

Revelations

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Note: Certain dialogue was taken from the episode 'Remember Love' from the series *Beauty and the Beast*, written by Virginia Aldridge.

'It was a dream, Catherine. A dream that can never be... If the slightest thing should go wrong, if anyone were to see us, it would ruin everything we already have...'

His words left a bitter after-taste in Catherine's mouth. Yes, Vincent was right about the risk their getaway together would mean, and she bravely accepted his gentle and heartbreaking refusal. However, she couldn't suppress the tears wetting her cheeks in deep disappointment, as she walked through the park back to the van she had rented.

All she wanted was to give Vincent something special, to show him something beautiful from her world. A place where he wouldn't have to hide his face from the cruel world, where he could walk with her in daylight, watch the sunrise and sunset colouring the still waters of the lake, to rest with her in the glen she remembered from her childhood. To make it *their* world... away from the dramas and perils of everyday life, away from the potentially prying eyes Above even after dark, away from the constant needs of the tunnel folk. Away from Jacob's ever-present overprotective watch over his beloved son...

Utterly devastated, Catherine could taste the salt of her tears on her lips. She wiped them away quickly and took a deep breath, trying to overcome the huge disappointment. It just wasn't fair. Vincent had given her so much since they met and she couldn't give him even such a simple thing as a safe weekend in nature...

You can't do this, Cathy, not to yourself and not to him... It's not his fault, it's just the world we live in...

By the time she reached the van, despite her resolution not to feel upset about it, her resolve was failing. And when she sat down in the driver's seat and turned the key in the ignition, she had strength only to hold onto the steering wheel, while she cried her heart out.

Jacob was seated in his favourite chair in his chamber, holding open one of the numerous medical books he had collected over the years. That afternoon, however, his mind was somewhere else. Precisely, a few chambers away from his.

Since his major disagreement with Vincent the previous day, he couldn't find inner peace. And Vincent obviously wasn't inclined to speak to him yet, since the patriarch hadn't seen him since breakfast - and even then, his son didn't speak a word and quickly left the dining chamber.

Jacob was convinced his arguments were correct and couldn't have been ignored for Vincent's safety and the safety of the whole community. For his son to be away from the tunnels for three days, unable to find refuge if the need arose, was unacceptable, preposterous! And what if something happened in the tunnels meanwhile? Who would protect them all?

And yet, Jacob couldn't forget just the anger, but most of all, the sorrow and despair in his son's eyes when he tried to reason with him.

'Tell me, Father, are we forever bound to accept a poem for a sunset?!'

Those words hurt, and for a brief moment, he almost bowed his head in defeat. But in the end, Jacob held his ground and prohibited Vincent's leaving. Yet now, doubts started creeping into his ageing heart, eating away the resilience residing there.

His son was in his thirties, a grown-up man. Did he have the right to forbid him anything? Wasn't it Jacob who always supported the free will of men? Yes, free will but such that obeys the community's rules. What rule was there for Vincent though? He wasn't a helpless child any more. His nightly walks Above had begun way before he ever met Catherine, and apart from a couple of unfortunate incidents, he always managed to return to the Tunnels safely. By what right did his father order what he could or couldn't do?

And then, Jacob thought of Catherine. He was almost furious, finding out about her idea. How could she?? Always claiming she loved Vincent, yet despite it, willing to throw him out in the open to the world full of danger, deceit and cruelty...

No, she would never intentionally do anything that could endanger his son. Jacob knew that by now. But the parent in him still couldn't reconcile himself with the fact that he couldn't help Vincent if he needed help. He would be miles away, without the possibility of any of them reaching him.

Suddenly it hit Jacob. Was *that* the problem? Letting his child go free to care for himself, trusting that he would find his way in the world, be happy, and always find his safe way back home?

Jacob closed his eyes and sighed.

What a fool you are... First, you wanted to forbid him from falling in love. Now, you want to forbid him to live...

Parents' role had always been to look after their children when they were helpless and too young to do that for themselves; to teach them about the world, life, and their ups and downs. But once they grow up, mothers and fathers had to let them run free - with trust, understanding, support - and most of all, with love. Why couldn't Jacob do that as well?

Vincent had been his touchstone since he was a helpless baby. A child who wasn't supposed to survive and yet, he fought harder than anyone Jacob had ever known. He loved his adoptive father unconditionally, and the patriarch knew that nothing would ever change that fact, even if they lived apart. Love could be a passing thing for some, but not for them. For them, it would always be fresh as an evergreen tree - unless Jacob *caused* it to fade away, to be replaced by Vincent's bitterness for a life spent in chains ...

Throwing the book on the table in front of him, Jacob buried his head in his hands, and the long and loud sigh betrayed his inner struggle with his own conscience.

He was running through the tunnels, not looking right or left, not focusing on his final destination. Full of adrenaline, he could feel his veins pulsing loud in his ear, almost deafening him. Away, away, from the pain and despair!

Without consciously knowing how, Vincent finally made it to his chamber and leaned heavily against the rocky wall. His breath was ragged, and sudden anger replaced the despair he was feeling just a few minutes ago. The moment he could feel a sharp pain stabbing him at the heart, he knew it was coming from her...

'But I thought for a moment it might be possible... I'm sorry, I should never have asked...'

Catherine's words from earlier were ringing in his ears, making his head hurt almost to the point of exploding. Why? Why does it have to be this way? Why would she have to apologise for asking something so simple from him? What was he guilty of in this world that he couldn't fulfil at least

one of her dreams, after everything she had done and sacrificed for him? A simple being together alone for a few days, away from everything and everyone...

His hands grasped his head at the temples; the pressure inside was getting unbearable. Anger can be devastating, like a hurricane, bearing down on the land and crushing everything that comes along its way. Vincent could feel the power of his anger full force at that moment. Voices, so many voices, were emerging from his memory - upset, desperate, angry, frightened...

No... It's not fair... It's NOT FAIR!!!

Almost in rage, Vincent grabbed the nearest chair and threw it with the full force of his mighty arms against the wall, smashing it to pieces. And then, everything got covered with a milky white veil of mist...

Catherine had returned the van. She decided to take the food supplies that she'd bought for their trip down to the Tunnels. Regardless of the sad outcome, why let so much good food go to waste? And there was no way she could eat everything by herself. At least something good could come out of the whole situation...

It was Friday, and because Catherine had taken that day off, she didn't need to make any excuses at work for leaving early. Wallowing in self-pity wouldn't be a solution anyway. By bringing the food down, at least she could see Vincent again and spend some time with him.

A poor compensation for raising his hopes so high, only for them to be crushed by the reality of his life...

Catherine didn't even bother to change her clothes and went straight to the basement of her apartment building. There, she pushed the latch on the basement door open and carefully started climbing down with one of the two bags of food. When she stepped down, she turned around, half-hoping Vincent would be standing and waiting there for her. But she hoped in vain. Catherine sighed and climbed up to get the other bag.

I made him so upset that he can't even see me now... she thought and her eyes started burning again. But then she got a grip and took a deep breath, before setting out for her journey to the Tunnel's kitchen. Yes, at least William would be happy that day.

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"I've come for my bow, you said you would have it fixed by today... Mouse?"

Jamie was trying to grab her friend's attention, but the young technical genius was staring into the blank space in front of him. He didn't seem to have noticed her.

"Mouse! Tunnels calling Mouse, hello??" She waved her hand in front of his face.

Mouse jerked, finally noticing his friend, and started fidgeting.

"Oh... The bow... Yes... Yes, Mouse fixed it."

He walked over to his work table and ready to pick up Jamie's precious equipment.

"Are you all right, Mouse?" Jamie asked when his hands remained resting on the table, while he was staring at the bow.

"Sure! Just..." He looked uncertain, a bit puzzled, nervously noticing Arthur crawling at his feet.

"Just what?"

Mouse looked at Jamie and winced.

“Mouse was bad... to Vincent...”

“What do you mean?” Jamie was confused.

“Forced Vincent to stay in the Tunnels and not leave with Catherine. Bad deed.”

Jamie raised her eyebrows.

“That was not a bad deed - it was rational thinking. It wouldn't be safe for him. And what if something happened here while he was gone? Who would protect us? This was for the best.”

Mouse's look turned contemplative, almost sad, his voice was a mere whisper. “What's best for Vincent?”

The look of Jamie's eyes softened.

“Vincent always does what's best for us,” Mouse continued. “But when do we do what's best for him? Catherine is best for him. Mouse was scared at first, but... should let him go with Catherine.”

There was nothing Jamie could have replied to Mouse's words. The realisation hit her quick and suddenly - Mouse was right.

She grabbed her friend's hand.

“Come with me,” she said, turned on her heel and started dragging Mouse out of his chamber.

The bow remained forgotten back on the table.

After Catherine had dropped off the food bags in William's kitchen - he was more than grateful for the extra addition to the usual weekly supplies - she was on her way, walking to Vincent's chamber. She met a few friends along the way, exchanged a few nice words with all of them. Not everybody knew of her plans for Vincent just a few hours ago, and Catherine saw no need to talk about it.

Just as she was about to reach her destination, she saw the familiar figure of the Tunnels' pipe master. Pascal was standing at the entrance to Vincent's chamber and he looked very nervous, undecided and... ashamed.

Catherine was observing him for a moment, but then decided to make him aware of her presence.

“Can I help you with anything, Pascal?”

Her soft melodic voice startled the man a few feet away from her, but he regained his composure quickly, walking over to her.

“Catherine... I... I just wanted to talk to Vincent,” he said quietly, his voice a bit unsteady.

“Is anything wrong?” Catherine inquired.

“No, everything is fine, just...” Pascal lowered his eyes as if he wasn't able to look into her eyes.

Catherine clearly saw the turmoil in her friend's face and gently touched his arm.

“Pascal, what's wrong?”

Her kindness surprised the pipe master. After he, Father, Jamie and Mouse had put Vincent off his trip with Catherine, he was expecting her to be upset or angry or whatever... anything but kind.

“I'm sorry for pushing on Vincent... For making him *not* go away with you... I wanted to apologise to him but...”

“But you can't seem to find the courage?”

Pascal nodded shyly.

If Catherine was surprised to hear Pascal's admission, it didn't show in her face - her smile was as warm, friendly and encouraging as always. She had a suspicion that Vincent's polite refusal of her plan was not merely the result of his fear of losing their precious, yet fragile relationship, to the dangers Above. But the sincere regret and worry of one of his best friends moved her.

"Maybe if I went in with you?" Catherine suggested.

Finally, Pascal smiled.

"Thank you, Catherine... And not just for this." His eyes spoke more than clearly - his apology was not meant only for Vincent.

"I understand." Catherine's smile was bitter-sweet but genuine.

They entered Vincent's chamber together. What they saw made them stop in silence -

Vincent was sleeping.

"I'll come back later," Pascal whispered with a smile and touched Catherine's arm briefly before leaving.

When Catherine stayed alone with Vincent in his chamber, she couldn't wipe away a dreamy smile from her face. The view of her beloved sleeping was enchanting, and her misery from earlier that day was forgotten in a second.

How can you be so upset when you have so much already? When you have this?

Just the thought of being so close to Vincent set her heart soaring. She would never tire of being amazed at how blessed she was to have this incredible man in her life. Carefully sitting down on the bed next to his sleeping form, she gently took his large hand in hers.

After watching him peacefully for a few minutes, observing the changes of expression in his unique face, once his face relaxed and looked at peace, Catherine couldn't resist. Slowly, she leaned over and stole a gentle kiss from his lips. The memory of their first (and up to that moment the last) brief and tender kiss from not long ago, the corners of her mouth turned upwards again.

As she started pulling back from him, Vincent slowly opened his eyes. The deep ocean blue of his irises was crystal clear and sparkling. His face was a mirror of genuine surprise, and looking at the angelic beauty smiling at him, he said the one word, that meant everything in the world to him.

"Catherine?"

Her smile widened and her emerald eyes sparkled in reply to his question.

Unable to resist and needing proof that she was real, Vincent reached out to cup Catherine's cheek with his hand. She closed her eyes briefly and trembled at the sensation of his tender, so eloquent touch.

"It was a dream... A terrible dream."

Vincent turned his head on the pillow, while his hand slowly left Catherine's cheek and stopped on her arm. He was taking in the image of his chamber - unlike in his dream, nothing was out of place; the stained glass window was intact, even the chair he thought he had smashed to pieces in anger was standing unharmed in its usual place.

"Everything was changed. I couldn't wake up!"

Catherine, now holding his hand in both of hers, was glowing.

"Well, it's over now. I'm here."

“Yes.” Vincent found her eyes again. “Oh...” He pulled her hand to his face, rubbing his cheek in it gently. Catherine was still smiling.

“I thought I lost you!” The despair of such an image was evident in his face.

“Oh Vincent,” Catherine almost whispered, moving closer to his side, looking deep and seriously in his eyes. “Don’t you know? You could never lose me. We could never lose each other. As long as we remember.”

Vincent looked aside for a moment, remembering something from the very end of his dream.

“Remember?”

“Remember love...” Catherine added and her smile reached her eyes.

Always, Catherine...

After a few moments of focusing on her glowing face, finally, Vincent smiled incredulously.

Catherine didn’t need any more invitation to lay down on his chest, resting her cheek under his chin. Vincent’s long fingers almost absently caressed her silky hair, while he was pondering about the miracle he was holding in his arms. His other arm pulled her even closer to him and Catherine sighed contentedly.

They lay together for a little while, blissfully unaware of the world outside the chamber, enjoying each other’s nearness. The disappointment and sadness of the unfulfilled dream were almost forgotten.

“Will you tell me about it?” Catherine interrupted the happy silence. “The dream you had?”

Vincent sighed as his look wandered into the distance, his thumb gently caressing the free-falling strands of her hair again.

“In that dream... I didn’t exist. Nobody knew me. In that dream, I was never born. And I got to see glimpses of what the lives of the people I love would be like without me...”

“Like George Bailey in *It’s a Wonderful Life*,” Catherine said with a nostalgic smile. “My mum used to love that movie; we watched it every Christmas that I can remember.”

She lifted her head to look into Vincent’s eyes. “I know what *my* life would be like,” she said seriously. “Hollow, meaningless... incomplete.”

Vincent’s eyes were glistening.

“In my dream, that is who you were... In that dream, you were lost to me,” he said quietly, sorrow colouring the tone of his voice. “I thought I would never see you again, and yet, the angel gave me hope...”

“The angel?” Catherine asked softly.

“Yes... The angel told me that nothing is ever lost. That we’re all on the same journey. We create that journey for each other. The angel was *you*, Catherine... I didn’t know what to believe, but she was sure, I did. And then...”

Vincent stopped, remembering the moment just before he woke up.

“And then?” Catherine hung on his every word.

The look of his eyes got suddenly more intense.

“Then, just before I woke up, she kissed me.”

Catherine lowered her eyes and a shy smile appeared on her face. Then, her eyes slowly travelled back to meet his. That was when he knew it for certain.

"That wasn't a dream..."

"The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it..." Catherine quoted quietly, her smile irresistible, bright as sunshine. (1)

Vincent didn't reply, but the twinkle in his sapphire-blue irises and the half-smile on his face was very eloquent. The memory of the smoothness of her full lips on his, that he had thought was a dream, brought back the sensation of how it felt.

His eyes irrevocably travelled down to her mouth and if they could speak, Catherine would know exactly what Vincent was thinking at that very moment. As if drawn by a magnet, her head was slowly moving in his direction, almost painfully slowly leaning closer...

Just when their lips almost touched, urgent voices reached them from just outside of the chamber. Catherine quickly moved away to sit upright again.

"Mouse! You can't just barge in like that... That's not the way to do it, Catherine might be there!"

"Good! Mouse must speak to Vincent *and* Catherine!"

In the next moment, an almost funny image presented itself to Vincent and Catherine: Mouse ran into the chamber, with Jamie on his heels, trying to pull him back by his sleeve though obviously failing.

"I'm so sorry," Jamie started apologising hastily. "We wanted to speak to you but not like this!" She glared at Mouse for a moment.

Catherine was trying to suppress a smile and noticed the bemusement in Vincent's eyes.

"Mouse needs to speak with both of you," the boy spoke with a slightly lowered intensity of his voice. It was as if, suddenly, his resolve started shaking in its foundations.

Vincent got up from his bed and walked over to his friends, who were nervously standing at the table; Mouse especially seemed restless, although his hands were deep in his trouser pockets, as always at such moments.

"It's all right, Jamie," Vincent spoke calmly. "What do you need to speak about, Mouse?"

Mouse lifted his eyes shyly and looked at the man he loved almost to a point of adoration.

"Mouse wants to apologise..."

Vincent's look was puzzled.

"For making Vincent not go away with Catherine... Was wrong, was... selfish..." His voice faded away.

Vincent sighed and with a smile, he put his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I understand what you were afraid of, Mouse. You did it all from love - there is no need to apologise."

"There is," Jamie jumped in, her own feeling of guilt coming on the surface as well.

"You deserve some time for yourselves... We should have trusted you, like you always trust us. We were just afraid that..."

Jamie lowered her eyes, unable to say the words.

"That I might not come back?" Vincent finished for her.

Both young people in front of him nodded silently.

His smile widened and he took them both in a gentle embrace before speaking.

“Wherever I go, I will always come back here. This is my home and you are my family. People always keep coming back to their family, to where they come from.”

Visibly relieved, Mouse allowed himself a little smile when he looked up to his friend and mentor. Catherine, who meanwhile joined Vincent at his side, smiled at both young people.

“Actually, I think it would be great for Vincent to get away for a while,” Jamie said when she looked into Catherine's eyes. “Father would finally give him a break.”

They all had to laugh about that remark - Catherine, Mouse and Jamie heartily, Vincent quietly, with lowered eyes, as always.

Catherine looked at the man next to her, with all the love and understanding she had.

“Some other time,” she said and hopefully raised her eyebrows for a second.

“Yes,” Vincent replied softly, returning her gaze with the same intensity. “Some other time.”

Jamie and Mouse quickly understood they were superfluous; their mission completed. Silently and with slightly awkward smiles, they left the chamber.

Still gazing into the blue of Vincent's eyes and with a wide smile, Catherine took his hands in hers.

“I think there is someone else who wants to apologise to you.”

“Who, Catherine?”

“Pascal. I met him when I came here, but he didn't want to wake you, so he left. But I'm convinced he will be the next in line,” she chuckled.

Vincent shook his head and smiled. Suddenly, the whole misery from only a few hours before seemed like something from another life. Now, despite the hardships in his life and his relationship with Catherine, he wouldn't want to miss on any of it.

He caressed her hands gently with his thumbs. “We *will* see that lake someday, Catherine, as I promised you.”

“I believe you...,” she replied quietly, and even without the feeling from their bond, her smile and the gentle look of her shining eyes told him she was telling the truth.

Then, she exhaled loudly.

“So, what would you like to do today?” she asked, a happy expression having returned to her glowing face.

“Anything, as long it is with you, Catherine...”

Her breath caught and she fell into his arms, embracing him tightly. She couldn't stop smiling. A big boulder fell off her chest and she could finally breathe again easily.

Vincent's arms enveloped her with the usual gentleness, and he couldn't resist kissing the top of her head - as lightly as a touch of butterfly's wing, but still in a way that spoke volumes about the state of his emotions.

When Catherine pulled back and took his hand in hers, she didn't need to say much.

“Chamber of Falls?”

“Chamber of Falls,” Vincent replied quietly with a smile.

He reached for his cloak on the chair nearby and they started walking, when Catherine suddenly turned around and ran to the bed. She retrieved the volume of Tennyson's *Poems* from the bedside table, where she had spotted it earlier, and hurried back to Vincent with a grin on her face.

Vincent chuckled, reached for her hand and led her towards peace and tranquillity.

When Vincent returned to his chamber late that evening, he found a letter on his table. The handwriting was unmistakable and his curious eyes started reading it immediately.

By the time he reached the end, his eyes were glistening and he couldn't help but smile. He folded the letter carefully and holding it in his hand, Vincent approached the heavy wooden chest next to his wardrobe.

He opened the lid, revealing the most treasured pieces of his childhood; an antique toy with a spinning wheel, a small intricately detailed model of a ship, lovingly worn-out editions of *The Hobbit*, *Treasure Island* and *Wind in the Willows*, some hand-made toys of different kinds, a few of his own drawings, the beautifully-ornamented model of a carousel that Devin had given him many years ago...

With a tender smile, he placed the folded letter on top of the books and with a last loving glimpse, he closed the lid on the chest.

As he laid down in his bed, staring at the wall opposite to him, the words written in the letter appeared in front of his eyes again and the corners of his mouth turned upwards.

Dear Vincent,

I wished to talk to you in person, but since you are with Catherine at the moment, I better write this down before I lose the courage until you return and I get the chance again.

I am sorry, Vincent, for being so harsh on you before. Harsh on both you and Catherine. I know she had only the best intentions, just like you, and I shouldn't have used such cruel words as I did.

I am sorry, for not trusting you. For not believing that you and Catherine would be vigilant and careful on your trip, and return to the Tunnels safe and unharmed. It was fear that clouded my judgement and led my tongue on the wrong path, which I regret deeply.

And most of all, I am sorry for being unable to face the reality of you being a grown-up man, with the right to make your own decisions, based on your best judgement.

When I look at you, I always see the wonderful, special and loving boy, with insatiable curiosity, wisdom beyond his years and a heart so large that it could encompass the whole world. The boy who helped me find the best of who I am and gave a new meaning and purpose to my life, at a time when I thought there was nothing for me any more...

You will always be that boy in my eyes, but from now on, I promise, you will also be the extraordinary man you have become. The man of his own free will, the right to his own dreams, and his own life.

And if you decide to go Above and go away for a while, I will not stand in your way any more. I can guarantee you that I will still be worried about you, but I will also be proud - as I already am - of how that boy, that man, my son had the strength and courage to find his own way and follow its path.

Vincent, please, know that from now on, whatever path you choose, I will always help you follow it
...

With all my love,

Father