

The Road To A Happy Life

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Note: Some of the dialogue was taken from the episode 'A Happy Life' from the series 'Beauty and the Beast' written by Ron Koslow.

When Vincent returned from Catherine's empty balcony that night, he was feeling drained. His usually strong legs were shaking slightly, his chest felt tight, breathing was getting difficult as well. His hands were grasping for support on the damp cold walls of the tunnels he was roaming.

After reaching his chamber, his legs finally gave in and he slid along the wall, his hands pressed tightly on his chest. Desperately gasping for air, suddenly he felt the same emptiness, loss and terrible pain as when Devin had left the Tunnels so unexpectedly many years before. Only this pain was cutting much deeper, right to the bottom of his heart and was tearing each of the thin fragile muscles which were keeping his heart in its place.

Only a couple of short weeks before, he had almost lost Catherine to Elliot, when she wanted to save the world Below and him. He had only a few short days to live in the joy of having her back, before he lost her again - for good this time.

I can't... I can't do this... I just can't...

"Vincent? Are you here?" Jacob's careful but urgent voice penetrated the air in the chamber.

He was just getting ready for bed, when he heard the message on the pipes about Vincent's return from Above.

Earlier that day, Vincent told him about his break-up with Catherine, and his ageing heart was really aching - not just for Vincent, knowing the suffering he was going through, but also for Catherine.

Jacob knew how difficult it had been for her to stay in Vincent's life. He had learned by then how deeply she loved his son, but he just couldn't figure out how to help her to carry the heavy burden of secrecy in her world Above. His heart was aching for them both, for a love that wasn't meant to be, although it was stronger and deeper than any he had ever seen, even his own...

Jacob's eyes travelled around the chamber before spotting the huddled figure of his son on the ground at the wall. His head was buried in his arms, hiding his face, and he looked vulnerable like a lost child.

"Vincent!" he cried and the doctor in him automatically thought his son was injured.

He threw his walking stick aside and lowered himself heavily down to Vincent.

"Vincent... Are you all right?"

The moment he asked the question, he almost laughed inwardly. Of course, he was not... Still, he gently touched the young man's shoulder.

Very slowly, Vincent raised his head to look at his Father. The older man's heart almost broke at the sight - his son's eyes were overflowing with tears, his face was the mirror of agony and despair, of pain which was as devastating as heartbreaking.

"Father..." Vincent sobbed quietly, looking him in the eyes.

“What can I do?” Jacob asked.

His voice was pained and desperate, though he knew the answer to his question anyway - there was *nothing* he could do to take this horrible pain away from the man he had loved ever since he had held him first in his arms all those years ago.

Vincent’s breath was ragged, the look in his eyes haunted, the tears running down his face were glistening in the candlelight. He was shaking his head, gasping for air, unable to face the cruel reality. It felt like some immense and heavy nightmare creature was sitting on his chest, unwilling to let him breathe.

“I can’t do this, Father.... This pain.... It’s tearing me apart...” His voice was strained as he continued sobbing.

“I don’t have the strength to face it...”

Jacob winced, but then took Vincent’s head in his hands, forcing him to look into his eyes.

“Yes, you do! You had the strength to let her go and you’ll find the strength to continue living with her love in your heart...”

Vincent shook his head slightly again, not convinced about his father’s words.

“But Vincent...,” Jacob continued, “you may find it difficult to believe from how I’ve behaved in the past, but I think...” He sighed. “I think that a love so unique and so deeply rooted as yours and Catherine’s... It cannot die just because *you* say so.... I stopped believing in love after my own disappointment, but you and Catherine made me believe again.”

He paused and smiled at his son, caressing his hair.

“And I believe now, that nothing is ever over until you *choose* to give up.”

Vincent’s eyes welled up even more when he whispered, “I love you, Father...”

Jacob’s smile widened and he pulled Vincent’s head to his chest, while his fingers gently caressed the golden hair of his beloved child.

Vincent was tossing and turning in his sleep. In his dream, he was walking in a dark, quiet wood, a place he didn’t recognise. There was no one around, just trees and dark shadows threatening him from everywhere. A sense of intense discomfort was creeping into his bones as he continued walking, when suddenly, a thought crossed his mind.

Am I to meet Hades? But Catherine’s not dead...

He did feel like walking into Hell though, for what was a life without her?

He couldn’t shake off the very disturbing feeling, when suddenly the darkness made way to a ray of light which kept widening, sucking out the blackness around and ahead of him. All at once, daylight coloured the wood around, it’s bright but warm shades of brown, green and yellow almost blinding Vincent, so he had to cover his eyes for a moment.

When he uncovered them again, he looked ahead and saw a glade, like a huge rich green carpet spread out and basking in the sunshine.

Sunshine.....

Before he managed to process his first proper look at the world around him in daylight, there, not far away he saw a figure of a woman, dressed in a romantic white floral printed dress, sitting on a picnic blanket, smiling at the sun above. She wasn't alone - there was a good-looking young man sitting next to her, and from the way his body was leaning towards her, it was obvious what he was about to do.

Vincent's blood froze in his veins when he recognised the woman.

He started running immediately, the urgency of the moment was pushing him to the limit. Suddenly, the image of the woman before him started vanishing, dissolving in the air like a puff of steam. The last thing he did before she disappeared from his sight was scream from the top of his lungs.

"Catherine!!!"

"Vincent!!"

Catherine's scream resounded in the room as she sat up feverishly on the bed. In panic, she knocked over the bedside table lamp when she wanted to switch it on.

Nancy entered the bedroom and ran to Catherine. "Are you all right?" she asked, worried.

Catherine looked at her with deep sorrow, as the terrible truth just hit her. "No..... No...!!"

She fell into Nancy's arms and started crying in despair.

When Catherine calmed down, and they were both sitting on the bed, Nancy spoke first. "So... will you tell me now about Vincent?"

Catherine hesitated for a moment, but when she saw the warm smile and genuine care and interest in Nancy's face, she relaxed and gave in. She had known Nancy for many years and...yes, she *could* trust her.

"Vincent is... everything..."

She smiled at the memory of him and looked dreamily into the night. Then she looked back at Nancy and continued, "I don't even know where to begin.... First and that's the biggest problem, is that he looks... different, very different from anyone else and that is why he has to live separate from our world, in his own world, surrounded by people who love, respect and accept him for who he is."

Nancy was intrigued. "When you say he looks different, do you mean he is handicapped or disfigured?"

Catherine swallowed and tried to put it in the right way without revealing too much.

"No, more like.... his face doesn't have the usual features of human face as people think of it... Sorry, I can't tell you more, I gave a promise," she said, with a bit of regret that she can't be totally honest with her best friend.

Nancy smiled and replied with understanding. "It's all right, go on."

Catherine returned her smile and went on. "To me, he's beautiful.... He's suffered a tremendous hardship all his life because of his appearance. He can't walk around in daylight, because he can't be seen. That's why he can walk out only at nights, when it's dark and he can hide his face from strangers..."

“That is actually how we met - it was he who found me in the park that terrible night... He took me to his adoptive father, who is a doctor, and saved my life... He was looking after me, fed me, read to me, talked to me... I owe him everything...”

“Nancy, he has the most beautiful spirit and soul and the most generous heart of everyone I’ve ever known! He is amazingly well-spoken, educated (greatly to his father’s credit), wise far beyond his years, gentle, down-to-earth, empathic and his compassion, care and love for people knows no boundaries...”

Catherine paused briefly to take a deep breath and shake her head in wonder. “His knowledge about human nature, life, arts, literature and classical music is second to none! And my God, Nancy, he reads so beautifully... Ever since I heard his voice for the first time, I felt such comfort, such peace and calmness spreading inside me, I can’t even describe it...”

“When I look into his beautiful blue eyes, I see myself as I really am - not Catherine Chandler, the daughter of a high society most successful corporate lawyer. I see Catherine, the woman who just wants to help people and make them happy. I found myself because of him, because he gave me the strength to see myself as he saw me from the start... “

Catherine sighed and stopped for a moment, still smiling. Her look when she was talking about Vincent was so full of love and admiration, that Nancy was completely overwhelmed by it.

“His beauty is unparalleled, inside and out... His eyes are like windows to his soul, pure kindness and love... His embrace feels like the safest place on earth... His presence is majestic and comforting at the same time... And there is something else,” Catherine said before allowing herself another little pause.

“What is it?” Nancy asked keenly.

“Ever since the night we met first, something extraordinary happened... A bond between us was created... Vincent can feel what I am feeling. Even when we’re apart, he knows when I’m happy or sad, when I’m in danger... He can find me anywhere when I need help, just because of the bond, because he *feels me* and it’s drawing him to wherever I am.... I don’t feel him so strongly, apart from times when he’s in danger, but I can sense the bond and control it in a way... It’s like we are one heart and soul in two bodies...”

Catherine exhaled loudly and closed her eyes for a moment, thinking of how she was missing Vincent’s presence. When she opened them, she saw Nancy looking at her with admiration and awe. And with a huge smile.

“It’s like a fairy tale, Cathy... Why all the tears then?” Nancy asked.

Catherine sighed. “I haven’t been well lately... I’ve been feeling a great sorrow that I can’t share my world with him... That no matter how much we love each other, we can never walk out in the sun, never go to the theatre, we can never do... simple things that everyone can do...”

“Vincent saw how unhappy I’ve been. I asked to live in his world, but he thought it’s best for me to stop seeing him... He said he can’t bear to live with the thought that he is the reason for my pain and unhappiness, when I deserve a happy life in my world...”

Nancy remarked knowingly.

“He must truly love you very much... Only those who feel real love would sacrifice their own happiness for the happiness of those they love.”

Catherine’s eyes filled with tears. “What he doesn’t want to understand is that I *cannot* be happy with anybody else... How can you settle for a candle when you’ve touched the whole starry sky?”

With a sigh, she tried to break the sad mood.

"What a night, Nance, I'm sorry." She smiled a little.

"Don't be silly!" Nancy protested with a smile too.

Catherine continued then. "It just tears me apart that we can never share a life together."

Nancy was still processing everything her friend told her about this by the sound of it almost otherworldly knight in a shining armour who turned her life completely around and made her a better and braver human being that she had ever been.

Then she said thoughtfully. "Maybe it's enough."

Catherine spoke desperately. "I want a home like this, and children and a family...It's sad knowing that that may never be..."

But Nancy didn't let her friend discourage her. "We all make our tough choices. Cath... I love my life, I love being a mother. But it's not the only path. It was a hard adjustment. Paul and I have been through some sticky times... Don't think I haven't had my doubts. Cathy, of all of us you're the one who's gone the greatest distance and gone the farthest. You've overcome a terrible accident... You've changed your life, now you're giving to others. And you have this *extraordinary* relationship... You should be so proud of yourself... And to hell with what anybody else thinks about what you should or shouldn't do, I mean... When all said and done, you've *got to* follow your heart, it's the only thing you can ever really count on..."

Catherine smiled through tears and said. "That's what Vincent always says..."

"Will we ever meet him?" Nancy asked hopefully.

Something suddenly shifted in Catherine and she felt joy returning to her veins again. "I'm beginning to think that anything is possible," she said with a beaming smile and embraced Nancy happily.

"I think I'm going to head back to New York!"

"Now?! It's 4am!" Nancy laughed.

"You said follow your heart..." Catherine replied, with sparkles in her eyes, and started packing.

Vincent was sitting by the Waterfalls, contemplating the past few days. In the palm of his hand, Catherine's rose was safely resting, making him gaze at it and reminisce.

I'm coming back, my love...

Vincent's head jerked and within a second, he jumped to his feet and started running through the tunnels towards Above. He ran and ran, always faster, using all his strong muscles to absolute maximum, his cloak flying behind him like wings.

I'm coming, Vincent, I'm almost there!

Her voice kept repeating the same words in his head and he knew they were real, it wasn't just a dream. He felt her joy, her excitement, her longing - it became his own.....

* * *

One last bend! Catherine thought, and when she finally stopped the car at the still dark Central Park, she shot out of it in a second and started running.

Her face was glowing with a beaming smile, she felt like she had just grown wings, carrying her to him like a bird to the sky. To he who made her heart miss a beat, her soul yearn, her whole being burn with longing...

The drainage tunnel is past that tree, I'm here!

And then she saw the familiar tall figure in a black cloak, waiting impatiently at the tunnel entrance, illuminated with a gentle orange glow from inside. Without stopping running, her smile got even wider and her glowing face was mirroring the almost childlike joy as she opened her arms wide.

When she literally flew into his arms, Vincent had to use all his strength not to fall over, it almost took his breath away. The full force that hit him was the sheer power of love.

"Oh, forgive me! Forgive me for doubting!"

Catherine was still gasping for air, but holding him tight was the only thing that she really needed.

"What we have is all that matters," she cried, and raised her head to look into his gentle blue eyes. "It's worth everything!"

"Everything!" Vincent echoed, returning her gaze and getting lost in her eyes and in his own love for her.

For a moment, time stood still and as their gaze deepened, Catherine couldn't hold back any more. She knew Vincent would never dare, it had to be she...

She held her breath and as her soft lips gently touched his, she felt a shiver going down her spine. A shiver of pure joy and fulfilment. His unique lips were warm and surprisingly smooth.

When she slowly pulled away, Vincent let out the breath he held the moment Catherine kissed him.

This is surely how it feels to be kissed by an angel, he thought, like the shimmer of a butterfly, on a warm sunny day.

He opened his eyes and saw her gazing at him with a look so full of those deep feelings, that no poets could find the right words to describe. When he awakened from what seemed like a dream, he pulled her head to his chest and held her even tighter than before, cradling her gently from side to side like a baby. Her arms around his neck tightened too, and all that mattered was one heart and soul in two bodies, clinging to each other as if they never wished to be parted again.

* * *

They remained in a tight embrace for a long while, until they suddenly heard a bird on a nearby tree, starting its morning song. It was then that they realised it was very close to daybreak and Vincent wouldn't be safe outside. Catherine grabbed his hand and pulled him inside of the drainage tunnel.

At any other time, they would have just said their goodbyes for that moment or that day, but not that early morning in Central Park. That morning they couldn't part, even if they wanted. Those two days, when they both thought they would never see each other again, were too painful to forget so easily.

They needed to be together now, to share the overwhelming joy of the fact that they hadn't lost one another; that their love was so much stronger than any doubt that might ever cross their minds, any obstacle they might ever have to overcome.

"Come!" Catherine couldn't contain her happiness and wipe a huge smile off her face.

Vincent obeyed gladly, and his heart was soaring as he followed her into the tunnels.

They were walking side by side, Vincent's arm firmly around her waist, and Catherine's head leaning her head against his shoulder and embracing his waist tightly with her own arm.

"Where shall we go?" Vincent asked, still feeling like he was dreaming.

"The Chamber of the Falls," Catherine whispered in bliss.

Vincent smiled and pulled her closer to his side.

Most of the tunnel dwellers were still sleeping, it was just before 6 am, so nobody crossed their path, nobody disturbed the blissful stillness surrounding them.

When they came to the Waterfalls, they sat down at their usual reading spot - Vincent leaning against a rocky wall and Catherine resting in his arms, her head on his shoulder.

They were quiet for a while, letting the feeling of joy sinking in and watching the peaceful scenery of the majestic underground waterfalls reflecting the golden glow of the rising sun from outside. Suddenly, Catherine looked up to Vincent.

"Never... Never ever try to send me away again," she said resolved, with a pained look in her eyes.

His gaze went through her right into her heart.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done," he replied, his sky blue eyes reflecting the deep sorrow of the memory of it. "It was tearing me to pieces that you were suffering so much because of me... I still feel that..."

Catherine quickly but gently put her hand over his lips to stop him. A shiver went down his spine at her touch.

"You said once that the grave is a very safe place to be, but even love can wound, and while we live, we bleed. Vincent... I would rather bleed to death because of you, than spend the rest of my life with that cold void in my heart, knowing that you're no longer part of me and I a part of you."

Her look was serious, but full of love and resolution and Vincent knew she truly meant it. His eyes were suddenly misty, and he could feel a single tear running down his cheek.

Catherine smiled again, so warmly that all he could do was to take her hand and put a soft kiss on it. Then he lost it, silent tears found their way out and he was overcome by emotions. Catherine put her arms around his neck pulling him close, breathing in the nearness of him and smiling.

"Wherever you are, wherever you go, I'm with you, Vincent... I am a part of you..... Forever..."

The End