

THAT HEAVENLY FACE RESTORED

(Nor Iron Bars a Cage episode expansion)

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(Author's note: Some dialogue was taken from the episode "Nor Iron Bars A Cage", written by Alex Ganza and Howard Gordon, from "Beauty and the Beast" series)

"Providence, Rhode Island..."

"Providence is when...b something is meant to be."

"I don't know what's meant to be!... Vincent, I care about you so deeply, but part of me is unhappy... and we both know why..."

"Well, then you don't have any choice... You must go. You must... see. You must... do everything you were meant to do, for me, for both of us. And then I can truly be with you. Always."

"There's no other way?"

"No... not for us..."

Their conversation had replayed in Catherine's head for almost two days now, during the lonely hours of packing away her belongings. The mementos and memories of her apartment, the reminders of the times she spent there... soon she would leave New York for her new position in Rhode Island.

Her tears spent the night before, she found herself numb now, the pain, heartache, and sorrow deeper than she could have imagined. Why *couldn't* there be another way? Why didn't he allow her to go for the other option? True, she hadn't mentioned it, but if he had asked her, she would have gone to live Below right away. At least she'd have given it a chance, *tried*, with *him*...

Ten months ago, she wouldn't have thought of ever living anywhere away from luxury and carefree comfort, the constant buzz of people filling the streets of New York. Now she was longing for the calm ambience of the underworld, with its glowing golden lights, the constant yet reassuring tapping on the pipes. She yearned for the simple, charming, cosy comfort of Vincent's chamber - the soft amber light from behind the stained glass window, candlelight turning the space into a magical, fairytale place of peace and beauty. Her own apartment - even before she'd started packing - seemed empty and cold, without him at least on her balcony.

Absent-mindedly packing books into one of the boxes, her hands suddenly landed on the beautiful old, leather-bound edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* Vincent had given her not so long ago. She opened it and her gaze fell on the inscription written in Vincent's unmistakably elegant handwriting.

With love's light wings did I o'er perch these walls;

For stony limits cannot hold love out.

Vincent

Her fingers lovingly traced the lines, and she held her breath at the sound - eternally engraved in her memory - of Vincent's voice, of him reading to her. A lonely teardrop fell on the page.

Catherine exhaled heavily and closed her eyes. A range of emotions clashed in her mind and heart, tearing her to pieces. They could never have a life together, not with her Above and him Below. But how was she supposed to move on and pretend there was someone else for her out there, waiting to lead her to *happily ever after*, when all she could hope for were the nights when she could escape to her dreams of descending to the tunnels where she could be with *him*? The whole situation seemed hopeless, impossible, inevitable, unthinkable...

THE PREVIOUS EVENING

When Vincent pulled the lever shutting the steel door behind him, leaving Catherine on the other side, he tried to walk away, but his legs almost gave out after just one turn and he had to steady himself on the wall, leaning against it heavily. With his hand on his chest, he found himself gasping for air, tears threatening to burst, clutching the place over his heart where he felt the life escaping from him. His heart shattered into millions of pieces. It hurt so much...

Father had warned him. He'd told him Catherine would only bring him unhappiness, but it was not her fault - or his - that the odds were against them. Fate had brought them together; they lived, they (or at least he himself, for sure) loved, and now fate was pulling them apart again. Vincent would never regret it, though, for what she'd given him far outweighed what he had just lost: his soul mate, a woman who cared for him, deeply, for who he was, his dark flaws included.

Vincent finally made it to Father's chamber. At first, he hadn't wanted to speak to anyone, but then somehow he wandered off to the patriarch's private quarters, in the hope Father might somehow ease his pain. He should have known better.

"Ah, Vincent!" Jacob called, seeing his son's figure in the entrance, though he barely looked up. "One of our Helpers sent me some interesting books on the history of New York. Come, have a look. You will surely -"

"Catherine is leaving," Vincent interrupted, with a lifeless voice.

Jacob raised his head from the books at the table and frowned. *Here we go...*

"What?" he asked. "Where is she going?"

"Rhode Island. She was offered a better job, where she could have more power to help people. She came to ask me for advice. I told her she should go." Vincent slumped into one of the chairs in Father's chamber.

Jacob sighed secretly - in relief, he had to admit to himself in shame. "I know how difficult it must be for you," he said calmly, "but probably it's for the best, Vincent."

Vincent's head jerked in his direction. "Best for whom, Father?"

"For both of you," Jacob replied, his gaze directed at Vincent.

Vincent contemplated a remark, but thought better of it and bowed his head with a nervous sigh.

Jacob thought it best to let Vincent deal with this on his own, as he knew he couldn't ease his pain. He'd always known Catherine's appearance in Vincent's life was a two-edged sword - a blessing, but also a curse. Jacob did feel sorry for both of them, but as a father, his main interest was in his son's protection, and that did not involve risking his life every night by going Above and desiring something he was not allowed to have because of his limitations. Jacob turned to his books and tried to focus on them.

Vincent knew it was pointless to have come here; Father always rejected the idea of Catherine and him being so close, but lately, he'd seemed to have warmed up to her and in his own way respected her as well. She was, after all, becoming a valuable Helper. But what else had Vincent expected? Even if Father had tried to console him, nothing would have brought Catherine back to him. *He'd* sent her away...

He rose from the chair and started pacing. His brain was on fire; his muscles burned. He wanted to run, run away and never come back. With all his strength, he forced himself not to roar in despair as he stopped back at the chair, leaning heavily against the armrests, bent over in agony. Jacob couldn't bear the suffering he was witnessing. "Vincent, the pain you feel now will lessen in time and finally pass. That I promise."

Vincent straightened himself up in a second and suddenly appeared larger than life. His eyes were pure fire when he glared at Father.

"So the best I can hope for is to forget her?" The sarcasm in his voice was evident. He paced a few steps again, unable to stand in one place, like a lion trapped in a cage.

"Forget everything." He took a book from a table and slammed it down in anger before turning to face Jacob again. "Mine was another life before Catherine! I'm changed... *forever!*" he growled.

"All right, then *accept* the change! Learn from it." Jacob understood his frustration. He sighed and went on. "But you *must* let the woman follow her own path!"

Vincent felt like his head was about to explode and he started quickly for the stairs leading out of the chamber.

"Vincent!" Jacob cried, and his son froze at the stairs. "For *your* sake..."

Vincent sent a glare across the chamber and his voice was deep and dead cold.

"Those are just words, Father, shadows of feelings. They offer no consolation."

And with that, he disappeared into the tunnels.

When Jacob thought back to his last encounter with Vincent, his heart ached. He wished he could have said or done something to ease his son's pain. But he couldn't, and now, two days later, Vincent was still missing, nowhere to be found. Jacob finally understood someone else should know, and that *someone* was probably the only person who *could* find him up there. Someone who was connected to him in a stronger and deeper way than anyone else. *Catherine...*

She was surprised – no... *shocked* - when she found the note from Father asking her to meet him at the threshold. The last person she would expect to wish to talk to her was the man who'd instilled a lifelong image of being "different" in Vincent's mind, and who wasn't exactly happy about her being in the picture. It could mean only one thing - something was wrong with Vincent.

Without hesitation, she made her way down to the basement. The moment she crossed the threshold and saw Jacob's worried face, she knew it was serious. He appeared several years older than when she'd seen him last.

"Your message said it was urgent," she started carefully.

"Vincent is missing. He has been gone since the night before last."

“But I saw him that night...” Her voice was very soft.

“I know.” Jacob didn’t elaborate for a time.

“Is there somewhere he might have gone?” Catherine enquired further, her anxiety growing.

“No, he would never cause me such undue worry. We’ve searched everywhere. He’s nowhere below. Vincent was... not himself after he spoke with you.”

Realisation hit Catherine like lightning. “About my going away?”

Jacob nodded.

“I’m only doing what we both thought best,” she said quietly, trying to convince him, but mostly trying to convince herself.

Jacob took a deep breath. “Once I thought I knew the answer.” He shook his head with a quick flash of a smile. “No longer. We must find Vincent, quickly.”

“What can we do?”

“Our friends Above are searching the city. Beyond that, I don’t know.” He turned and slowly took a few steps away from her.

She called after him. “Father?”

He stopped, waiting, having seen the fear and love for his son reflected in her eyes, but now also hearing a hint of curiosity.

“Why did you come to tell me?”

Jacob lowered his eyes and half-turned towards her. “Because I know you care.”

As Catherine watched him limp out of her sight, she had to smile a little, her heart warmed by the older man’s care - not just for Vincent, but for herself as well. But the smile faded when she remembered the purpose of their meeting. A cold shadow fell across her heart. *Please, Vincent, be well...*

She couldn’t believe her luck when she saw the front cover headline of one of the tabloid newspapers a few hours later: “GRANDMA SEES MONSTER CAPTURED”. She went to talk to the author of the article at the newspaper office and managed to find out the address and name of the “grandma” who told her Vincent had been captured outside the drainage tunnel in Central Park by two men driving a van. It appeared he’d been tranquillised, and when Catherine found two tranquillizing darts at the tunnel entrance, her heart sank. The “grandma” was not making anything up. *What if he’s ...?* A freezing shiver ran down her spine. But then she noticed the serial numbers on the darts, so she knew she could trace the buyer of them. At least she’d discovered *something* - and hopefully...

Just hold on, Vincent. I will find you!

In a different part of New York, in one of the laboratories on the grounds of Columbia University, Vincent lay helplessly in a cage with thick iron bars, a cage that was too small for him to stretch his legs fully. The two men who had captured him had locked him there after he tried to fight his way to freedom. by threatening them once he woke up from the effect of the tranquillizers. His will to fight now was completely gone, his limbs bent lifelessly on the cage floor, his sad eyes staring

into nothing. There was simply no way to break the bars, and he was weakened by the many tranquilisers they had used on him before they put him in the cage. He was only wearing his shirt, pants, and long socks, and despite the laboratory being heated, he felt a chill creeping into his bones.

Catherine... He missed her so much that his chest felt tight and his heart clamped. The only thing he was glad about was that she hadn't seen him like this. In a cage, trapped like a true animal, he was slowly slipping away from life, but without her, even if free, he would die anyway...

He must have been lying on the floor for a couple of hours when suddenly the door opened and a man in his early fifties walked cautiously in, never taking his eyes from Vincent. He slowly approached the cage and squatted to the resigned form on the floor. With amazement, he saw silent tears streaming down Vincent's extraordinary leonine face.

"Speak to me, please. I know you can; I heard you. You've got to let me help you." The man spoke with genuine interest, remembering the one word Vincent had spoken in his sleep earlier.

"Then release me," Vincent's deep voice said lifelessly. He spoke without even raising his head.

"So you can speak, and you can understand what I say?" The man was ecstatic.

"Yes."

"Why did you keep silent in front of Gould?" the man asked, revealing the identity of his other captor to Vincent.

"The other man means me harm. No words can change that," was Vincent's quiet reply.

The man gripped the bars dividing them. "I never meant you harm. You must believe that." His voice sounded pleading. "Do you have a name?"

"Vincent."

"Vincent," the man repeated with excitement. "My name is Hughes. You spoke the name of Catherine. Who is Catherine?"

The younger man's head shot up a bit, but then dropped back to the floor, resigned. His voice was full of love and pain when he spoke

"She is everything... but she lives... only in my heart." More tears wet Vincent's cheeks.

Hughes was hungry for more information, asking the inevitable cruel question, "Vincent... *what* are you?"

"I am only what I am," Vincent answered. "If you cut me, I will bleed. If you strike me, I will strike back. If you keep me in chains... I will die."

Something in Hughes's heart was deeply touched by these words.

Vincent raised his head a little. "Look at me," he almost ordered.

Hughes sighed and looked away, not because of Vincent's looks, but because he could see the pain in his sad eyes, the most striking deep blue eyes he had ever seen.

"I don't know what to do," Hughes almost whispered, haunted by dilemma of decisions.

Vincent lifted himself up a bit, leaning against the bars and looking at Hughes.

"Let me go," he pleaded, his breathing ragged when Hughes looked at him again.

"I can't! Not now, not yet. I still have so many unanswered questions."

"Hughes... I'm dying," Vincent said in a desperate whisper. He bowed his head, leaning his forehead against the bars, his last strength slowly deserting him.

Hughes just stared at the weakening body behind bars with a lump in his throat and suddenly a feeling of deep compassion rose to his chest and his vision blurred.

Catherine made her way through the university corridors straight to his office door. The name on the door read *Edward Hughes*.

From the moment she introduced herself, he knew who she was. And once she revealed the two darts and told him how she tracked him, Hughes knew the secret was out, as his eyes moved from her to the floor.

“He’s here, isn’t he?” Catherine’s eyes widened and she barely dared to breathe. “Is he alive?”

“He’s spoken of you,” Hughes said coldly, trying to pretend indifference.

Catherine sighed. Her pretended calmness was gone when she pleaded, “Take me to him.”

“I can’t do that. I’m sorry,” Hughes said, a bit softer-spoken now, but still avoiding her eyes.

“Please!”

Her begging voice almost broke him. What must there be between this woman and Vincent? He could only guess.

“I need time!” he said. “There’s more at stake here than you think.”

“No! There is only Vincent!” she cried. “If you’ve spoken to him, then I know you understand it!”

“My whole career, my reputation, the respect of my colleagues...” Hughes was looking for excuses, grasping for any possible straw, walking away from her, feeling trapped.

“Is that worth the pain he must be suffering??”

“There’s still so much to learn from him, so much we don’t know.”

Catherine became furious and once more was reminded of the atrocities that science in the wrong hands could do in the name of humankind.

“Who gave you the right?!!” she spat, her eyes ablaze.

Hughes turned to her in despair. “It’s too late! Another man’s already seen him!”

Catherine’s tone changed as she walked over to him. Her eyes were begging him again, her face the mirror of unspeakable agony.

“Professor Hughes, I don’t know how to explain this to you. I don’t even pretend to understand it, but Vincent and I... are *connected*...” Her voice almost broke in despair. “I know him, and I know that whatever he is, he’s also the best part of what it means to be *human*. And if you take away his freedom, then you take away the very part that makes him *most human*!”

Hughes was stunned by the fierce statement of the petite woman in front of him. Suddenly, he had a faint idea why Vincent was so drawn to her, and his sense of compassion surfaced again, especially when he was looking into those green pleading eyes that had welled with tears. He bowed his head and sighed as he acknowledged her words. His dilemma was solved.

He was still lying on the floor in the same fetal position, as Hughes had left him, when he heard the door open. Without interest, his eyes remained closed, until suddenly he heard that voice...

“Vincent!”

A mere whisper, an echo of a beautiful memory... but when he felt a gentle touch on his forehead, he lifted his head and realised he was not dreaming. *Catherine!* The loving look in her misty eyes, the relief and joy he could feel coming through their bond...

Catherine's heart almost broke at the sight of him. Pale, lifeless, helpless, depressed... She looked up to Hughes in sudden anger.

"Let him out of here. Now!!"

"Where will you take him?"

To their surprise, a voice came from the doorway.

"He's not going anywhere."

It was Gould, the other captor, who closed the door behind him, having decided not to let his chance at fame slip through his fingers.

Hughes tried to persuade him to let Vincent go, but Gould's greed for success and money was larger than life. They started fighting, and Catherine stood up protectively against the cage. Gould grabbed a screwdriver and pushed it into the breast of Hughes.

Catherine, shocked, but keeping a cool head, quickly grabbed the keys of the cage lying on the floor in front of her where they'd dropped when the two men were fighting. She remembered Isaac's defense lessons well - use *anything* as a weapon. She held the keys pointed at Gould, ready to attack him with the tiny tool. When Gould launched himself at her, she tried to shake him off with all her strength, moving with him about the room, but when she knew he was stronger, she pushed off the wall with her feet, using all her power. The push threw them both against the cage, Gould with his back to it. That was the only thing Vincent needed, and he quickly put his arm around Gould's neck, and with force and speed twisted his head to the side. As Gould slid lifelessly to the floor, Vincent fell back exhausted, sitting with his back at the bars and breathing heavily.

Catherine hastily unlocked the cage, kneeling and gently touching his shoulder. "Vincent..." she whispered, trembling with emotion.

"Hughes," he whispered, pointing at the mortally wounded man outside the cage.

When Catherine knelt to the professor, she knew there was nothing to be done.

"Forget me... Take him away... far away," Hughes said with effort.

"I will." She could see the life slipping away from him as she held his head.

"I wish I could have known him better. Vincent? Forgive me. Forgive... me..."

Hughes breathed out for the last time and died in Catherine's arms.

Father was looking for a book on one of his shelves when Catherine entered his chamber. When he spotted her, he smiled.

"Catherine, it's nice to see you," he said genuinely. He was more than grateful to her that she'd found Vincent, and with a little help had managed to bring him back to the tunnels the day before.

"And you, Father." She smiled back at him. "I came to see Vincent, but I just wanted you to know that before I called the police, I managed to destroy all the research documents Professor Hughes kept in his laboratory about Vincent, including the tape he made when he caught sight of him in the park one night..."

Father gasped. "Dear God... I can't even imagine what that boy must have gone through..." His face was full of pain and worry as he shook his head. "I want to help him to process it, but I don't know if it's better to try to make him talk about it, or leave it alone."

Catherine looked at him knowingly. "Whether he wants to talk about it or not, all we can do is just give him time and be there for him."

Father narrowed his eyes a bit when he comprehended the meaning of her words. Unexpected relief and a smile appeared on his face.

“Thank you, dear Catherine.”

She returned his smile shyly and saw his eyes glistening before she turned around and left.

When she entered Vincent’s chamber, he was half laying, half sitting on his bed, reclined against big comforters and cushions supporting his back and side, one leg stretched out over the edge of the bed, the other one bent and pulled up. He was wearing only a white patched shirt, light brown pants and long white socks. She could tell he was still not back to his full strength, and yet...

The amber light from the window behind him cast an almost otherworldly glow around him, making his hair shine like a golden sunrise. Catherine had to stop for a moment to take this image in. Even when weakened, Vincent was still a vision.

She took a deep breath and walked over to him, unable to ignore his gaze on her from across the chamber. She sat down in his high-backed chair near the bed and looked at him.

“How do you feel?” she asked softly.

“Better,” he said quietly, unable to look away from her eyes.

Catherine smiled and at once words failed her; she was lost in his gaze. *Help me, Vincent...*

As if he understood, he lowered his eyes and eased the tension between them.

“Thank you for helping me,” he said quietly, and she could hear sadness in his voice. “I’m sorry to have kept you. I hope you won’t have any problems... in Providence.” He almost choked on the last words.

Catherine closed her eyes for a moment and shook her head. “No,” she said plainly and forced him to look up.

Vincent was unsure of what she meant exactly, and he couldn’t really read her face or her feelings, as if she closed the bond somehow. But suddenly, a feeling of elation and joy came over to his heart, and he saw a smile appear on her face. He tilted his head in curiosity and his sapphire eyes looked suddenly brighter.

“No,” she repeated. “I’m not leaving.” She couldn’t wipe the smile off her face now.

Vincent gasped quietly. “Catherine...,” he said hoarsely.

She couldn’t stay away from him any longer and walked over to the bed to sit next to him. He changed his position to sit upright, making more space for her.

“I know what you want to say, and I appreciate your interest, Vincent, but hear me out, please.”

Vincent paid attention with a lump in his throat. She had no idea that he did *not* want to protest her decision.

“You probably think it’s because I feel guilty. If I hadn’t said I was leaving, everything that happened in those two days *wouldn’t* have happened and ...” She paused, fighting back tears. “And you would be partially right. I *do* feel guilty for causing you such pain. Seeing you in that horrible cage...”

“Catherine -,” he tried to protest now.

“No, it’s true,” she interrupted, quickly wiping away a tear. “But that’s not the main reason.” Now she sighed and wondered how best to put her thoughts into words. “When you... when you left me that night, I thought that was it. I thought that was what you wanted and I had to respect it.”

A sharp pain stung him deep inside, and he winced and gasped.

Catherine took his hand in hers. “When I was packing up my things, I was trying to find something positive about it, something that could overcome the pain, the deep feeling of loss... But I couldn’t. I just couldn’t imagine - ” Her voice broke and her eyes welled with tears.

Vincent squeezed her hand and, in his deep, gravel, velvet voice, finally spoke again.

“Neither could I.”

The heartfelt reassurance in his voice made Catherine smile as she exhaled loudly.

“My life would never be the same again,” she said. “No matter who I would meet or live with Above, I would always wait for the nights, just to be with *you* in my dreams. But I don’t want to live *in* a dream, Vincent. I want to *live the dream with you.*”

Vincent’s vision was getting blurry and his heart was pounding wildly, unable to contain his happiness and love for her.

“You see, then. Even if this all *hadn’t* happened, I wouldn’t have left, Vincent. I know it and I think right here...” She gently pressed her hand over his heart. “...you know it, too.”

He closed his eyes briefly, savouring the warm feeling. Then he gave her a lovely smile when he opened his eyes. “Yes... I do.”

“So, please... don’t send me away,” Catherine pleaded in a whisper.

Then she did what neither of them expected. Her hand slowly reached for his face, and very gently she stroked his cheek, then let her hand drop down again.

Her touch almost took Vincent’s breath away and made his heart soar. After a few moments of blue eyes gazing into green ones, Vincent reached for a book from his bedside table. He opened it to a page marked with a dried flower bookmark and passed it to Catherine.

“Please... read to me, Catherine,” he said hoarsely, and his eyes darkened suddenly.

Catherine swallowed as she was trembling under his gaze, but she took the book, smiled, and moved back to the high-backed chair allowing Vincent a perfect vantage point. He slipped into his former comfortable position.

Catherine took a deep breath and started reading.

*But how could I forget thee?
Through what power,
even for the least division of an hour
have I been so beguiled as to be blind
to my most grievous loss?
That thought’s return was the worst pang
that sorrow ever bore, save one,
one only, when I stood forlorn knowing
my heart’s best treasure was no more.
That neither present time
nor years unborn could to my sight...*

She lifted her head to look at him before she whispered the last line.

...that heavenly face restore. (1)

Her gentle gaze settled on that beloved, beautiful face and she was shaken to the core of her being. The way his intense, darkened blue eyes were piercing hers, the enigmatic, almost invisible smile on his face, his focus entirely on her as if he enveloped her in his caress even from a distance ... All that caused her to be hardly able to breathe.

She was indescribably happy, relieved, excited... Her lips stretched into a beaming smile and Vincent knew she understood. She knew he would never dare to tell her in direct words how much and how deeply he loved her, but, as always, he found a perfect way to do it - through poet’s words.

I love you too.

Catherine hoped he would feel it through their bond, and when his smile widened, she knew he did. Suddenly, the chair she was sitting in seemed too far away and she stood up and walked over to him again, sitting down next to him as he moved and almost eagerly wrapped her in his arms. As he did so, he could feel her trembling from joy. Embracing her tightly, he pulled her even closer, rubbing his cheek against her hair. He finally felt he was again where he was supposed to be - he was *home*.

END

(1) "Surprised by Joy" by William Wordsworth