Follow The Light

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

Carving into wood is something that requires skill, a great feel for detail and often also strength. But carving into a rock requires so much more than all of that - it requires perseverance.

Vincent was helping his friend Kanin, and a few other men, carving into solid rock in their underground world most of that day. The number of people to whom the Tunnels had become a home was growing and so was the need for new chambers.

In his muscles, which possessed much more power and endurance than those of his friends, Vincent could feel the fatigue creeping in and weakening his precise hits with the stone carving tools in his hands. Despite his enormous physical strength, he was really getting tired.

On his way back to his chamber, he decided to stop by and visit with his father, at least for a brief moment, and update him about the progress they had made with the new chamber. After that, he was planning to wash, get changed and go Above for a walk in Central Park. The darkness of the night was his friend and, along with his long dark cloak, it always lent him a veil of protection against being seen by unwanted eyes.

When he entered Father's large chamber, he was greeted by a familiar sight - his parent was sitting at the large wooden table, with glasses low on his nose, a very focused expression on his face and one of his hundreds of vintage books in his hands. Vincent couldn't help but smile at the image.

"Which one of the bard's masterpieces is it tonight, Father?" he asked bemused.

At the sound of the velvety baritone, Father looked up from his book and smiled.

"Believe it or not, it's not Shakespeare. I decided to spend some quality time with Mr. Poe tonight." He glanced back at the pages. "*The Black Cat* probably wasn't the best choice for a bedtime story."

Vincent chuckled and walked closer to his father.

"I just wanted to tell you that we've made good progress on the new chamber today. It shouldn't take us more than three or four days to finish it."

Father's face lit up. "That's wonderful news! I'm sure it would take much longer if you weren't helping out, Vincent. Thank you for doing that."

"Always, Father, you know that."

The two men held their gaze for a moment, smiling. Then, Father closed the book and leaned back in his chair.

"I don't suppose you have enough energy for a game of chess tonight?"

Vincent shook his head with a smile. "I'm sorry, Father, but not tonight. I'm just going to change and go for a short walk in the park before I go to sleep. I need a bit of fresh air."

The older man's look turned serious, a worried frown wiping out the relaxed expression from before.

"Vincent… You know I don't want to interfere with your life but these trips Above… I am not very fond of them."

"Father, please…" Vincent sighed.

"I know you've been going up regularly since you've been 21 and always returned fine, but that doesn't mean it doesn't frighten me to death every time you leave again."

"You know I'm being careful. I know my way around the park and the city better than anyone. I was born from the dark, darkness is my friend and it won't betray me…"

Father stood up, supported by his walking stick, and started nervously walking around.

"I wish you would stop going Above, Vincent, for your sake."

"For *my* sake? Or for yours?!" Vincent raised his voice at once.

Suddenly, his frustration over the never-ending arguments about his nightly trips Above became too much. His voice was unusually intense and strained.

"Vincent, please, try to understand…" Father started.

"I *do* understand, very well! I am condemned to a life away from the world Above, away from sunlight and its warmth. Do I not deserve at least a few moments in that world, in the dark which conceals my face? Was I truly meant to be an eternal prisoner of the underground forever? Do you trust my judgement so little, Father?!"

An angry fire was flashing in his eyes, but through it, Father could see something more - a deep sadness. The sadness which he had been unable to reach, every time it appeared in Vincent's deep blue eyes. Unable to say anything else, he just kept staring helplessly at his beloved adoptive son.

With a frustrated shake of his head, Vincent turned on his heel and almost ran out of the chamber.

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By the time he reached his chamber, his anger had subsided and absently, he walked over to the wash-bowl to rid himself of the dirt of the hard labour. He simply didn't have enough strength to go to bath chamber any more. The washing didn't take him long, and after putting on fresh clothes, Vincent suddenly stopped.

Just a few minutes ago, more than anything, he had wished to walk among the tall old trees in the park, covered by darkness which allowed him to walk in safety. And yet, now, the hard labour and the sudden and unexpected outburst in Father's chamber robbed him of the last bit of energy he still had.

Exhausted, Vincent covered his face with his hands and exhaled loudly. His will to go up that night started slipping through his fingers, like sand from a broken hourglass. Thinking of Father, he deeply regretted talking to him as he had, but he didn't regret *what* he said. He regretted his temper, but it saddened him that his parent couldn't understand the simple truth - he didn't trust him enough.

Drained and overcome by sadness, Vincent walked over to his bed, inviting him to rest. He didn't resist and stretched his long body on it gratefully. And it didn't take him long to shut his eyes and start drifting away…

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The tapping of the pipes in the distance… The occasional sound of subway-train passing by high above…. And then…

"Where are you?"

Fully alert, Vincent opened his eyes immediately upon hearing someone calling from a distance - a soft but urgent voice echoing in his ears. His eyes got immediately blinded by a bright light coming from his side. He covered them with his hands in protection, but when he slowly peeked through, adjusting his sight to the brightness, he realised the light was coming from behind the stained-glass fan window on the wall beside him.

"Where are you?"

The voice was distant. Vincent jerked his head to all sides, but it seemed to be coming from behind the window…

As if pulled by a magnet, something was drawing him to find that voice. Someone was calling for him to follow the light.

He raised himself on the bed and after putting aside a few of the curios on the top of the bookcase wedged in between his bed and the window, he climbed onto the bookcase. His hand reached out slowly to touch the window, although all he could see was a sea of white. As he was just about to touch the glass, his hand penetrated through the air - there was no window any more, only the opening in the wall…

A feeling of strange curiosity overcame Vincent as he carefully stepped over the window ledge and found himself on a rocky pathway. After a few steps, the pathway led to something that looked like a rectangle-shaped rocky patio, no…. a balcony, because the view from it was overlooking a vast empty and dark space. Vincent was looking down into a deep abyss.

The abyss below him was dark, although when he lifted his eyes again, he was almost blinded by the bright white light. It seemed to be warming him inside out somehow, going *through* him, caressing him… And Vincent could also see something that defied his belief. Covered by the widely spread veil of light, he recognised the shapes of trees, a whole sea of trees in the distance ahead of him…

"Where are you?" resounded in the space yet again. Impatient, anxious, frightened…

"Who is it?" Vincent called out into the light.

But no reply reached his ears. Only a feeling of a feather-light touch on his cheeks, as if he was caressed by some invisible hand, leaving a warm trail on his sensitive skin.

"Who are you?" he called out again.

The feeling of warmth was getting overwhelming, filling him with something sweet and yet painful, beautiful and yet frightening. But whatever it was doing to him, he couldn't resist it….

Very slowly but almost longingly, he reached out into the light which by then blinded him almost completely….

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Vincent woke up suddenly with a jerk; his eyes fell immediately on the wall behind the bookcase. The light was gone and the fan window was sitting gloriously in its place unharmed; its warming ember and green shades, illuminated from behind, were lending the chamber a soft soothing glow.

Illuminated…

Too many thoughts ran across his mind: Was the light behind the window all the time?

Was it calling *him?* If yes, then why and why *now?*

Suddenly, Vincent had a flashback from his dream reminding him of the trees. Was it a dream? Or was it a *vision*?

He didn't need much time to ponder the questions. He got up quickly and grabbed his cloak from the chair before leaving his chamber. His feet had only one destination, the only place he knew where he could see many trees - Above in Central Park.

Maybe I can find what is calling me ... maybe I will get some answers ... maybe…

Vincent had no idea what specific he could find in the park or *if* something, or someone, was really calling him. Maybe it was truly just a strange, though beguiling, dream. But then again, dreams are for the dreamers, and Vincent, despite his rational and realistic nature, *was* also a dreamer, one with highly empathic abilities, which he trusted fully.

As he quickened his walking pace subconsciously, the soft, sweet voice calling him in his dream was ringing in his ears.

Maybe tonight is a special night, a night of significance, a night that I will remember forever. The night of 12th April 1987…