

# WHEN HANDS AND HEARTS SPEAK

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*(Episode Expansion Season 2 Episode 6 – Sticks and Stones)*

“Hurry, please! He’s in danger!” Catherine exclaimed to the policeman in the car, as they were rushing through the side roads of the dodgy area of New York known as the home turf of gangs and criminals. Her heart was thumping wildly, she was scared they might be too late.

When the car drove out of an alley into a large open concreted space, Catherine saw two figures crouching at a wired fence separating the buildings behind it from the open space. She shot out of the car and ran towards them. It was Jerry, the undercover detective, and Laura, the deaf girl who had once lived in the Tunnels...

Catherine went down on her knees spotting a third person lying on the ground. She recognized Lincoln, the leader of the gang who had revealed Jerry and along with his gang members tried to punish him by stoning him to death. When she looked closer at the bloody marks on his chest, she gasped quietly - Vincent was here.

*He probably saved their lives...*

Catherine looked around her and up on the roof of the building behind her, trying to find the dark cloaked tall figure hiding somewhere in the shadows. But Vincent was gone.

She looked at the detective and the girl who was clinging to him desperately. Catherine crawled to them and touched Jerry’s leg. Seeing blood on different places of his head and body, she knew it must have been a close call for him.

“Are you all right?” she asked both of them.

Jerry only nodded, looking totally exhausted, though relieved as well. Catherine glanced at Laura in worry. The girl still had tears in her eyes. She signed the letter V.

“I know,” Catherine said with a smile. “You are safe now, both of you.”

She wanted to ask if Jerry had seen Vincent, but judging by his almost resigned expression, it didn’t seem likely. In the near distance in front of them, policemen were chasing and arresting the gang members who hadn’t managed to flee. Catherine looked back at the young lovers. What she needed to do now was get them to a hospital and sort it out with the police.

And then she would see Vincent.

The tunnels seemed much colder and darker that night, when he was making his way home through them. Vincent had had to leave Laura because there were policemen all around, but when he saw Catherine arriving, he knew she and Jerry were safe and he wasn’t needed there any more.

The damp air made him shudder.

*Why is it that children always have to learn the truth the hard way?*

Vincent’s heart went out to the deaf girl who had been his protégé ever since she came to the tunnels as a child. Abandoned, alone, unable to hear, unable to speak, lost, desperate.... In time,

Vincent was the first to have found his way to Laura, who had opened up her heart to him. He helped her to learn to speak through signs, developing her own language to communicate with her hands and with her heart. And in time, he became more than her teacher. He became her dearest friend. Just like he had with Mouse, who was a lost and abandoned child, disillusioned by the world Above and finding his voice and peace in the underground world, with Vincent's help.

At the bend just before the Home Tunnels, Vincent stopped for a moment leaning against the wet wall and sighing. Laura was so angry when she'd left the tunnels after the Council meeting. Of course, the members of the Council were right to have doubts about Laura having joined a gang Above. She had been raised by people who followed moral principles of love, respect and care for others. To live with people who stole, and sometimes hurt others to get what they wanted, was wrong in their eyes. It would have been wrong in the eyes of every good person.

But Vincent knew that Laura was suffering Above. Her great need to fit in, to blend in with the world outside of the tunnels, had not been easy for her. She had friends Below and Above, but in many ways, she was still alone. Vincent wished he would make her see that it was all right to make mistakes, as long as we learn from them and try to make things better. He knew she was hurting inside. It was the naivete of her youth and desperate wish for independence which tricked her and made her stubbornly refuse to listen to good advice of those who truly cared for her.

And now, all Vincent could do was hope that with the danger out of the way, Laura's heart would heal and she would find peace - with the Tunnels, with Jerry, and most of all, with herself.

Vincent pushed himself off the wall and started walking again. He was almost home and the chill of the wet stony corridors, and what he had just experienced, were creeping into his bones. Suddenly, he felt more tired than he did after a day of hard labour in the deepest parts of the tunnels. All he wanted to do was to rest his weary body and mind in sleep. With that thought, he quickened his pace.

It took Catherine almost two hours to get Jerry and Laura to hospital and give her testimony to the police. It was already past 11 pm when she made her way down Below to see Vincent, to tell him that Laura was safe. For most people it would seem an unusually late hour for visits. But with Vincent, Catherine had become so used to his late night visits on her balcony, that she didn't even think about the time. Putting his mind at ease was all she wished at that moment, and as she passed two sentries on her way to Vincent's chamber, they just smiled and greeted her as if it was midday.

Finally, Catherine entered the personal space of the man she loved and the sight which greeted her prevented her from calling his name.

Vincent was lying on his side in his extra large bed. His knees were slightly bent and his head was resting on his right arm. It almost looked as if he just wanted to rest a bit and fell asleep while doing so, for the quilt was under instead of over him. Catherine thought how vulnerable he looked in that position and his beautiful leonine face was showing signs of worry and fatigue.

*Of course, he's worried about Laura and her future. Oh, Vincent...*

Catherine thought of leaving for a moment, but as if a magnet was pulling her, she carefully sat down on the bed close to him. Vincent was fast asleep, for neither her movement nor her presence woke him up. Catherine was watching him lovingly. She was thinking about how much Vincent cared for everyone who knew him - and how much it often cost him. He invested so much energy and belief into each relationship, to make people become the best they could possibly be and still remain true to themselves.

Catherine remembered the first time she'd seen Vincent 'speak' with Laura, using the sign language. How in awe she was, as she hadn't known he could use it. She was reminded of how fluid and gracefully his hands and fingers worked when talking to Laura. It was striking how Vincent spoke, using his hands, the same way he spoke using words - always with care, precision

and softness, not wanting to overpower others, but to involve them and make them truly listen. Catherine smiled at that thought and reminded herself of how much she loved his way of connecting with people - of how much she loved *him*...

No matter how much Catherine loved talking to Vincent, she didn't want to disturb his sleep by awakening him. She knew how much the last days had worn him out. That was why she grabbed another blanket, carefully folded at the end of the bed and gently covered him. Unable to resist, she brushed his cheek with a feather light kiss.

She should have known better because Vincent woke up immediately and startled her a little when he stirred and opened his magnificent blue eyes. She felt embarrassed about watching him sleep, but Vincent didn't seem to realise or mind it because his eyes showed only genuine pleasure of seeing her and were caressing every line of her face.

"Catherine..." he breathed.

"Vincent... I'm sorry. I didn't want to wake you..." She stuttered a little, but smiled.

"It's all right," he smiled. "I just felt a bit tired. I must have fallen asleep."

"I just came by to check on you after... what happened..." she said with slight hesitation.

Suddenly, he remembered the events of the night. "How is Laura? And Jerry?" he asked worried.

"She and Jerry are fine and safe," Catherine replied, relieved. "I'll tell you about everything tomorrow after you get a proper sleep."

Vincent was just looked at her for a while. His intense blue eyes had the colour of the ocean in the semi-darkness of the sparingly lit chamber. The expression on his face was finally calm and relaxed, the stress of the past days slowly leaving it. Just by looking at the woman he loved so deeply, he could feel hope returning into his heart. Hope not just for Laura, but for everyone...

Almost unconsciously, Vincent reached to stroke Catherine's cheek tenderly, still gazing and smiling at her. She closed her eyes at the warm touch of his hand and her blissful smile widened. She leaned her face into his hand and her own hand encircled his wrist craving a deeper physical contact. Then she opened her eyes again and Vincent could see sparkles in their green depth.

"You should sleep, Vincent," she said, a bit reluctantly then. "Laura will come to speak to you tomorrow."

Vincent nodded and his clawed hand very slowly slid away from her cheek. Catherine immediately felt the physical loss and a slight ache at her heart caused by it. However, she shook it off with a smile and was ready to stand up.

"I'll walk you back to the threshold," Vincent said and moved to get up.

But Catherine quickly and gently pushed him back to the pillow. Her hands remained on his shoulders.

"I'll be fine," she said. "Rest now..."

Vincent suddenly realised he didn't have the strength to resist her. His eyes couldn't seem to get enough of her image, but his eyelids were visibly getting heavy again. And then, Catherine slowly leaned over him and kissed him on the forehead. When she pulled back, his eyes were closed, but he was smiling and there was something so innocent and sweet in his face that her heart leapt.

When Vincent didn't open his eyes again and she saw his chest rising and falling peacefully, she knew he fell asleep again. A gentle and warm smile lit up her face.

*Good night, my beloved...*

Catherine stood up and with one last look at him, she quietly walked out of the chamber.

Laura was signing her apologies to Jacob and other Council members. Vincent, as always, was translating for her.

“We understand it has been hard for you, Laura,” Jacob said. There was a clear understanding and worry for the girl in his grey eyes.

“And we know that sometimes, even with our best intentions, we can’t avoid hurting those we love along the way. So we accept your apology and we would like you to know, that you are always welcome here, should you need a shelter or would like to visit old friends.”

Seeing Jacob and others smile, Laura smiled as well, once Vincent finished translating for her. The relief and happiness in her face were there for all to see. Jacob embraced her warmly, followed by the rest of Council members. After Rebecca’s hug, Laura’s vision got a bit blurry and she signed the word *‘friend’* for her. Rebecca remembered their last word exchange and understood the significance of it. She signed the word in return.

“Friends... Forever, Laura,” she said with a smile.

Catherine was standing next to Vincent, watching the whole exchange. She was touched by the warmth and openness with which the tunnel inhabitants accepted Laura’s genuine apology and welcomed her back in their hearts. In fact, she had never left them, for the people living in the hidden underground world didn’t know hate or resentment. Only one of them did and he was not living with them any more. John Pater had been exiled many years ago. The rules of the tunnels were clear for everyone: love, respect, care for each other and forgiveness.

Catherine looked at Vincent and saw the joy in his twinkling eyes. When he noticed tears glistening in Catherine’s eyes, he took hold of her hand and smiled gently.

*“I will not say do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.”* (1)

The woman of his heart squeezed his hand and her face was glowing in the candlelight.

When Vincent, Catherine and Laura came to the drainage pipe leading out into Central Park, they stopped. The girl was obviously struggling with what she was trying to say, because her eyes were wandering from Vincent’s serene face, to the tunnels exit and back to Vincent’s eyes again. Finally, she started signing, her face mirroring her feelings.

“Don’t be ashamed,” Vincent said softly while signing as well. “Hate and rage are powerful forces in all of us. Don’t punish yourself for feeling them. They are a part of us we understand the least. Yet, they’re the part of us we should *try* to understand the most.”

Laura was looking gratefully at her beloved teacher and friend. Vincent noticed her hesitation again.

“What is it, Laura?” he asked.

The girl signed a single word and her face lit up with a smile.

“Jerry?” Vincent asked and Laura continued signing.

“I also hope to meet him... perhaps someday,” Vincent replied to her thought with a half-smile.

Then, seeing there was no more Laura wanted to say, he opened his arms. Laura welcomed the invitation heartily and hugged her friend tightly. For that moment, she looked like a child in her father’s loving arms.

The conversation and action between them warmed Catherine’s heart. She perfectly understood the young girl’s eager embrace of her teacher. Vincent’s embraces always gave one a feeling like coming home after a long and arduous journey - warm, comforting and safe.

After Vincent and Laura pulled apart, Catherine walked to Laura and hugged her as well. When they parted, the girl signed *‘thank you’*. Catherine nodded with a heartfelt smile.

Laura started walking away from them, but then she turned around once more to see her friend's faces watching her leaving. With a beaming smile, she signed '*I love you*' and they returned the words.

For a moment after Laura had left, Vincent was staring into the drainage pipe through which she had walked out back into the world Above.

Catherine noticed his melancholy by the expression of deep thought in his face.

"You have a lot to be proud of, Vincent," she said smiling.

He looked at her, his eyes partially wondering, partially still deep in thought.

"For all that you've given to Laura and taught her," Catherine finished.

Vincent looked into the distance before speaking softly. "I never realised until now just how much she's given *me*. And how much I miss her..." He looked away again.

"She's been through a lot," Catherine said making Vincent look at her.

"The world has tested her," he replied.

"And yet, she chooses to remain Above," Catherine smiled with an almost dreamy look in her eyes.

"She's in love..." Vincent said raising his eyebrow briefly.

Then his look softened and an enigmatic smile settled on his lips when he saw the unspoken reply to his words in Catherine's eyes.

*Just like I am, Vincent...*

Catherine broke the intensity of their gaze and spoke again.

"That she could forgive Jerry... that took courage. It's the rarest kind of love."

"To surrender yourself completely to your heart... To trust in it fully, to believe in it without doubting..." He continued her thought with his gaze piercing hers.

"To let it guide your life..." Catherine finished, totally transfixed by the intensity of his sparkling blue eyes.

After a beat, she found her words again. "Somehow Laura's found a way," she added hopefully with a flash of a smile.

"Yes."

Vincent's reply was short but the intense look in his eyes and the enigmatic smile weren't leaving his face.

*We will find it too, Catherine...*

"Will it make her life any simpler, do you think?" Catherine asked, drinking from his eyes thirstily for both an answer and something more.

Vincent tilted his head, then lowered his eyes, chuckled quietly and shook his head.

"No... Not simpler," he replied bemused.

"But she'll be happier," Catherine wasn't letting go of what she was trying to convey to him.

He tilted his head again and the look in his eyes was curiously studying her face.

"Perhaps..."

Catherine, with her gaze never leaving his eyes, stepped closer to him.

"Trust me, Vincent, she *will* be happier..."

Her loving smile and the conviction in her soft but steady voice made him raise his head. In his eyes, Catherine could read more than love in that moment - it was utter wonder and amazement, recognising her own feelings towards him.

Her smile widened and Vincent was thinking she had never looked lovelier than that very moment, her eyes shining bright in the dim light like two diamonds. And the power and intensity of her love for him he could feel flowing so strongly through their bond was undeniable.

Unable to look away from her face, he offered her his hand as she reached out for the edge of his cloak, pulling at it briefly to assure him how strongly she believed in her words. When their fingers entwined, Vincent felt a heat spreading in his body like wildfire. Catherine lowered her eyes, but couldn't stop smiling, as she led him back towards the Home Tunnels. Even when he pulled the lever to close the steel door behind them, his eyes were resting on her glowing face. After all their time together, she still managed to take his breath away.

Catherine was still smiling as they neared his chamber. The ambiguous conversation with Vincent had left a lingering warm feeling in her heart. They hadn't spoken since, each basking in their own feelings for each other. But every now and then, Catherine couldn't resist glancing aside at Vincent. The wondrous beautiful expression in his face was pulling her to him like a magnet. And as always, he mirrored her actions almost unconsciously. They were so in sync in everything, that they had slowly but surely become one soul in two bodies.

"Vincent, I just thought of something I've never asked you before..." Catherine broke the blissful silence finally.

"What, Catherine?"

"How did you learn to use sign language?"

Vincent smiled and looked ahead again.

"We had a Helper when I was in my early twenties. She used to teach in a school for hearing-impaired children. Her name was Rose. She used to come Below almost every week, bringing Father medical books she borrowed from the library she was using. You know Father's keen interest in the progress in medicine. What he couldn't get from Peter, he got from Rose," he said bemused.

"Oh yes! Last week, I brought him the newest issue of *The American Journal of Medicine* and judging by his reaction, you would have thought I gave him the Nobel Prize for Literature or something. He was so excited!" Catherine laughed.

Vincent chuckled and continued.

"Well, one day, Rose came to see Father as usual, but he was held up in the Hospital chamber. While she was waiting for him, she was practising a speech she was about to have that evening at a conference for sign language teachers. Of course, she had to use sign language as well. After a little while, I started mimicking some signs she was using. I found it fascinating how you could use so many different moves and gestures to convey different words and put them into sentences, giving them a real meaning."

Vincent paused for a moment and chuckled for himself.

"Rose noticed my poor attempts at imitating her and asked me if I wanted to learn to sign properly. I guess you know what my answer was by now," he finished with a smile and glanced at her.

Catherine shook her head in awe and smiled at him.

"I have *never* met anyone so passionate about learning as you, Vincent," she said looking at him with deep admiration. "You speak Russian, you can sign, you could easily get the highest degree in classical literature and music, you're an expert on arts, and your knowledge of biology is on higher level than most high school teachers."

“The limitations caused by my condition have always been a blessing in disguise - they made me hungry for more. When I couldn’t experience things Above, I wanted to learn about them as much as I could,” Vincent said, eagerness reflected in his voice.

“To master something, to excel in it meant that I have crossed another hurdle and turned it to my advantage. At some point I have realised, that *the only limitation is that which one sets up in one’s own mind,*” he concluded with a quote. (2)

Catherine’s smile faded as she gave him a longing look. *I wish you would see everything like this, Vincent...*

He felt the sadness pass like a shadow through her heart and stopped to look into her eyes. There it was, written all over her face and in the eyes which were burning into his own almost painfully.

*I know, Catherine...Please, forgive me, I just... It’s a hurdle I’m not ready to cross yet....*

Of course, she understood him. The haunted look of his now a shade darker blue eyes brought out her compassion. Catherine took mercy on him and smiled, easing the tension between them. She looked away, sighed and started walking again. Then she laughed and shook her head again.

“I had Spanish at high school and later Daddy paid for my French lessons. But I was truly hopeless and Daddy soon realised that he could put his money to a much better use.”

The sound of her laughter was like music to Vincent’s ears.

“I’m afraid I will never have great communication skills in any other languages than my own,” Catherine concluded.

Vincent smiled lovingly at her.

*“The greatest communication skill is paying value to others. And that, Catherine, is a skill you definitely possess in abundance.”* (3)

She looked at him with misty eyes and then, a beaming smile graced her face again.

*There are no words... Isn’t that your phrase, Vincent?*

The acknowledgement reflected in his look made her tremble. He tightened the hold on her hand and they walked into the warm light of his chamber.

END

- 1) J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings - The Return of the King*
- 2) *Napoleon Hill: Think and Grow Rich*
- 3) Denis Waitley