

Heal

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

It's late at night, all our world is asleep, and yet I am wide awake, unable to close my eyes. For when I do, all I can see is *her*... The woman who invaded my heart so unexpectedly, and filled it with feelings as deep as I have never known - Catherine...

My mind is racing like a steam train, desperate to reach the destination. What is *my* destination? Until ten days ago, I thought I knew. Now, I barely know anything...

My life has always been joined with solitude. Yes, I have my tunnel family, my father, people who love and accept me as I am. But my heart always knew it would follow a path of loneliness, that it would never be bound to another by something deeper. It cannot be. It *could* not be, until now...

I'm lying here in my bed, restless, and I can't forget her fragile silhouette lying in the same bed. My nostrils are still invaded by her light scent, filled with fragrance so sweet and intoxicating that I find it hard to breathe. Catherine...

Beaten, cut and bruised, she was lying here. For ten days, my life was given a new purpose - I could help someone to heal. For it was not only her face and body that was bruised and hurt. Her heart suffered a terrible blow, deeper than any physical blows one can endure - she had lost trust in people and she had lost hope. She needed to be healed gently, patiently, with understanding. I would have given her anything to help her heal. All that I have, all that I am...

I'm clutching the pillow, holding on to it tightly as if it was her... I cannot, *I must not*... Yet I can't help it; the void in my heart is too large and nothing and no one else can fill it, but she. It feels as if I am bleeding inwardly. Slowly but painfully; I have an open wound, right at my heart...

I know I will never see her again, and the memory of her soft body pressing gently onto mine at the threshold is making that thought unbearable, unthinkable. It's burning me up inside and for the first time in my life, I wish so badly for something that I know cannot be.

I wish she would put her hand in mine again, and ask me to read her the last chapter of *Great Expectations*. And then, her eyes would look at me the way they looked at me when she put down the hood on my cloak and saw me for the first time as I really am - not as a beast, but a friend, someone she could trust...

I cannot sleep. Is Catherine asleep now? She should be, it's very late, but something is telling me she is awake. Some invisible, and to me still inexplicable, feeling inside has a certain connection to her. And that connection, this... bond, is telling me she's not asleep.

Is she thinking about me? I mustn't think like that - she will need so much courage and strength to heal and recover completely. The last thing she needs to think about now is me - a creature who helped her in the time of need, but is bound to a life of eternal darkness and exile. And yet....

Hope is such a terribly tempting thing. It's giving me wings, not strong enough to fly, but still, ready to learn to.

Catherine, wherever you go from here, be well, and know that helping you to heal was the most fulfilling and most beautiful experience of my whole existence.

And know, that I'm here for you with all my heart and soul, forever...



I can't sleep. It's almost 2 am and all I can do is stare through the darkness at the ceiling above me. I can feel its weight pushing on me, trying to crush me and turn me into dust, so I would vanish from this world for good. So little was needed, and I *would have* vanished for good...

When I called Daddy after I sneaked to my apartment this afternoon, I was happy to hear his excited and relieved voice. But I knew that once he saw me, that excitement would fade and what I would have to face from him would be pity. And there was, but there was also so much more...

When I opened the door to him and he saw the state of my face, I could feel his horror in my bones. At that moment, I couldn't stand his terrified look, his hopeless attempt to appear cheerful and encourage me, that the face can be fixed, and everything would be as it was before.

I wished to tell him *Nothing will ever be as it was before. I've changed, someone has changed me...* But I couldn't, for he wouldn't understand. What he wanted at that moment was his beloved girl back where she belonged - in the world where the wealthy and the powerful rule, happily strolling through life with a well-paid and safe job and a rich husband.

Oh, Daddy, life can be so cruel and yet so generous at the same time. One moment you have everything you *want*, and the next moment you realise you have nothing you *need*. And the only thing you really need is miles below you, in a world you cannot reach...

In a countless attempt to fall asleep, I close my eyes. But even before I do that I know, it's a huge mistake. For all I can see is *him...* The man (yes, a *man*), that mysterious being that grabbed me from death's door and brought me back to life - Vincent...

It's been only a few hours since we parted at the threshold in the basement, but it feels like it happened in another lifetime... I hear the silent ticking of the clock on my bedside table, the rest is silence. Unexpectedly strange, unnerving, unsettling silence. I miss the tireless tapping of the pipes, the repeating sound of the subway trains in the distance. But most of all, I'm dying to hear *that* voice again, *his* voice... It would soothe my restless mind, fix my broken spirit, heal my wounded heart. Vincent...

His voice had been my only touchstone for the last ten days, the only thing I could hold on to and put my trust into. And when I saw his face... I did a horrible thing, throwing that reflector at him. But still, he returned, just to make sure I was all right and to take me back

safely. How much strength, how much courage it must have cost him to make me see him again? I have never met anyone like him in my life, not just physically, but most of all, anyone with such... presence.

When he was near me, even before I could see him, I felt almost a sea of power, yet gentleness as well, washing over me. And when I looked into his eyes properly for the first time, it was as if I was looking into myself - shy and trying to escape my look at first, but then, open, honest and grateful. The warmest bluest eyes I have ever seen, looking right into my soul...

If his face scared me at first, now I can't think of anything more beautiful... How is it possible that we can change our perception so quickly? But maybe those ten days I spent with him, and my trust in him, helped me to see clearly what's *behind* that face. A heart so gracious, pure and kind; a spirit so uplifting, eye-opening and beautiful; a soul so gentle and warm...

Vincent has helped me to see the real me, opened my eyes to new possibilities. He said I have the strength to move on and do whatever I want to do. I didn't believe him at first, but his unwavering trust in me and the piercing look of his eyes shook my own perception of myself. It feels as if he had known me all of my life. And there is something even deeper... I can't explain it, but although he's miles away, I feel his nearness so clearly, so vividly...

I wish I could go back down Below and find him, but I know I would never find my way within the tunnels. And still, I would walk through a street full of people staring at my disfigured face, if it meant Vincent would be standing at the end of it and take my hand, leading me back to his world...

I know I must be strong, for Daddy, for myself, for Vincent. Especially for Vincent. It was he who made it possible that I'm lying in my bed, in my apartment now. And it was he who made me look at my life through different, truer eyes. Thanks to him, I'm changed, forever...

'I never regretted what I am... until now...'

When he said those words, it felt like a knife going straight through my heart. They still haunt me. Why did I have to be so heartless and hurt him so? His wound was already deep and I made it even deeper. How I wish I could tell him that *I don't* regret what he is, for I have never met a nobler man...

Vincent helped me to start healing, inside and out, and I wish so much that I could look take his incredibly warm hand and look into those blue eyes again and tell him that I wish to help *him* to heal, too. For he must have been suffering greatly in his life - and I did nothing to make him suffer less...

But maybe one day, I will be able to. And then, I will take his hand and ask him to read me the last chapter of *Great Expectations*, and he would look into my eyes and know in an instant, that I am not just some rich girl he had saved, but a friend, someone he can trust... And maybe something more...

Vincent, wherever you are down Below, be well, and know that I'll be waiting here for you, forever...

