

When Will It Stop

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

“Vincent!” Catherine called out his name, trailing quickly after him.

They had run out of the old cinema. Vincent had saved her from the two young rich boys, who had spent their boring existence with the cold-blooded, ruthless murdering of young prostitutes. Of course, the encounter with Vincent cost them their lives, but otherwise, Catherine would have been dead by now, as she had been relentless in trying to prove their guilt. They had lost patience with her and set a trap.

“Vincent!” Catherine repeated her call to him, desperate to stop him and reassure herself he was unharmed. Before he killed one of the boys, Vincent had been shot at.

He finally stopped running; exhausted and breathless, he fell with his arms against the nearest wall, hiding his face in them.

Catherine reached him from behind, breathing heavily, her shaky voice betraying her anxiety.

“Are you all right?” she breathed and leaned her face against him, rubbing his back gently with her hands, trying to soothe his hurt soul and hoping he wasn’t injured. He always suffered greatly every time he had to kill to protect the ones he loved.

A moment later, Vincent turned around and leaned his back and head against the wall, in despair and resignation, tears glistening in his eyes.

“Nothing... Nothing but madness... Nothing but blood...,” he sobbed quietly, anguish filling every choked word. He bent his head down. “When will it stop?”

Catherine, already checking his chest for any wound, looked up, struck by the tragic truth of his words, and she was unable to reply. Anything she would have said would have been pointless. Her heart was breaking for this noble soul, whose ideals of love, respect and kindness had been crushed time and time again by the cruel world of those Above, who called themselves civilized.

After gazing at him in sympathy and sorrow for a few moments, she focused on his chest, looking for any bullet wounds. Luckily, the bullet just grazed his arm; the boy obviously couldn’t shoot under pressure, if at all. Breathing a sigh of relief, but still feeling the deep mental pain penetrating to her through their bond, she buried her head into his chest and embraced his waist tightly. She was hoping she could pass onto him her strength and love to recover from his ordeal.

Vincent’s arms were still at first but then slowly encircled her, although his embrace was light, as if trying to hold himself up, instead of collapsing in her arms and giving in to despair.

Catherine placed a gentle kiss over his heart and whispered, looking up at him, “We can’t stay here...”

His eyes locked with hers, finally fully back in reality, and grabbing her hand, he led them quickly to the entrance to the tunnels.

When they finally reached his chamber, they both breathed a sigh of relief. The journey back had seemed endless, the events preceding their arrival still reeling through both of their minds.

At first, Vincent felt remorse over the seemingly never-ending violence he'd had to encounter again and again. But then another feeling crept into his heart, a much stronger one, which was tearing him to pieces - guilt.

He knew it was right to follow the boys on their search for their next victims and scaring them off, as he had several times. But he also knew that had he not teased them, they wouldn't have attacked Catherine, as they held her responsible for him following them. *I almost had her killed - and all because of me....*

Vincent slumped onto his bed, burying his head in his hands, unable to look at Catherine, who sat on the bed next to him, rubbing his shoulders and back, trying to calm him down. She wanted to clean the scratch on his arm, but correctly guessed that there was a much deeper wound bothering him now, and the scratch could wait.

"Talk to me, Vincent," she spoke softly, knowing that bottling his feelings up would only make things worse for him.

"I can't...." He almost choked on his words.

"You must... Please?" Catherine was gentle yet relentless.

She was afraid Vincent would retreat into the depths of the tunnels and disappear for days or weeks again to lick his wounds.

He swung his head to her so suddenly that it almost made her jump. His eyes were full of anguish and horror.

"I almost had you killed!" His growl was heartbreaking.

Catherine frowned, immediately catching the train of his thoughts, and she grabbed hold of his hands.

"No, Vincent, you did *not!* It was not your fault!" She raised her voice slightly to reach his heart and mind.

"I don't regret following them, but I regret never thinking about what it might cause to you! If I hadn't pursued them, they would not have blamed you, and you would not have been in danger..."

He was on the verge of tears, his hands shaking in hers, his head down again in shame.

"Vincent, look at me, please..." Catherine cupped his cheek with one of her hands to make him look at her. When she saw the pain, shame and the realization of her near loss, it almost broke her.

"I pursued them too; I was doing everything I could to put them behind bars for the atrocities they had done. Even if you hadn't followed them, I wouldn't have been safe from them, because, just like you, I was in their way."

Vincent shook his head slightly, still unable to accept that he had nothing to blame himself for.

"Vincent," Catherine continued. "If anyone is to feel guilty here, it's me."

He frowned in disbelief. "Why would you say that, Catherine?"

She sighed before explaining. "It's my own fault that I constantly end up being in danger. In my investigations, I always go for broke to find justice; I often push safety limits. By doing that, I unwillingly force you to face the ugliness and cruelty of my world, time and time again, breaking your noble heart over and over, and putting not just myself, but especially *you* in danger. That is unforgivable..."

Her voice faded as she felt the weight of her own words, the reality of them causing tears pricking in her eyes. Vincent immediately held her hands tight.

“Catherine, you only do what must be done! You help those who can’t help themselves, the voiceless, the powerless ones... Your courage and your willingness to take risk helped to bring justice and change the lives of so many already! Sometimes, we have to leave our safe places and walk empty-handed among our enemies...”

He cupped her cheek, and his thumb gently brushed a stray tear away from her face. Hearing his words, Catherine smiled at him, seeing the truth behind those words and her own brilliant attorney’s mind, which had brought Vincent to the desired conclusion.

“See, Vincent, that is exactly what you do, as well,” she said, hoping he would get her point.

When she saw the expression in his eyes change into one of realisation, she knew he did.

“Oh, Catherine...” he whispered and took her in his arms.

This time, his embrace was as tight as it could be. Vincent was clinging to her body desperately, his head resting on her shoulder, and suddenly, the pain eating at his heart took over his entire body. The tears started flowing, and his quiet sobs tore through Catherine’s heart, as her arms enfolded him tighter, as if to protect him from all the evil of the world she had called her home for more than thirty years.

She had felt the shift; the definition of a home had changed its meaning for her two years ago - home was now wherever Vincent was.

“Don’t cry, Vincent, please don’t, it’s breaking my heart...” Catherine whispered, feeling her cheeks wet and stroking his hair tenderly with one hand.

Yet, she let him cry, knowing he had to let his sorrow wash away, for the storm to pass and allow him to heal. They had been through so much lately - ever since the incident with the Outsiders. And it was beginning to take its toll on both of them, but especially Vincent. The increasing cruelty of her world unleashed a rage such as he had never experienced before. Apart from the one time, when he was still a boy in many ways. Sadly, it cost him a much greater effort to process it now than in the past, as if the other, darker side of him was getting more consumed by anger every time he had to use its power. When will it stop indeed?

When Vincent calmed down, he sighed and pulled back slightly to look into her eyes.

The loving smile on her face and the deep green of her eyes caressing his own almost took his breath away.

“What have I ever done to deserve you?” he wondered quietly.

“You just *do*, Vincent, for who you are, what you stand for.... You deserve *everything*.”

The resolve in her voice stunned him. The weight of the world and his actions earlier was still on his shoulders, but his amazement and endless love for the woman in his arms overwhelmed him yet again, and he couldn’t resist.

“As do you, Catherine,” he whispered with a smile, holding her face with both of his hands.

Leaning his face to hers, he kissed her, exploring her soft lips eagerly. She responded with all her being, and after several moments, when they finally came apart for air, Catherine was trembling, clutching to his vest tightly. She knew she would have to explain to the police what was she doing in the old cinema that night and somehow find a story of how the two bodies ended up dead there. All that mattered at that moment was that Vincent was with her, alive.

Vincent embraced her again, holding her head tucked under his chin, their favourite spot. They both let out a deep sigh of contentment and closed their eyes, holding each other tightly, as if they never wished to be parted again. After the horrors of the past night and all the events leading up to it, they knew that evil existed in the world and probably always would. Yet, they also believed that there was something stronger, something that would always overcome evil - and that thing was love.

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