

NO KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOUR

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(Episode Expansion -Season 2 Episode 7 – A Fair and Perfect Knight)

Note: When I read the first version of the script of the episode 'A Fair And Perfect Knight', I loved that version of the problem-resolving scene between Vincent and Catherine (although I totally adore the final version and it's one of my favourite scenes of the whole show). And it is one moment, one sentence which Catherine says to Vincent in that scene, which has stuck with me since then. I knew I had to use it in this story somehow. Hopefully, I found an appropriate way to do so.

Shock, confusion, fear, dread, anger, agony.... A mix of feelings were raging in Vincent ever since he had returned to his chamber after seeing Michael unexpectedly in the tunnel. The look in the younger man's eyes confirmed his worst fear, since that cold feeling had grabbed his heart suddenly earlier that night. Michael had kissed Catherine.

He knew it was totally unexpected for Catherine. She didn't initiate it and the absolute shocked surprise and discomfort when it happened resonated in his heart and mind clearly. What Vincent couldn't process though, was his own feelings arising from the situation, like a volcano inside him. The frustration and anger raging in him was like a massive tide, threatening to overcome him completely.

It shouldn't have happened... It can't happen! Not if I cannot be the one!!

He leaned against the rocky wall and was taking deep breaths to slow down his racing heart. With his hands balled into fists, Vincent felt on the edge of an abyss he wanted to throw himself into. Suddenly, pushing himself away from the wall, he started pacing around the chamber. It took a great effort not to throw things about.

How dare he?! She belongs with me, with me alone, no one else!!

His mouth was filled with bitter taste, his throat was narrowing. Gasping for air, Vincent felt tears burning in his eyes. And as suddenly as anger had clouded his mind and heart, so suddenly other feelings replaced it - shame and guilt.

How could you...?

He closed his eyes in pain, he slumped into the high padded chair and buried his face in his hands in despair.

Catherine sped up her walk through the tunnels. Actually, she was almost running; her were feet mirroring the situation in her head.

How could this have happened? How could I have not foreseen it?? He's so vulnerable and hurt, grasping for any piece of kindness... He truly needs help, but not the one he was wishing for...

Shaking her head, a frown creasing the forehead of her pretty face, she was mentally going through the events of that evening and her own inability to judge things for what they truly were.

Vincent.... She knew he must have felt the kiss, but she also hoped and prayed he felt that she did not enjoy it and it was totally unexpected - and unwanted.

When Catherine finally reached his chamber, she stopped at the threshold. The hunched posture of his body in the chair told her the misery he was feeling.

Oh, God, what have I done...?

He felt her standing behind him. In fact, he had felt her nearing to his chamber miles away, yet, though tears almost sprang into his eyes just from breathing the same air, he could not rejoice in it. Whatever she would say to him, nothing could ease the pain he was feeling inside.

“Vincent?” Catherine asked, carefully and softly.

He didn’t turn his head, just raised it slightly, directing his look stubbornly at one of the thick candles on the table before him. He put his left arm on the table, almost as if to steady himself. His hand was shaking slightly.

Catherine walked slowly in and one look at his face shook her to the core. Yet, she knew the next words spoken between them were vital for their relationship.

“Michael... he ran away....”

She waited for a moment, her eyes never leaving his face. When there was no reply, she sat down slowly on the edge of Vincent’s bed and continued watching him, feeling tense, almost afraid of his reaction.

“We went to his orientation party tonight and unexpectedly, he saw his father there.... He talked to him briefly, but it didn’t turn out well and he ran out. When I caught up with him outside, he was so upset that he broke down and...”

Catherine stopped for a moment, trying to put in right words the critical moment.

“I guess he misread my friendly interest and... he kissed me...”

Not even that statement could break Vincent’s silence. He hadn’t moved since she started talking; he just kept staring at the candle in front of him.

“Vincent, Michael’s so heartbroken... There are things he didn’t tell you, or anyone, and he’s ashamed about that.... He’s like a lost child who needs a helping hand...”

Still, nothing. Catherine was getting desperate, fearing he might misinterpret her feelings.

“Go to him Vincent... He needs you!”

She was pleading at this point, willing him to finally say something; to acknowledge that the whole situation was just an unhappy misunderstanding and that a boy’s life had just shattered like a house of cards, for the second time in his young existence.

Vincent just lightly shook his head before his almost broken voice finally spoke.

“No.”

Catherine was grasping at straws, her body was leaning forward desperately, trying to be closer to the man she loved with all her heart. Yet, she knew he needed space.

“What do you think happened?”

Vincent took a moment. “Nothing.... happened.... I know that.”

His voice was barely audible.

Catherine exhaled partially in relief, partially confused. “Then?”

Vincent felt he was losing his fragile composure and covered his eyes with his hand.

‘You must leave.’

Catherine’s eyes widened. “No...”

She didn’t even manage to blink, when Vincent’s hand suddenly slammed the table knocking over one of the candles. Then he shot from his chair and walked further away from her.

“Leave now!!”

He stopped at a pedestal near the wall leaning heavily against it with his hands, his head bowed low.

She couldn't help but notice how attractive his slim, but perfectly-built body looked without the massive veil of his ever-present cloak.

“Why do you want me to leave?” Catherine demanded, frightened more with every minute passing. She could hear Vincent's ragged breathing.

“Because what I'm feeling... my thoughts.... shame me...”

He still had his head bowed, pushing against the pedestal with both hands as if trying to push away the bitter feelings eating him inside.

Catherine rose from the bed and walked to his side, but didn't touch him.

“Tell me... Tell me what you feel!”

The nearness of her almost burned him. Without looking at her, he pushed off the pedestal and walked away from her, stopping at the massive wardrobe on the other side of the chamber.

“You mustn't see me like this!”

His voice was quiet but very strained. Its usual velvety soothing tone was overshadowed by his emotional turmoil and agony.

“Please, don't send me away!” Catherine almost cried in fear. *Please, please, don't leave me, I will die if you do...!!*

Vincent continued pacing, raised his head to the ceiling for a moment and sighed heavily, then bowed his head again and grasped the chair in front of him for support.

“My thoughts are poisonous!”

Catherine dared to walk a bit closer to him demanding. “Tell me these thoughts!”

Finally, Vincent looked at her and the despair and pain in his eyes almost broke her. His eyes were glistening and she knew he was fighting so hard not to cry...

Gathering all his mental strength, Vincent exhaled deeply and looked away again. He bowed his head slightly in defeat before almost whispering.

“What you shared... I envied...”

Catherine sighed and closed her eyes. What she felt was relief. He wasn't angry with her, he was angry with himself. He wasn't so different from a man after all. What Vincent felt was jealousy.

“Vincent...”

“I betrayed you, I betrayed Michael, everything I hold dear.”

“How did you betray us?”

The gentle tone of her voice made him look at her again. He knew there was no going back - she deserved to know the truth.

His hands covered his heart, his eyes were welling up again.

“I know what it is to love you, Catherine...,” he said tearfully. “I love Michael like a brother, like a son! But his life's been such a struggle...He needed to be healed by your tenderness. And yet...”

He looked away from her and started pacing again. “I was unwilling to share your love with anyone.”

“Don't be ashamed of those feelings...,” she pleaded gently.

"It violates everything I believe," he said, still pacing, then stopped in the corner of the chamber, his head slightly bowed.

Catherine couldn't stand the distance between them any more. All she wanted to do was take him in her arms and make him understand that what he was feeling was just a perfect human reaction, that nothing had changed between them. So she walked over to him, gently touching his arm and back. Vincent looked up and sighed at the feel of her touch.

"Don't you think I have those feelings too? Sometimes... I envy Father and others in your life who receive your love and your care every day! I know those feelings, they are ugly!"

Vincent winced.

"But... all of those feelings come from love!" she added softly. "To turn away from them is to forget where they come from!"

Vincent's felt his resolve to keep her away from him was slowly failing. He turned to her and pressed both his hands to his heart again, while his deep eyes looked at her with such love and longing she almost cried.

"Catherine... The better part of me would rejoice seeing you find love with someone as fine and good as Michael..."

She shook her head though waiting for him to go on. Her hand was still lightly lingering on his forearm, maintaining the physical contact.

Dear God, I want to hold her so much...!! He quickly walked away from her again.

"You have so much love to give..."

"Because of you!" Catherine cried, holding her hands over her heart.

He looked at her briefly, for a second desperately wanting to believe her.

"Our time together is always so measured, so limited," he said, as he resumed his pacing.

"We don't know what the limits are..."

"You deserve a life without limits."

"There is no life without limits!!"

She almost screamed the last words and that stopped him finally. He bowed his head so low she couldn't see his face through the veil of his golden hair.

Catherine took a deep breath, closed her eyes for a moment, then smiled a little and walked over to him.

"Vincent... If this is my fate, I accept it... gratefully! You must believe that..."

Hearing those words, spoken softly yet with conviction, he looked at her immediately. Still not convinced of his worthiness, he shook his head lightly. His cheeks were wet from tears now.

Catherine's look was gentle and loving, but fierce.

"Don't be afraid to want it," Vincent hung his head in pain, "...even if only for yourself. Don't be afraid to deserve it, you deserve everything!"

He looked at her again. The huge wave of her love, and the total acceptance of their fate flowing to his heart, finally broke him. She wanted to share his life with him and no one else, no matter what the cost... His bottom lip started trembling as he bowed his head, tears streaming down his face.

Catherine stepped to him and he gratefully laid his head on her shoulder, his arms slowly but hungrily went around her waist. She sighed in relief and pulled his head even closer, stroking his head gently and resting her cheek against it. Then, his silent tears were joined by hers.

"Oh, Catherine...", he breathed into her shoulder helplessly, between quiet sobs.

She embraced him tighter and planted a lingering kiss into his golden hair.

"I love you... so much that it almost hurts..." she whispered.

Vincent shuddered hearing her words and tightened his hold on her too.

"Love does hurt sometimes," he replied quietly.

Catherine pulled back a little, took his face gently in her hands and leaned her forehead against his. The look in her emerald eyes was full of deep love and desperate need.

"Please, don't run away from me, Vincent.... Can't you see? I *need* you... so badly!"

Her eyes filled with tears, her bottom lip was trembling.

Vincent, moved to the bottom of his being, only whispered. "Run away? Without you I would cease to breathe..."

He straightened up and embraced her tightly, hungrily as if never wanting to let her go. Catherine sighed and buried her wet cheeks in his chest, her arms clinging to him as if her life depended on it. Whatever was ahead of them, there was no doubt that they would face it together.

The winter breeze was playing with her freshly-washed and dried hair, as she walked out on the balcony, wrapped only in one of her silk night robes. The evening was unusually warm for the time of year, so she didn't need a sweater. She felt a touch of coldness though, on the inside. She was missing Vincent...

When they had calmed down after their slightly-heated exchange in his chamber, Catherine asked him to find Michael and talk to him, for the boy needed help. She was sure he felt guilty of breaking Vincent's trust, but still needed him.

Vincent understood the truth in her words and because he loved Michael almost like a son, and knew how vulnerable young people were. He agreed to go right away. When he was leaving, his eyes were still a bit sad. The shame he felt at his jealousy earlier was still lingering in the back of his mind, despite of Catherine's loving words. He had embraced Catherine though, and kissed the top of her head lightly, before leaving her at the threshold of her building and returning to the Tunnels to find Michael.

Catherine could feel his sadness. No matter how strong and steady her love for him was, it would always be an uphill struggle for Vincent to fully believe in himself, in the truth, that he was more than worthy of her deep affection and the love binding them together. She knew he was still learning to accept himself as he was in their relationship, but truthfully, she would never have him any other way even if she could. She loved Vincent, not despite of who he was, but *because* of who he was. His fate had made him the man he became, making the best and most of his limitations. His grace, wisdom, empathy, generosity, gentle manners and kindness were unlike anyone else in her life. And yes, she found him beautiful to look at as well. She just wished Vincent would see and accept himself like that one day as well.

Just as she sighed and leaned against the balustrade of her balcony, she heard rustling in the corner behind her.

Vincent was quiet, his mood was sombre, but she could feel he wasn't trying to keep distant from her. He only seemed a bit vulnerable, not sure whether he could approach her or not. The emotional turmoil of the day had left his soul exposed and fragile. She didn't want to abuse him by trying to get too close to him, if he wasn't ready for it. Therefore, despite her heart leaping at his presence, she just smiled warmly at him.

"I wasn't sure you would come tonight," she said quietly. "But I'm glad you did."

As if emboldened by her words, he slowly walked towards Catherine, joining her watching the city lights.

"I spoke to Michael," he said quietly.

Catherine's look remained at the city lights, feeling his apprehension.

"How is he?" she asked, almost in a matter-of-fact tone.

Vincent felt her caution. "He will be all right. We talked ...," he stopped mid-sentence, unable to name the disturbing moment. "...The situation though ... and his father... He will go to the University. He will be staying with one of our older Helpers before he moves to the campus."

Catherine smiled a little. *An older Helper, of course. It's safer that way.*

"I'm glad. I will bring the things he has here to the threshold later tonight," she said. She was dying to ask '*and how are you?*' but she knew she had to thread lightly.

Neither of them made eye contact. There was a tension between them, almost like a very thin glass wall, enabling them to see each other, but not touch. As if they were afraid to step closer to each other, although it was so easy - all they had to do was break the glass...

They kept silent for what seemed like an eternity looking out into the city when Catherine decided to brave the storm.

"The lights are so beautiful tonight," she said still looking ahead of her.

"Yes..." Vincent agreed softly, while looking ahead too.

She couldn't wait any longer, she had to see him, to see that beautiful yet tormented face...

Catherine's head slowly turned and her eyes met his. Her gaze and her whole face telling him how much she loved him, begging him to understand and let go of his shame.

There was no anger, no pain in his eyes. Just a trace of uncertainty and oh yes.... love.

I know, Catherine, believe me... I feel it and it's been my only touchstone...

She sighed softly when he didn't seem to want to hold her and looked out into the city again.

Vincent mirrored her action, but then he sighed a little as well and almost laughed at his own behaviour when he reached his decision, understanding how unnecessary his keeping-the-distance attitude was. Unnecessary and totally unacceptable, for all he wanted to do was to devour her in his embrace.

His arm went slowly around Catherine's shoulders and pulled her closer to him.

Catherine almost screamed with joy inside. But on the outside, just a tiny hint of a smile graced her lips, as she leaned her head against Vincent's shoulder stepping closer to him. When she felt his thumb gently caressing her arm and his head leaning lightly against her own, her arm went around his waist pulling him closer, sighing in relief and contentment. Vincent's heart sped up its rhythm immediately.

How could anyone not love her, indeed?

They continued looking at the city lights, but now there was no glass wall dividing them now. They were one heart and one soul in two bodies again and the uncertainty, guilt and shame were slowly melting away like the last resisting snow of a long winter.

END