

Let Me Tell You A Story

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova



The air was chilly that mid-January day, biting her cheeks, as she sat on the cold rock, watching the majestic scenery unfold in front of her. The setting winter sun spread its golden wings over the liquid mass, making it glitter like gold. It wasn't the first time she had seen this spectacle - sunsets after a bright day were the most beautiful moments in the Chamber of the Falls - and yet it filled her with as much awe and wonder as any other time before. *If only it were as easy as this – flowing effortlessly, creating magical scenes...*

She sighed heavily and ran her hand over her tired eyes. The previous night was another of those when she barely got any sleep. So much to say, and yet no words coming to do so...

“The Falls are beautiful tonight,” a deep, gravelly voice said softly behind her.

She didn't need to turn around to recognise it, but she did anyway, her heart instantly lighter. “Yes, they are... It's nice to see you again, Vincent,” she said with a smile when she glanced at him.

“And you, Michele. It has been some time.”

He tilted his head and smiled, correctly sensing her troubled state, but decided to start gently. “The children have been asking about you.”

His friend's eyes brightened, and her smile grew bigger. "I've missed them too. I promise I will come to storytime with them again soon. Next week, when I bring the grocery delivery from Long. He promised to send you something special on top of the usual supplies."

"I shall thank him when I see him next time," Vincent smiled gratefully.

Michele turned back to the Waterfalls, watching the stream rush down, pulled mercilessly by the gravity. Not even her dear friend's presence could erase the doubt in her mind.

"Sometimes it helps to talk about it," Vincent remarked calmly after he sat down next to her. His eyes were fixed on the water.

She chuckled. "I'm not sure in this case, but trust me, there's no one else I'd love talking to more." A warm smile reaching her eyes made him lower his eyes humbly.

"Then... maybe you should try," he said knowingly.

A deep sigh tore from her throat; then she shook her head. It wouldn't hurt to get it off her chest. "Actually, it's pretty simple," she stated. "I'm stuck... There is so much on my mind, but I don't know how to express it."

Vincent smiled knowingly. "Even the greatest storytellers of all times had a writing block now and then. You're not the first one. Tolstoy could tell you a lot about it if he was still here."

"I know, and it's not the first time, but it never lasted so long." Her eyes mirrored doubts. "I'm afraid I will never be able to put another word on paper again..."

She stood up, feeling ashamed that among all the much worse problems the world and people around her were facing, she was troubled by something as insignificant in her eyes as a writer's block.

"I know it's trivial. I'm not dying of an incurable disease, I have a roof over my head, food on my table, friends and family who love me," she went on.

"But writing is very dear to you," Vincent added for her. "It is your way of expressing what lies in your mind and heart. There is nothing trivial about that."

Michele turned to look at him. She couldn't help but smile when she saw the calm and understanding expression on his face.

"You make everything seem important," she remarked, amused.

"Because it is." He shrugged, smiling. "Everything we say, what we do, how and when we act... It all defines us, not only who we are but also what makes us happy, what fulfils us."

"Yes... I guess that's right."

She sat down next to him again, feeling a bit more settled now.

“For some time now, whenever I sit down to write something, I take a pen and then stare at the paper for a long time before writing a line and then deleting it. Or before deciding it’s no use and putting the pen away again,” she explained, frustrated.

Vincent’s eyes travelled to the falls in front of them again before replying.

“There was a time when I was about to write in my journal but no words would come because there were too many in my head.”

“When was that?” she asked with interest.

He sighed and relived in his memory his most traumatic experience. “A few days after I thought that Catherine... that she was taken from me forever.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, feeling guilty. “I didn’t want to awaken painful memories...”

“No need to apologise,” he replied, smiling. “It all turned well in the end.”

She nodded, smiling too, and her eyes wandered to the waterfalls again.

“I was filled with so many emotions, with pain, anger, despair...” Vincent continued. “They all prevented my mind from focusing on what I really wanted to say. That’s why I couldn’t write a single word for several days, not until I started processing the reality – which to my greatest fortune turned out not to be a reality at all. When something traumatic happens to us, it often affects our mind, the way we think and feel, and prevent us from going on.” He turned to look her in the eyes. “Especially, after we lose someone dear.”

Of course, he knew, and she wasn’t even surprised.

“After my Dad died last year... With all my duties and looking after the family, it took a long time until I finally had some room to come to terms with it,” she said, watching the last sun rays fading above the falls. “They say time heals everything, but to me, it seems that time is only adding to my burden. I don’t feel such pain of loss any more, but for some reason, I still feel blocked, in a way. I live my life, spend time with my loved ones, do the things I find joy in doing... Everything seems to be falling back into place apart from the one thing – my writing.”

She ran her hands over her face, frustration kicking in yet again.

“Maybe you lack inspiration,” Vincent suggested. “Although...”

“Yes, although I see inspiration around me every day. In the faces of the people on the street, in the stories I hear people talk about, in ordinary things I come across daily, in my own life.”

“But you feel you lost the ability to weave a web around that inspiration.”

“Yes!” she sighed and shook her head. “Vincent, what am I to do? I’m full of untold stories which I would love to bring into the world, but I don’t know how...”

Her friend smiled. “I don’t pretend to know everything and I don’t have a guaranteed way how to fight it. I can only tell you what I did.”

Her eyes were willing him to continue.

“I imagine I was talking to Catherine... There were so many things I still wanted to tell her that somehow, in my mind, I created an alternative reality for myself, where I felt safer and could think clearly again... When I wrote into my journal, I imagined I was talking to her, and suddenly the words began flowing again.”

He paused; then his expression turned from melancholy into fondness and the small, gentle smile returned to his face.

“When you feel like writing next time, imagine you are sitting with the children at the story-telling hour. Imagine their faces, eagerly waiting for a new adventure. Imagine them asking you questions, moving the story forward, and absorbing the lesson the story teaches them.”

He put his large warm hand over hers in encouragement. “Make it *real*.” His eyes focused on hers for a moment, letting his words sink in. Then he pulled his hand back and went quiet.

Michele observed him for a brief while, thinking of how only a handful of people in her more than forty years spent on earth had ever managed to motivate her the way Vincent always did. She still wasn’t sure it would work, but she felt much more confident in trying it out. After all, she couldn’t let the children down...

If Vincent could overcome it, I can too.

“Thank you,” she expressed her genuine gratitude to her dear friend. “*You* never fail to find the right words.”

He chuckled. “You will find them too. I have no doubts about that.”

He stood up to leave but turned back to his friend.

“Catherine is helping William with dinner tonight,” he remarked. “Her cooking skills are improving with every passing day. I think she would be more than happy to have one more diner.”

Her happy smile was an answer on its own. “Then I shall not want to miss it.”

She joined him with a spring in her step, and for the first time in a long while, the weight of the world on her shoulders seemed much lighter.

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13 MONTHS LATER

“If you keep looking at me like that I won’t get far tonight,” Catherine said, quirking her lips, as she was putting mascara on her eyelashes.

Vincent lowered his eyes, smiling. He was leaning against the doorframe of their bedroom, his arms folded over his wide chest. They were spending their weekend in the brownstone again. Jacob and little Charles were staying with their Grandfather and aunt Mary - and loving it.

Vincent had been watching his wife putting on make-up, strangely fascinated by the whole, delicate process, carefully watching her every move. Catherine wore very little make-up in the last few years, so this night was a special treat for her as well.

“It’s like watching an artist at work, handling their brush with precision and care, creating a masterpiece,” he said then, genuinely impressed. “I’m sorry, Catherine, I will try to keep my fascination for myself,” he added then, turning more practical.

Catherine smiled and reached for her petal pink lipstick. “I think we rather leave the masterpieces to Mr Da Vinci or van Gogh. They were the true artists,” she said with a smile, nevertheless appreciating his compliment.

Vincent was about to comment but his gaze was suddenly drawn to her full lips as she glided the lipstick along them. He swallowed hard, drawn like a moth to a flame to her reflection in the mirror, suddenly overcome by something more than just spiritual love. However, he managed to compose himself and averted his eyes.

Catherine has obligations tonight; I mustn’t distract her...

He tried to busy himself and reached for the volume of Blake’s poetry on the side table nearby. Just as he was about to open it, Catherine’s hands snaked around his waist from behind, and she leaned into his back.

“You can distract me as much as you wish...,” she said dreamily, well aware of what he was thinking. “After I’m back,” she added cheerfully, pressed a kiss on his back before releasing him and walking away with a wink.

Vincent chuckled and shook his head, slowly following her downstairs.

”I’m so sorry you can’t go with me,” Catherine said then regretfully when she was putting on her coat over her navy-blue long-sleeved dress. “It would mean so much to her, especially since you are the one who’d helped her to get back into writing again.”

”Michele knows I’ll be there in spirit,” Vincent replied with a smile. “This is *her* day and she should enjoy it. She worked really hard.”

“I’m sure she will, don’t you worry, especially if Jenny has that special surprise for her that she mentioned to me. She wouldn’t tell me what it is, but I hope it’s no nightclub visit. We’re talking about a children’s book, and I still remember the fiasco last time.”

Catherine reached for her handbag by the front door. Seeing Vincent's eyebrows up and his amused smile, she rolled her eyes, chuckling. "Don't ask. You know Jenny."

Yes, Vincent knew Jenny, and he was grateful for it. And he was also grateful when Catherine leaned into him, her small hands on his chest, and pressed a lingering kiss on his unusual lips.

"I won't be long," she whispered, seeing the dilated pupils of his sapphire-blue eyes.

"Don't worry... about me, Catherine," Vincent said with great effort and kissed her back, unable to resist. "I will be fine... waiting for you."

Catherine chuckled and reluctantly left his arms, which somehow found their way around her frame within those few seconds. They had so little time without their children that every moment they were allowed to spend alone was very intense and extremely enjoyable. After all, poetry, music and arts aren't the only pleasures of worth exploring...

"That's my cab," Catherine remarked, hearing the hoot outside. One last loving gaze between them, and then Catherine walked out into the evening New York, closing the door behind her.

Vincent remained on his spot for a moment, savouring the brief tender moment from not even a minute ago. Then he sighed, thinking how extremely blessed he was to have her in his life.

His eyes found the book lying next to the antique lamp on the small table next to him. Its light-blue cover with an illustration of a little girl in an oversized sweater and a long skirt, wearing glasses and holding a book made him smile. He reached for it and opened it, and without drawing his eyes away from the cover, he walked into the living room and sat down on his large upholstered armchair. An old free-standing lamp beside him, with a wide, orange-coloured shade, cast a pleasant amber light. His fingers found the first page of the book in his hands.

He smiled at the dedication ("*To Vincent*"), and for the second time that week, he started reading the same lines.

"Dear children, let me tell you a story..."

