

Why, Daddy?

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

“Arms first, legs after, honey, and again - arms and legs, you can do it!”

Catherine was standing in the shimmering water of the Mirror Pool up to her waist, dressed in a colourful one-piece swimsuit. She was bending slightly over. Her arm was supporting a little blond-haired boy under his belly while he was kicking with his short arms and legs, trying to move forward. His breathing was laboured as his little three-year-old body was trying to coordinate his limbs with his breaths.

“You’re doing great, Charlie; keep going!”

The sound of happy splashing and occasional laughter filled the warm early summer air in the popular underground cavern. It was one of the few places in the subterranean world getting some direct daylight from Above - through a tall chimney-like opening leading to the outer world. A small part of the water in the pool was glittering in the spare sunlight penetrating the shaft.

On the edge of the pool, not very far from Catherine and little Charles, Vincent and little Jacob were sitting on a quilted blanket and watching the rest of their family splashing in the crystal clear water.

Vincent’s deep blue eyes were bright with contentment, a serene half-smile settled on his face. Moments like this always made him feel truly grateful for having been blessed with the miracle of his little family. That feeling had not changed, even after five years. The woman he loved passionately with his whole being, and his two sons, who held the other special places in his generous heart - they were the centre of Vincent’s world.

Little Jacob - who at his five years was among the tallest children of his age - was dangling his legs over the rocky edge. With his bare feet soaked in the cooling water, he was paddling in it at a slow, but steady pace. A few curls of unruly blond hair were falling over his face, partially obscuring the vision of his sapphire blue eyes inherited from his father. Though he was observing his mother and younger brother at their swimming lesson, his mind seemed to be wandering miles away.

Vincent could feel the turmoil inside his firstborn through their bond, but he could also see the contemplative expression that settled on his son’s rosy-cheeked face.

“Charles is doing rather well, don’t you think?” he spoke, trying to involve Jacob in a conversation.

“Yes, I guess he is,” the boy replied with a small smile, glancing briefly at his beloved father. Then he set his eyes on the pool in front of him again.

“I remember when I taught *you* to swim,” Vincent continued. “You were as smart and as quick back then as your brother is. It didn’t take you more than an hour to learn the basics.”

Jacob smiled at the memory of a few years back, one of the first real memories he had had.

“As mum always says, I had a good teacher.” He looked at Vincent, and the love and admiration for his parent shone from his bright eyes.

Despite his young age, Jacob was very mature in his behaviour. Sometimes he reminded Vincent of himself when he was a boy. Jacob was loved by all children, just as Charles was, and he knew how to have fun with them, but there was also this more subdued, contemplative side to his personality - another trait inherited from his father.

The special bond they shared (like with the rest of their little family) spoke clearly to Vincent, though - unrest, doubts and confusion were bothering the little one's mind.

"What's troubling you so, Jacob?" Vincent asked, his eyes focusing on his son.

Jacob glanced at him, then sighed and almost shyly lowered his eyes. It almost seemed that he found it difficult to look in the eyes of his father.

"You know you can tell me anything, don't you?" Vincent continued.

The boy sighed again and absently, his hand started playing with little stones he found nearby on the sand-like ground.

"It's just something I heard some children talk about..."

His voice was quiet, hesitant.

Vincent didn't reply, but his eyes weren't leaving his son's face, and he tilted his head a bit to encourage him.

"I would... I would tell you, Daddy, but..." Jacob finally raised his eyes to his father's. "I don't want to hurt you..."

Vincent's eyes narrowed a bit in confusion, then relaxed again. A memory flashed in his mind, from years back, when he heard the same words from someone else.

You are so much like your mother, my son...

Then, he smiled warmly and opened his arms in invitation.

Jacob didn't hesitate this time, and because he knew exactly, what his father offered to him, he crawled into Vincent's lap. It was his favourite place anyway.

Vincent embraced him and looked into his son's eyes.

"Sometimes, there are truths that can hurt us, but that doesn't mean we can't, or don't, talk about them. Sometimes they are necessary to help us to understand things, to accept the truths and move on with our lives."

Jacob thought for a moment, but then he decided it was best to talk it out and gathered his courage.

"Katie overheard her mum talking with Mary... It was about.. you... Something you did in the past..."

Vincent's expression didn't change, though his sense told him he knew where this was going. Lena always liked talking about Vincent, though he would never have thought she would ever talk about *that*.

"Was it something... disturbing?" he said seriously.

Jacob didn't lift his head from his father's chest, where it was resting now, but he spoke silently.

"She said you killed some people..."

Although Vincent knew the answer before he asked the question, still, he winced and sighed.

He had to find out sooner or later anyway; there is no other way...

Enveloping his son's little body with a feeling of safety and warmth, to make him more comfortable, Vincent spoke.

"Look at me, Jacob."

The boy straightened himself up a bit and looked at his father shyly, but there was curiosity in his big blue eyes as well.

"Yes," Vincent started. "It is true. There have been several times when our world was threatened. Evil had entered it and wanted to destroy us. And at those times, because I am the strongest and have the..." He glanced at his hands, holding his child. "... the means to do so, I had to protect the people that I love."

"I know, grandpa talked about the bad people who wanted to harm us. He said you protected us from them, but I never realised..."

"That I killed them?"

"Yes..." Jacob replied with a faint voice. "You always say it's wrong to hurt people, so.... Why, Daddy?"

Vincent's chest felt tight suddenly. He hadn't spoken about those times to anyone for years. Since Gabriel, there were no incidents, no personal danger to deal with. Catherine had officially left the D.A.'s office shortly after Gabriel's demise, and nothing was getting her into physical troubles in her new part-time job as a legal consultant, practising family law.

Vincent's darker side had been dormant for years. He had reconciled himself with the Other, Catherine helped him do that, and he was not afraid of it anymore. However, even in his wildest dreams, he had never imagined having to explain the cruel, albeit necessary, actions of his past to his own child. Or maybe he had...

Maybe deep inside, he had always known that this moment must inevitably come, one day. One does not have a father with the hands of a beast without raising at least some questions about their varied use.

Taking a deep breath, the words he spoke then came from the deepest part of his soul.

"It *is* wrong to hurt people, and believe me when I say, each one of those I killed is burnt in my memory forever... There is no excuse for taking a life. But sometimes, to defend your own life, or protect the lives of those you love, you have to strike back to survive."

"Like King Arthur when he was protecting his people in Camelot?"

"Yes," Vincent couldn't suppress a smile. "Like that."

He paused for a moment, allowing Jacob to digest the bare truth and himself a little breather to choose wisely his next words.

The boy was looking at his father with a curious look in his eyes. There was no resentment, just a genuine effort to understand the reason behind the logic. At that moment, he was both a child, just opening up to the world and its wonders and curiosities, and a grown-up soul, trying to understand a moral problem.

"Did they have guns?" Jacob asked, his eyes fixed on his father's.

"Sometimes. Sometimes they had other weapons of some kind. All of them wanted to harm those I love, and sometimes they wanted to harm *me*."

“Did *you* have a weapon?”

Vincent looked down at his hand resting on his son’s knee. Without saying a word, he lifted it and showed it to Jacob. The boy understood immediately. For the first time in his short life, he looked at his father’s hand with different eyes.

Jacob knew, of course, that his parent had a different appearance to the other Tunnels folk, and the same was true for his hands. Their long and sharp nails never hurt him or anyone around him, though, not even with a scratch. For him, these were the hands that fed him, held him close when he was tired or sad, covered him lovingly with a blanket when he was falling asleep, gently stroked his forehead when he was sick. For all he knew, the hands of his father were loving and strong, helping at hard labour for the good of all people living in the Tunnels.

From this day on, though, they would also be the hands that could kill...

“Did the others help you?”

Jacob’s question caught Vincent by surprise. He remembered how Catherine asked him a similar question once: *Why didn’t they help you? Why does it always have to be only you?* And it was the same answer he gave his son now as he had given his wife back then.

“I didn’t want to endanger their lives. I knew I could deal with the danger myself.”

“But friends help each other, always...” Jacob was confused.

The purity and innocence of his son’s heart made Vincent smile.

“Yes, but friends also protect each other any way they can, and that’s what I did back then, or at least tried to. Three of them helped me when your mother was taken by a very evil man once. And one of them paid with his life for wanting to help me find her...”

“Winslow?” Jacob asked.

“Yes.” A bittersweet smile appeared on Vincent’s face. “Winslow was a good and brave man, who valued those he loved above his own life.”

For the first time during their conversation, Jacob’s sweet face lit up a bit and he smiled.

“Mouse always says how grumpy Winslow was, that he scolded him many times.”

Vincent chuckled at the memory.

“But he also says that Winslow was a true friend and an honest man.”

“That he was indeed, and we will always remember him,” Vincent agreed and went quiet, contemplating silently his dear friend.

After a short moment of silence between them, Jacob, who watched Catherine and Charles in the water, spoke again with a wistful expression on his face.

“Did mummy see you? When you...” His voice faded again. Despite his young age, he knew how distressing this topic must be for his father, but he couldn’t help but ask.

Vincent sighed. His memory brought back a clear image from many years ago - the moment when Catherine saw the beast unleash in him for the first time.

“Yes...”

“Was she not afraid of you?”

“When it happened for the first time, she was shocked at first... But not even a few seconds later, she reached for my hands and urged me to leave with her to safety... Your mother has a rare combination of understanding and compassion. She knew right then and there that this wasn't my choice. That I just did everything I could to protect the life of someone I loved.”

Jacob kept gazing at Vincent's fine-fur-covered hand, the long fingers ended by razor-sharp long nails. His little fingers reached for it and stroked it slowly, exploring it as if seeing it for the first time. Then he spoke, still looking at the clawed hand.

“Were they always like this?”

“Ever since I was born. I don't know exactly why. There is very little I know about my origin. I don't think I'll ever learn the whole truth. I was born, and I survived. The rest is only a shadow following my life, something that will always be a part of me, but will never have control over who I am.”

Vincent went quiet for a moment, observing his son mulling over what he had just heard. For most other children of Jacob's age, this might have been a too complicated topic to discuss, but not for his son.

“I had to learn how to be careful with my hands, especially when I was young. When we used to play, in order not to hurt my friends. Especially when we argued. Do you remember uncle Devin's scars on his face?”

“Yes, on his cheek. He said he has them to remember his own stupidity when he was younger.”

Vincent chuckled and shook his head.

“That is not the reason. We had argued once; it was a misunderstanding. One thing led to another; he hit me, and in my anger, I struck back. Only I forgot about my hands... It was the first time I fully understood how much in control I have to be with them.”

Father and son were looking into each other's eyes for a long moment before Vincent spoke again.

“Now that you know what I have done, are you afraid of me?”

Just for a few seconds, Jacob was studying the sapphire-blue irises of his parent. Then, he answered the question with assurance.

“No. I know you could never hurt me. You love me.”

A burning sensation in his eyes made Vincent realise he was on the verge of tears. He smiled, but couldn't prevent a stray tear from running down his cheek. The always perceptive Jacob reached out to wipe it away with his small hand.

“Don't cry, Daddy; I didn't want to hurt you, and I did...”

The misery in his face from upsetting his beloved parent was written all over his angelic face.

Vincent's smile reached his tearful eyes. “You didn't, Jacob. That tear was a happy one...”

Though still not convinced, the boy put his arms around Vincent's neck and embraced him with all his strength.

“I love you, Daddy...”

Vincent held his son close and kissed the top of his golden-blond head. Looking over Jacob's shoulder, he noticed Catherine watching him with a gentle smile. Her eyes were glistening.

"I love you too, always..." he whispered into the boy's ear and cradled him slowly.

Ever since he had learned of Jacob's existence for the first time, he knew this child was special. It was a child born out of the greatest love, a love that was compassionate, devoted, honest and strong. And in his short life, Jacob had proved that the very same love was running in his veins.

"Now," Vincent spoke after a moment. "Shall we show Charles what a real swimmer looks like?"

"Sure! But only if you show mummy how to dive!" The boy didn't even finish his reply and was already in the water.

"That should be interesting," a soft voice from behind him said, bemused.

Catherine overheard the last bit of Vincent's conversation with their son while little Charles was resting on the pool ledge. Her eyes went from Jacob to her beloved husband's face, those features she would never tire of seeing.

"Don't worry, Catherine," Vincent replied with a half-smile. "We are here to teach our son to swim, not to... explore the hidden wonders of... love."

Catherine made her way through the glittering water right towards him. The sparkles in her green eyes and the wide, almost cheeky smile spoke for her.

"There will always be time for that," she said, her eyes never leaving his gaze. "Later..."

Vincent chuckled and joined her in the pool. Yes, there will be time for much more. Later...

