

Vincent's Distant Shore

Judith Nolan



“Because there's nothing more beautiful than the way the ocean refuses to stop kissing the shoreline, no matter how many times it's sent away...”

Sarah Kay



Vincent entered the hidden chamber, looking all around, before sinking to one knee by the edge of the Mirror Pool. He was exhausted. He'd been unable to sleep, because his mind had been filled to overflowing with fantastic images of an endless beach hemmed by the vastness of an immense ocean.

He felt lightheaded and overwhelmed by all he'd seen. In his inner vision, bright sunshine was everywhere, shining on everything. Vincent had to squint to see it all, so bright was the light. His night-accustomed eyes needed a long time to adjust.

Then, all he could do was marvel at the blue of the water against the gold of the sand. Above the beach, craggy headlands hinted at a vast interior.

He knew the fantastic vision was not his. But all was silent. There was nothing and nobody on the beach except himself, and a voiceless wind tugging at his clothing.

And yet he did not feel alone.

Even though the vastness of an entire continent lay between them, he could feel Catherine's unseen presence. This was her vision, her dream. The bond between them hummed and throbbed with a deepening awareness. Vincent knew she was somehow close to him, reaching out to him through the power of her emotions.

At dusk fell, he'd been unable to resist the pull of Catherine's balcony, all the while knowing she was not there. He still needed to be as close to her as the distance between them allowed. He stood for some time, with one hand pressed hard against the glass, gazing through the doors into the darkened apartment.

Long after he'd returned Below, the visions of endless sand and surf clung to him, nudging against his confused senses like tangible things. Feeling restless and on edge, he'd come here to the mirror pool to try and reorientate himself.

He leaned forward to stare down at all the stars being reflected onto the still waters through a small fracture in the soaring rock ceiling. The hour was early and the waning moon still hung low in the sky far above.

His attention was so keenly focussed on his recent vision, he didn't sense Mouse's approach on silent feet. The tinker hesitated in the opening, not wishing to intrude. But he has a message to deliver and Vincent had not been in his chamber as expected.

"Vincent..." Mouse crossed to his friend's side, holding a small, brown paper wrapped package in his hand. He stood looking down at the mirrored night sky. "Stars are pretty."

The pool threw up both their reflections, superimposed over that of the heavens far above. Vincent pointed to a star. "Yes, look. Orion . . . with three bright stars on his belt."

Mouse frowned his confusion. "Seen those before... last year."

Vincent smiled. "He returns every year. The hunter. Striding across the winter sky. Never resting. Catherine walks under the same stars. Even now."

Mouse shrugged as he crouched down beside Vincent. He held out the package. "Helper brought this down. For you, from Catherine."

Vincent took it carefully, noticing that sand was sifting from one corner of the wrapping. He held his hand beneath the thin stream, weighing it in his open palm, amazed at the lightness of the fine golden grains.

Mouse watched, looking stricken. "Not Mouse's fault. Came that way."

Vincent smiled as he held the package out over Mouse's cupped hands and the sand fell softly onto his friend's open palms. "Sand . . . from the distant shores of the Pacific. How far it's come."

Mouse frowned at the shifting pile in his cupped hands. He poured it from one hand to the other before dusting it to the floor.

"A lot like our sand," he observed, privately wondering why his good friend was so concerned with the origins of the fine grains. *Sand is sand, isn't it? Here or there. Same everywhere.*

Vincent nodded. "Yes, and yet so very different. It hints at places I may see only in books. This sand carries the taste of salt and the memories of a vast ocean I will never see."

"Okay..." Mouse leaned back to observe him with a curious expression. "Still just sand."

He shrugged, not grasping what Vincent was trying to say. *Like the sand, surely sea water is sea water. Isn't it? The same everywhere...*

"You're up early. I'm sure you have better things to do, my friend." Vincent grasped Mouse's shoulder companionably, wishing to be alone with his gift.

Mouse nodded as he jumped to his feet. "Around if you need me," he offered quickly, before scurrying away on his own business.

Vincent shook his head in amusement, as he retired to his chamber, carrying Catherine's gift. Settling into his great chair, he opened the package and marvelled at the large shell she had packed for him. He picked it up carefully, before holding it up to the lights of the candles, admiring its construction. Then he turned it over to peer into the glossy opening before bringing it to his nose, inhaling all the mystical scents of the distant Pacific. He sighed, resisting a temptation to hold it to his ear, to see if he could hear the sound of the waves.

Replacing the shell carefully into its box, he studied it for some time, marvelling at its texture and shape. Then his attention shifted. Tucked beside the shell was a folded letter. He reached into the box again and picked the letter up to open it.

As he began to read, he could hear Catherine's sweet voice inside his mind...

"Vincent, it's the strangest thing. We've never been so far apart. And yet I can feel you with me so deeply. Sometimes it's as if I'm seeing

*things through your eyes. The sun is coming
up now. The sky is pink. The ocean is deep
purple and I feel like a child . . .”*

Vincent smiled in appreciation as Catherine continued her letter. He could picture her walking along the ocean’s restless edge. Just as he had walked, in his incredible dream.

*“I wish I could just scoop it all up with a shell,
run to you, and pour it into your hands.
Everything! The cry of the gulls, the warm sun,
the breeze and the ocean spray it carries,
the taste of salt, the waves...”*

Vincent closed his eyes and saw her standing there before him, surrounded by sunshine and a trackless beach that seemed to stretch for miles in both directions. Beside them, the Pacific waves swept in, rushing up onto the sand before retreating, only to run in again in an endless cycle that they were destined to repeat until the very edge of doom.

Vincent opened his eyes to read more of Catherine’s letter.

“God, it’s so quiet right now, Vincent. And the waves are so peaceful...”

In his mind, Vincent reached out to grasp her hand. They were bathed in sunshine and warm on-shore breezes. They turned together and started walking slowly along the deserted beach. There was no need for words.

After what seemed like hours, in his imagination, they turned to face each other. He enfolded her in his arms, resting his cheek against her wind-tossed hair as he held her close to his heart. He breathed her in, wishing they could stay this way forever...

He shrugged at such wishful thinking as he went back to reading, Catherine’s voice continuing to echo in his mind.

*“And the feeling is so one of solitude,
except you’re here too. I find myself talking*

*to you, listening to you. This morning I think
we walked for miles together. Just you and me.
And it was so clear, Vincent, I didn't think I
imagined it! I think we walked for miles together..."*

Vincent heard her sigh deeply, and with longing. He could hear sadness in her voice. Catherine wrote in final farewell...

I miss you..."

"As I miss you, more than I can say..." Vincent answered softly, holding the pages up to his nose and inhaling Catherine's warm scent that lingered in the folds of the paper.

He gently refolded the letter before returning it to the box and closing the lid. Then he reached for his diary and fountain pen before he began to write a reply Catherine would never see.

*Catherine, we are as far apart as we never have been.
It seems so impossible, this distance between us, and yet...
I can feel you, sense you, within every fibre of my being.
You call to me like the sirens of old
and I would go willing to my doom,
to be with you on that very distant shore.
And yet, it's almost as if you are here, beside me,
holding me, whispering to me.
You show me everything, through your eyes.
Everything that is magical and beautiful in your world.
I went up to your balcony tonight, but you were not there.
I knew you were not, and yet...
I needed to be close to you. I dreamed of you...
Of us, together, in the sunshine.
Now that I read your letter,*

*I know it was more than a dream.
It was your soul reaching out to mine across the miles,
to show me all you are seeing and feeling.
It seems my soul will always find yours no matter how far apart we are...
I find immense comfort in that thought, in that understanding.
Together, we did walk miles in the sunshine.
The beach, the ocean and you. Everything was so perfect.
With you beside me, I could have walked forever,
both of us bathed in sunlight and beauty.
But then you stopped to turn and smile at me,
And I, who can only ever be intimately acquainted with the night,
Saw all that was possible, if only I dared to believe.
In your smile, in your eyes, you showed me what it is to be beautiful...
To be loved without reserve, without hesitation.
To give everything of yourself, expecting nothing in return, but acceptance.
I await your return with bated breath and keen anticipation.
I cannot wait to hold you again, to lay my cheek against your hair and dream...
Be Well, my love... Be Safe...
Hurry home to me...
I miss you more than all the written words could ever say...*





"I was happy anywhere I could see the ocean..."

Ai Yazawa