," and his hands moved over her body, suggestively.

She suddenly felt very, very cold, but still she remained silent.

Tied as she was, Mary had very little chance to fight back, but what little she could do, she did, kicking and struggling with all her strength as her captors tore her blouse open and pulled at the fastenings of her jeans. She screamed - once, before a handkerchief was forced so far into her mouth that to almost choke her.

Hope was fading fast within her, and she almost wished she'd faint or that the pain in her head would overcome her so she wouldn't have to experience what was happening to her, when fury exploded into the room!

The two men barely had time to turn, before one of them was flung against the wall by a savage blow which laid his arm open to the bone, while the cruel fangs of the beast fastened on the throat of the second, ripping and tearing.

So much for them.

There was nothing human in the thing's eyes as it approached the helpless girl tied to the camp bed.

Mary lay shaking on the bed in the silent aftermath of sudden and violent death - for she was sure her two captors and would-be rapists were no more - pulling convulsively at the ropes which still bound her, while her senses screamed of the presence of the savage animal now moving slowly towards her.

She began to cry then, and though she could not have known it, this was the very act that saved her, touching as it did the humanity that lay hidden deep within the beast.

So it was that Vincent, shaken to the depths of his young soul by the loss of control to his bestial nature, reached out to remove the handkerchief from her mouth.

"Mary," he said softly, apologetically.

"Vincent?" she cried in disbelief, hearing his voice coming from what she'd thought was some wild animal. Then this, and the memories of other recent horrors caught up with her, and she fainted.

It was a very grim Vincent who wrapped Mary in his cloak and carried her back to her apartment, Mouse scouting ahead so that they might avoid being seen.

The youthful thief had also seen what had happened in the abandoned warehouse, for he had followed his friend, as his animal senses had tracked the spore of the girl and her abductors there.

Vincent had recognized the two men as being part of the mob who had been chasing him when he'd first encountered Mary, and had been saying as much to Mouse, when with a roar of anger which momentarily stunned the young thief, he'd crashed through the window and into the room.

Had Mouse known the turmoil currently going on within his friend, it would have perplexed him. Asked his opinion, he would have said that he knew Vincent would not have hurt the girl because she was his friend - just as Mouse was Vincent's friend, and because of that, Vincent would never hurt him. Simple as that.

Vincent, however, would think Mouse to be wrong in that assumption, and it was upon this very thing that his mind returned to over and over again, as he watched over Mary from the chair beside her bed in which he'd placed her.

'Was it his fate to always hurt those he cared about the most.' He had still not answered that question when sleep finally claimed him some hours later.

She struggled out of a dream-haunted sleep calling his name.

Vincent woke at the sound of her voice, and reached out for her hand.

"I'm here," he said gently.

"Oh, Vincent," she said. "I've had a terrible dream! I dreamt I was in danger of some sort, and this creature, this animal came and rescued me - but it wasn't an animal. Somehow it was you, and I was so afraid," she swallowed and Vincent lowered his head, "... for you," she finished.

His head shot up, startled.

"You were afraid *'for'* me?" he asked, unbelieving.

She nodded her head, *'yes.'*

"Were you not...." he paused, collecting his thoughts. "Were you not afraid this animal, this beast, would hurt you?"

"Not when I found out it was you," she replied. "But why the question? It was only a...." the word stuck in her throat, as memories of her abduction impinged on her consciousness. "It wasn't a dream," she whispered.

"No," he said sadly.

"That's why that mob was after you, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Mary sighed. "You saved me."

"I could have killed you."

"But you didn't - and *'could have'* doesn't count."

No reply.

"You know, at one time or another, nearly everyone does something they regret...."

"I'm not everyone," he broke in.

"Oh, Vincent," she admonished gently. "Don't do this to yourself. There is great strength in you, and great tenderness too. If you spend your life in vain and bitter regret over what was, and what might have been, what room will you have left for what will be? What room would any of us have?" and she quoted Milton;

*'When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent.
To serve therewith my maker, and present
My account, lest he returning chide----*

*Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?
I fondly ask;----But patience, to prevent.
That murmur, soon replies; God doth not need
Either man's work, or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest----
They also serve who only stand and wait.'*

(On His Blindness - J Milton)

She smiled then, and Vincent smiled back.

They sat in silence for a while, holding hands and just enjoying each other's presence, but finally Vincent arose.

"I still have to leave," he said.

"I know," she replied.

He squeezed her hand, and turned to go.

"Vincent!" she called.

"Yes?"

"Will you let me *'read'* your face?"

He slowly turned and went back to sit on the side of the bed.

"Yes," he said, and placed her hands on his cheeks.

Mary *'read'* his face slowly, her deft fingers lingering over each strange, beast-like feature, her own face expressionless the whole while.

Finally, it was over. Finally, she knew of his otherness.

"Thank you," was all she said, quietly and without emotion.

Again, Vincent turned to go. At the door, he paused. "Goodbye," he said.

Mary made no reply - then in a flurry of movement, she was out of the bed and embracing him.

"Oh, Vincent," she said crying. "It's okay, don't you see, it doesn't matter. It's not what you look like, it's who you are - and I'll always think of you as my dearest friend, always."

"And you are mine," he replied. "Always."

Vincent never forgot Mary in the years to come. He visited her when he could, and eventually she was enrolled into the ranks of those who act as eyes and ears in the city, for the underground dwellers; *'The Helpers Network.'*

Due a lot to her, a youthful Vincent came to terms with his dual nature, and learned never to regret what he was....

.... Until Once Upon A Time, the beast met beauty -but that, as they say is another story.