

IF YOU DIE, SO DO I

(Beast Within episode expansion)

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A cold, almost freezing chill ran across his heart, when he lifted his eyes to the dark night's sky and cried out his agonising fear in a gut wrenching roar. Then he looked down at the woman lying helpless and unconscious in his arms.

You can't... You can't, Catherine!! You must hold on!

The rational part of Vincent's brain made him stand up with his physical burden in his arms and run quickly towards the nearest hospital. Catherine was bleeding from her back, her denim jacket was getting soaked more, as Vincent's long legs were trying to beat the impossible - the time needed to save her life.

Just a little moment, Catherine, we're almost there... Just keep breathing, please..., he begged in silence and his eyes were stinging from yet unshed tears. His breath was heavy, his heart felt clamped, almost as if an invisible hand had a firm grasp on it and didn't want to let go.

When Vincent finally spotted the hospital building, he slowed down just before he ran out of a dark alley towards the back door with a large sign 'Emergency' above it. He was lucky, as apart from an empty ambulance car, there was no one to be seen around.

He quickly looked around to make sure no one could see him and then gently put Catherine's unconscious body down on one of the wide steps leading to the Emergency entrance. His tear-filled eyes couldn't let go of her pale and already sweat-covered face and his hand was desperately holding on to hers, as if holding on to a lifeline.

'Don't die, Catherine,' Vincent whispered, painfully. 'If you die, so do I...'

A tear ran down his cheek and at a distant sound of voices, he realised he had to leave, though leaving her was like depriving himself of oxygen. And leaving her on the verge of death's door was something he couldn't bear. But Vincent knew there was no use getting caught, as there was something else he had to do that night. He couldn't save her life, only the doctors could, but he could avenge her. He had to find Mitch Denton and make him pay for this. And make him pay he would...

As red veil covered his sight, and blood in his veins boiled almost to a painful point, he glanced for the last time at Catherine and then disappeared back into the night. He was following the trail of the man who shot the woman he loved with his heart and soul.

You can run, Mitch, but you can't hide from me! And you know that this time, there will be no lucky escape...

Killing the two men who were with Mitch was not exactly difficult. Each of them were on watch, unaware of the true danger their boss was so terrified of.

'*You idiot, you don't know what we unleashed!*' Mitch shouted at his companion, who had teased him of being afraid just a few moments before. Now he was running for his life up the steel staircases in an abandoned warehouse full of steam pipes - and on his heels was Vincent...

A blind rage was filling Vincent as he easily closed in on Mitch. A man who he once used to play with as a boy was now his biggest enemy. The image of Catherine laying lifeless on the pathway

was one he couldn't erase from his memory, and his fury made way for the Beast in him, as snarls and roars were accompanying him on his blind quest.

In a last desperate attempt, Mitch (seeing how close Vincent was behind him) climbed up a cat walk and tried to escape, although he knew it was a futile attempt. An angry beast is extremely dangerous, but a beast whose dear one had been hurt is deadly. With horror, he realised the narrow walkway he'd used to escape ended abruptly with a wall. He turned around and saw Vincent right behind him.

Snarling and growling, with his teeth bared and fangs gleaming threateningly in the light, Vincent looked and sounded like the God of Revenge. His eyes were like fires, burning into Mitch's eyes and soul - Vincent was his prosecutor, judge, and executioner.

'Please, please, Vincent! Mother of God, don't...', Mitch begged for his life crying, crouching down at the wall, his self-confidence vanished like a puff of icy breath. He had turned into a terrified child awaiting for the worst to happen.

Vincent let out another growl and was almost prepared to strike, when suddenly he heard it.

Vincent...

His eyes grew wide, his growling stopped, as did his hand in the air.

Catherine...

She was alive.... The bond spoke clearly - she was alive! And he knew she would have wanted him to stop.

Vincent's facial features relaxed and transformed into a cold mask.

'There's nothing left of you... nothing,' he said to the man at his feet, in an icy cold quiet voice, before turning on his heel and walking away.

Mitch Denton could do nothing but sob in relief - and in shame.

Vincent....

As always since the moment they met, he was the first thing on her mind after she woke up. After that, she was trying to focus on the sound of the beeping machine somewhere behind her. Her eyelids felt heavy and difficult to lift. A throbbing pain lower in her back reminded her of what happened earlier that night.

When she finally opened her eyes, the hazy veil cast over them slowly cleared and the first thing she saw was the sweetest one she could ever imagine - it was Vincent's face bending down to her.

His deep blue eyes were glistening in the subdued light penetrating the hospital room from the street behind the opened window. A light breeze was playing with strands of his golden hair. A sweet tenderness settled over his face.

He looks like an angel...

'Vincent...', she whispered with visible effort.

'Shh...', he hushed her, calming her.

Catherine frowned slightly, not sure she wasn't dreaming.

'You're here?'

'I'm here,' Vincent replied with a little smile and reassurance, as if this was the only place he could ever be. Right beside her.

Catherine's face relaxed a bit, and suddenly she remembered something.

'I had a dream about you,' she said slowly, her brain still influenced by anaesthetics.

Vincent couldn't hide his surprise and gasped with an incredulous smile.

'About me?'

Catherine just nodded slightly and then continued.

'We were walking down Fifth Avenue... The sky was blue...,' she closed her eyes.

Vincent suddenly desperately wanted to know more.

'And then?' he asked, when she went quiet for a moment.

Catherine opened her eyes again and suddenly her face lit up and she smiled, looking like a child who had just opened the most incredible present imaginable.

'You bought me ice cream,' she whispered happily.

Vincent's smile widened in awe, before she added seriously.

'No one looked twice...'

He gasped and a tear escaped his eye when her own eyes closed and she fell asleep again.

Oh, Catherine... how innocent, how sweet your heart is...

Vincent gently took her hand in his and put his cheek against it, closing his eyes and shivering, savouring the sensation of her soft skin against his stubbly cheek.

Then, trying to calm down his pounding heart, he released her hand, laying it tenderly on the bed. He fought off his urge to kiss her forehead. So with one last smile, he left the room through the window and vanished into the night, which so graciously covered his face from those who wouldn't understand.

More than a week passed before Catherine was released from the hospital and allowed to continue her recovery at home. She still hadn't regained all her strength, but she was able to function on her own in her apartment. Her father was paying her a visit every day after his work, bringing her the best food and gossip of the town. Catherine enjoyed his presence, especially since they had a less frequent contact since she'd started working for the D.A.'s office. Joe stopped by a couple of times as well, making sure she had everything she needed, his extreme interest in her well-being never going unnoticed by her. *Dear Joe, such a sweet friend,* she thought.

She spent the first five days of her home recovery dividing time between reading, sleeping and spending time with her father. However, there was something she was missing terribly, ever since the morning she woke up in the hospital after her surgery. *Vincent...*

She knew it had been extremely risky for him to come to the hospital to see her, that night after her surgery. It had been a precious gift she'd needed, as much as he needed it to assure himself of her being alive and as well as she could be. Ever since her father had driven her home from the hospital, she was hoping and dreaming Vincent would come to see her.

But the steady presence of her parent staying each evening for dinner and well after it, made it impossible for Vincent to visit her. He sensed her fatigue, knew she needed a rest and didn't want to disturb her peace. And yet, Catherine knew he was with her in her heart, and she in his thoughts. The single crimson rose she found on the wrought-iron bench on her balcony, the night she'd arrived home, was standing still in the porcelain vase on her bedside table. Its subtle sweet fragrance helped Catherine to sleep peacefully with a smile on her face.

She didn't know the one she was so deeply thinking about was watching her through the French doors from the balcony every night, when he came well after her bedtime, to see she was well. Vincent regarded the beloved figure on the bed for hours, watching her sleep, the moonlight stroking her face gently, giving it an almost ethereal glow. Vincent to wished he could be right

there beside her and hold her safely in his embrace. And each night, he sighed and left as secretly as he had arrived.

A week after Catherine had arrived home, she finally persuaded her father that she was able to spend an evening by herself and needed to get back to her usual life. Over two weeks after her injury, her strength was back. Only a little blunt pain every now and then at a wrong move, reminded her of the gunshot wound she had attained. It was Friday and after the weekend, she was about to return to work. Joe informed her that Mitch Denton gave himself up to the police and admitted his wrong doing, so she was safe again. Catherine was looking forward to doing something useful again and felt she was strong enough to continue. But before that, she was truly hoping Vincent would finally come and see her, now that she was alone.

The clock on the mantelpiece had just struck nine, when she walked out on her balcony wrapped warmly in a long cardigan, with a cup of freshly made herb tea warming her hands. Looking out into the city lights longingly, her heart was wishing on a star.

Come to me, I'm waiting for you...

'I'm here...', as if an answered prayer, a whisper came from the corner behind her.

She turned around swiftly and her face lit up like hundreds of candles, a beaming smile gracing it.

'Vincent!' she exclaimed and almost ran into his arms.

He held her gently against his solid frame, aware of the barely-healed wound on her back, yet his breathing was ragged and a lonely tear escaped his eye.

'Oh, Catherine...!' His voice betrayed a pain like she had never heard it before.

'I'm all right, Vincent, I'm all right,' she assured him immediately, sensing his anguish.

'Forgive me, please...'

Catherine pulled back from his embrace slightly and looking puzzled in his eyes, she asked.

'For what?'

Vincent bent his head in shame and words were suddenly too difficult for him to pronounce.

'I was too late... Too late to... prevent it...' he looked up at her and the sapphire blue of his eyes was obscured by tears.

Catherine gasped quietly and shook her head while holding his arms tight.

'Vincent... you can't blame yourself for this! It was not your fault - the risk was mine to take! You couldn't have known what Mitch was planning...'

She tried to take the guilt away from him, took his hands in hers and gently squeezed them to confirm her words.

'I should have known,' he said quietly. 'I know Mitch, I've known him for years and I know he's willing to go to extremes without hesitation when it suits his needs. I should have done something about it earlier...'

Catherine shook her head again and smiled gently.

'You did, Vincent, you warned me, and the fact that I thought I would be careful enough has nothing to do with you. I should have paid more attention. In fact, it is I who asks for forgiveness.'

Vincent looked at her in disbelief.

'Why, Catherine? There is nothing to -'

'There is,' she interrupted him. 'You asked me to be very careful and I wasn't. And if it wasn't for you bringing me to the hospital...'

Vincent gasped and closed his eyes at the horror the image of the possible outcome evoked in him.

'Thank you...,' she whispered.

When Vincent opened his eyes again, he saw that the green of her eyes was glistening with tears.

How am I supposed to forgive you, if I can't forgive myself, my dearest Catherine?

'There is nothing to forgive, Catherine,' he sighed, then said with a calmer voice now. 'You just wanted to give someone a chance for a better and safer life - and that is what you did.'

A wide grateful smile graced her lovely face.

'Hold me, please?' she asked softly, then and while his heart leapt, he was amazed how undemanding and shy it sounded, as if it was the only thing she longed for, but almost didn't dare to ask for.

He wanted to tell her about his pursuit of Mitch, how his own mind was veiled with rage and how he wanted to take Mitch's life, how she literally stopped him from killing him... but there would be time for that later. For now, there was only one thing he needed and wanted to do - obey her wish.

He smiled a little as his eyes twinkled in the darkness of the balcony, illuminated by the warm light coming from her apartment. He took her in his arms and pulled her carefully closer while resting his head against hers.

Catherine sighed in relief and contentment and her arms reached under his cloak embracing him tight around his waist. With her face buried in the warmth of his chest, she smiled when she heard the slightly quickened beating of his strong and gracious heart.

'By the way, thank you for the rose, it's beautiful...,' she whispered.

Vincent smiled with his eyes closed.

'You're welcome, Catherine, it reminded me of you...'

END