

I Need You

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*Note: Some dialogue was taken from the episode 'Orphans' from the series 'Beauty and the Beast'
written by Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon.*

"Vincent, I need to be with you!.... I need you! I need you...."

Catherine's pleading, as she desperately clutched his shirt to have him as close as possible, was so bittersweet to him - how beautiful those words sounded to his ears, and yet, he knew how difficult it would be for him to have her in such nearness, much more difficult than anyone could ever imagine...

Her big green eyes started welling up. He pulled her head to his chest with a deep sigh and resting his cheek on top of her head he closed his eyes, breathing the scent of her in stillness, trying to comfort her. When they looked at each other again, he spoke quietly, putting his arm carefully around her waist pulling her close to his side.

"Come..."

The many candles lit in the guest chamber were spreading a warm glow around the rock dwelling filled with old-fashioned yet cosy furniture and quilted cushions and blankets.

Ever since she came to the tunnels the first time, Catherine loved the ever-present smell of burning wax candles. There was something soothing in it, she wasn't certain what, but there was. She had loved candles since she was a little child, but since she'd met Vincent, her senses were enjoying them even more. The thought of him sitting in his chamber with the beautiful yellow and green stained-glass window in the wall behind him, reading a book or writing into his journal at the candlelight always put a warm smile on her face.

"So sudden a loss, you had no time to prepare," he said, referring to the unexpected passing of her father a few days before.

Vincent was standing a little further away from the bed Catherine was sitting on. The quiet gravelly velvet of his voice had already calmed her down.

"The pain goes through me and then subsides," she replied.

"I can feel it in you."

"I know you can."

Catherine's look was full of warmth and understanding.

Vincent hesitated for a few seconds, breaking the eye contact just to glance at the antique clock on the chest of drawers nearby.

"It's late. You should sleep."

She sobered up from her thoughts and looked away for a second. "I am tired."

Vincent slowly stepped closer to the bed, his body towering over her majestically, so she had to look up. Without being aware of it, Catherine slightly opened her mouth while gazing into his eyes. She was captivated by his presence, radiating strength, warmth, care and something else which she didn't dare to name.

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" Vincent asked with care.

"I'm sure..." Catherine nodded slowly in approval as in a state of trance, mesmerised by his glowing sapphire eyes and the masculine power surrounding him.

He smiled knowingly, noticing and feeling the effect his close presence had on her and after a brief moment turned around and started to walk away in his typical slow graceful style.

"Vincent??" she heard herself cry out.

He turned around quickly in anticipation and saw her desperately trying to tell him something, though she was struggling to get the words out of her half-opened mouth.

Catherine couldn't take her pleading eyes off him, longing for saying it, but her throat was shut, not letting out a sound. Yet, she was convinced and afraid at the same time, that he could hear her, hear her thoughts which were crying out only one thing ... *Don't leave! Please, stay with me tonight...*

A few seconds later, she broke the gaze, and trying to compose herself, she looked around, smiled a little and looked at him again. "Good night..."

Vincent tilted his head slightly and whispered with a smile. "Good night."

Her gaze at him was bittersweet and he knew very well why when he turned on his heel and slowly walked out of the chamber.

Catherine's eyes were still resting on the spot where she had just seen him last, before he disappeared out of her sight, still seeing the outline of his body like an image imprinted in her mind, so deeply it almost made her weep.

To want to say it so badly, yet knowing she couldn't, knowing how incredibly difficult it would be for him to keep his feelings controlled and how terrified he was of hurting her. Causing him any emotional unrest and pain was the last thing she wished.

And still, she longed to feel his body next to hers, the gentle yet intense comfort of his embrace, the calm rhythm of his heart at her ear, his warmth and the intoxicating scent belonging distinctively to him...

Parting is such a sweet sorrow...

She had never felt these words truer than since meeting Vincent. The slight pang in her heart each time they parted, the unconscious counting of the hours until the sunset, waiting for his silhouette to appear on her balcony, when her heart would jump with joy at the sight of him.

For partially understandable reasons, they weren't intimate and yet, she had never felt more a woman than when being with him. Their embraces, the way he held her hand, the way he looked at her... All that was way more sensual and intense than any intimacies she had shared with any man in her previous life. It was as if a window to a completely new world had been opened to her, and through Vincent, she finally found herself and knew the real meaning of love and all its colour shades.

Even when they were apart, they were always together in spirit, a constant comfort guiding her even through the toughest times. Besides, she was never giving up hope that, one day, he would finally understand there was no reason to be afraid....

Catherine smiled sadly to herself and curled up on the bed. She knew that no matter how upset she was feeling, he was with her, always, never leaving her alone.

With that thought, she closed her eyes and exhausted fell asleep.

-I know how difficult this is for you.

-To have her so close...

-Yes.

Father's words were still resounding in Vincent as he remembered the time spent with Catherine after he had taken her into the tunnels earlier that day.

They had walked for a while, then rested and sought comfort by the Waterfall. Vincent noticed it had become Catherine's favourite place Below - apart from his own chamber. Maybe the rush of the majestic falling masses of water, streaming right into the nameless river in the distance, reminded her of a troubled mind - the water carrying away all the worries, pains and fears, washing them away into the darkness where they came from.

Vincent had kept silent, not wanting to interrupt her contemplation, his eyes lingering on the running waters before them. She knew he was there for her and that was all that mattered.

It was a bit chilly that day and yet, her immediate nearness was warming him inside out. She was sitting very close to him, practically touching his side and leg with hers. Whether she was doing it willingly or not, he didn't know, but he couldn't bring himself to keep more distance from her. The close physical contact was sweet and painful at the same time, awakening emotions which he had been trying to fight ever since he had known her. The problem was, they were gaining on intensity day by day...

Catherine hadn't said a word for a long time, just staring into the waterfall and watching the orange and pinkish glow of the sunset spread around the chamber.

And then suddenly, still without looking at Vincent, she leaned against his shoulder and buried her face in his golden mane and took a deep breath before exhaling again. Her arm went around his waist and held tight.

Vincent held his breath. Not that they had never been in an embrace before, but the flow of his emotions at that moment triggered an almost immediate reaction in his body. The fire in his veins, the rush of blood into his head, the elevated heart rate were all mingling into a wondrous, almost floating sensation threatening to spill over.

He reprimanded himself in his mind for his feelings when Catherine was in such a fragile state, but he couldn't control them. Carefully but longingly, his arm crept around her waist and pulled her even closer. Only then, he dared to exhale with a shaky breath and closed eyes.

Even then, not a single word had been said. They remained sitting in the embrace until the sun had definitely set over the horizon in the world Above, casting the Waterfall in a grey shade and reminding them of how much time had passed.

Catherine had politely refused dinner the following day, saying she wasn't hungry. Therefore, after he had left her to get some sleep, Vincent went straight back to his chamber, skipping dinner, too. His mind and heart were occupied with other thoughts than those of food.

His memory slipped back to the conversation at the Waterfall they had had earlier that day. Catherine revealed her strong wish to stay Below, with Vincent.

'I want to live in your world. I don't want to go back!'

'I don't want you to go back.'

Sometime later, his own reply to her plea shocked him. It was the most daring confession he had ever admitted to the woman he loved. And yet, at that moment, when she said those words so convincingly, so headstrong, it was like falling into a sweet trap. Immediate, intense, inevitable.

'To have her so close, and yet to know that...' he wrote into his journal and stopped. His heart was rejoicing at her presence, but there was a little alarm ringing in the back of his head, warning him.

You must be careful...

And still

She comes here in grief. Whatever she needs, whatever sacrifice I must make, I will make to be there for Catherine.

Yes, whatever it would take.... He wished he could just absorb all her pain through their bond, to bring back the joyous smile on her lips, the sparkling light to her eyes. For now, her smile was bittersweet, and her eyes revealed, even more, how fragile and lost she was in herself. And yet, those eyes...

The way her eyes were pleading with him when she had called his name before he left her chamber.... Being so vulnerable now, he could read her thoughts and feelings more than ever. Those eyes were begging him to stay...

But as ever with Catherine, she knew him so well. She knew that to ask that of him might endanger the vulnerable balance between his feelings and his desire, and she knew what his fear was. He feared for her safety if he got too close to her.

Still, as he turned around and felt her longing, he had wished with all his being that she would have said those words aloud. He would have obeyed gratefully...

Vincent tried to sleep but it was impossible. Too many thoughts were keeping him awake - too much worrying for Catherine, for how she was feeling, how he could ease her sorrow. And too much of his own emotional turmoil.

He closed his eyes and all he could see was her face with those big green eyes and all he could hear were those three words her beautifully shaped mouth whispered repeatedly.

I need you...

Suddenly, he opened his eyes as a sharp feeling of sorrow went through his heart. Immediately, he stood up and started for her chamber at a quick pace.

When he stopped at the entrance to the chamber, his heart sank at the sight of her.

She was crying, sobbing in despair, her head down, her small body curled up helplessly while sitting on the bed with her back against the headboard. A veil of her fine hair was covering her face, but he knew it was wet with tears.

Vincent sighed in pain and quickly approached her bed, sat down at the edge and gathered her in his strong arms, embracing the entire curled up bundle of sorrow. She buried her face in his chest, putting her free arm around his body tightly and she let all the sorrow flow out with more tears and sobbing.

"Just cry..." Vincent's gentle words whispered in her ear and he rested his cheek on the top of her head, feeling as much pain as she was.

Time stood still, for how long, he didn't know, but after Catherine had calmed down, he stretched out on the bed leaning slightly against the headboard and Catherine gratefully nested on his side. She was resting her head on his chest, with her right hand laid over his heart, her fingers occasionally stroking the spot gently. Vincent felt as if she was truly caressing his heart and it felt like Heaven to him. They kept silent for a while before Catherine finally spoke quietly.

"Thank you..."

"There's no need to, Catherine," he replied softly, his thumb gently rubbing her arm embraced by his. "I told you, I'm here, always."

Catherine smiled and closed her eyes briefly, savouring his words, mirrored from the night he was comforting her when she had just found out her father had had a stroke.

"I just... don't feel like I have the strength to do this alone anymore..."

The inner struggle was evident in her voice.

Vincent moved his hand slowly towards her chin and with his finger gently lifted her face to look at him.

"You're not alone, Catherine. As long as I live, you will never be alone."

She let out a quiet sigh and the smile and misty eyes told him everything he needed to know.

If she thought her feelings for him couldn't run any deeper, her thought was erased at that moment. Seeing the love and devotion in his beautiful deep blue eyes, she swallowed hard and couldn't help slowly raising her hand to tenderly caress his cheek.

Vincent exhaled loudly at her touch and closed his eyes, savouring the magical moment. Every time she did that he got lost; in those moments, nothing existed in the world apart from her, the magic of her touch, the glow of her eyes, the warmth of her breath when she was so close to his face... His wish to surrender in those moments, to forget what he was, was almost unbearable...

When Catherine's hand slid down to rest on his chest again, he opened his eyes into her radiant smile and sparkling eyes. Where there were tears of sorrow before, there were tears of joy now, as he felt the warmth and love spreading in her veins, just as if it was his own body's reaction he was feeling. His breath caught, when she spoke quietly.

"And you will never be alone as long as I live, because I live only for you..."

She bowed her face and pressed a soft but lingering kiss on his chest before laying her head down on the same spot and sighing in contentment. No matter what happened from then on, Vincent was her man, he filled every atom of her being and they would always be a part of each other, their love uniting them into one being, one half inseparable from the other.

Her words brought tears to his eyes. He released his breath, tightened his embrace on her and bent down a bit to kiss the top of her head, before resting it against the headboard again.

Catherine closed her eyes still smiling and not long after, she fell into a merciful sleep.

Vincent was awake, staring at the rocky wall ahead of him, though not really looking. A strange feeling of peace was running through him like a calm forest stream on a quiet summer night. All his fears of what might happen disappeared the moment he held her in his arms and he could feel her heartbeat in his veins. His own heart was beating faster at first, but after a little while slowed down and adjusted its rhythm to her own.

He was trying to understand it, but then almost unbelieving his immense fortune, he surrendered to his feelings completely and was simply enjoying the silent sound of her breathing, the gentle touch of her hand on his chest, the warmth of her body pressed against his own.

Then she, still asleep, turned slowly to the other side with her head resting comfortably on his now outstretched arm.

He looked down at her and for a moment he almost stopped breathing. How beautiful she was in peaceful sleep, how unbelievably blessed he was for her love...

Vincent freed his arm by lifting her head gently with his other hand and then put it down even more gently. His fingers carefully put aside a strand of her hair covering her face and then he remained still for a brief moment to take this image in.

He let out a quiet sigh and unwillingly stood up from the bed, slowly in order not to wake her up with his movement.

He turned around once more, and a bittersweet but loving smile appeared on his face. The image of the woman who captured his heart and soul lying peacefully in bed sleeping was another one to stay with him for the rest of his days. No matter what the future held for them, he would always cherish this moment as one of his sweetest memories.

Vincent turned around and with his head down very slowly and with a heavy heart walked out of the chamber.

They were walking through the tunnels, not rushing at all, approaching the way out to her apartment building. Neither of them was speaking, Vincent was trying not to influence her by the run of his emotions and his craving for her to stay Below - despite what he told her before when she told him about her dreaming of her father speaking to her.

- *You found peace with him.*

- *Yes.*

- *But not yet with yourself.*

- *I'm not sure...*

- *Don't ever be afraid of the truth.*

- *I don't want to hurt you... I don't ever want to disappoint you...*

- *By returning Above?*

- *I feel like I failed...*

The look on her face confirmed her biggest fear, but he knew it anyway. Vincent knew that when she'd told him before that she wanted to stay and live in his world, her wish was strongly affected by the grief she was feeling. And he also knew that he couldn't let his love and longing for her stop her from living a full life, she had so much to give to the people Above still, so much to live through.

- *You're a woman of both worlds. That is who you are.*

- *But my heart is here...*

- *And my heart is with you. Wherever you are, wherever you go, you take me. You stand for me, for us, for our dream. You carry our light.*

Finally, they were at the threshold at the way out and stopped. Catherine looked at the ray of light illuminating a spot of ground at the ladder leading up above. She turned around and looked a bit nervously at Vincent.

"I'm a little scared," she said.

"I know," Vincent smiled with understanding.

"Isn't that strange?"

"No," he replied almost playfully, still smiling, with a slightly tilted head, and she could see sparkles in his eyes even in the shadows surrounding them.

Catherine just nodded transfixed by his face. His leonine features were never so lovely to her and his eyes never so irresistible and warm, as at that very moment. And there was an almost boyish charm about him. Her heart skipped a beat as she held his gentle gaze.

Vincent felt her state of emotions and for a brief moment, they were connected by something stronger than their bond. Electricity was floating in the air between them, reminding them both of the moment after they got soaked by rain while listening to a concert under the park months ago. They were parting at the same spot for the night and the heightened emotions of that moment brought the same electricity about, invisible sparks floating all around them.

It was Catherine who tried to return them both to the ground, and she took a step forward to hug him. As she did that, burying her face in his chest with his golden blond hair falling freely over it, she took a deep breath. She wanted to savour as much of that familiar beloved smell of him as possible. It gave her comfort, but for some time now, it was awaking feelings in her she didn't even dare to think of, afraid that by reading her they might frighten him. She got so used to the nearness of him in those few days she spent Below that the thought of parting from him was almost physically painful to her.

However, Catherine put on a brave face when pulling away from Vincent's tender embrace and when she looked into his eyes, she smiled, then turned around and started walking towards the ladder.

It took her only about six steps to decide. She stopped and hesitated for a few seconds. Then she turned around.

Vincent straightened his lightly tilted head and the relaxed expression on his face got a bit tense - mostly in anticipation of something he wasn't sure of, but deep down inside could feel was coming as he could feel a strong resolve from Catherine through their bond.

Catherine didn't hesitate anymore and started walking back towards him with a calm but decided expression on her face.

Vincent's eyes were not leaving hers. He held his breath when her glowing face came close to his and he closed his eyes when her soft warm lips touched his bottom lip and remained there for a few seconds before she slowly pulled away again, remaining very close to him.

He opened his eyes and in them, she could read all the emotions like from an open book - the shock, the surprise, the joy, the desire, the admiration, the dream which just came true for him. And above all, she could read his deep, pure and undying love to her, more intense than ever before.

Catherine heard him let out his breath which he was holding and knew that he could read in her eyes too, but she couldn't hide it anymore. Her feelings for him were reaching far beyond the physicality of a relationship, but she just couldn't conceal any more how she longed for him. It was an impossible task and she didn't want to. Her main mission was making him see that to her, he was a beautiful man in every sense of the word and that she loved every bit of his soul, as well as body, that he didn't need to be afraid of it.

Yes, Vincent, we will go with care but also with courage, just like you said.

They were gazing at each other for what seemed like an eternity but were only a few seconds.

"Thank you, Vincent," Catherine's suddenly deeper strong voice broke the silence.

He was still stunned and speechless, so she just bowed her head slightly, looking away and back at him for a second with a shy smile and turned around. This time, truly walking away to disappear out of his sight in the light.

Vincent kept staring into the light for a long time after, trying to process what just happened. His heart was racing but it was the most beautiful race ever he could remember. Not since she came back to him after he tried to set her free, had they crossed that boundary and kissed.

Vincent knew that she had wished to do it many times, but she didn't want to push him and wanted to give him time to feel comfortable doing it on his own initiative. Yet now, he felt the deep resolve in her heart and

he knew that what she had done was done from pure love, not just because she was grateful for his support in this time of grieving.

He felt like bursting out of joy, like dancing, like singing, like laughing and crying at the same time, he felt on fire. And yet all these emotions were playing only inside him, as outside, his body was still motionless under the spell of her kiss.

All the stories and poems he had ever read could not describe well enough how it truly felt. And he knew that whatever happened now, just like their very first kiss, he would relive this moment until the end of his days.

And then, a few lines by William Shakespeare came to his mind.

I dreamt my lady came and found me dead...

And breathed such life with kisses in my lips

that I revived and was an emperor.

Yes, at that moment, Vincent felt like a king....

END