

TITLE: VANTAGE POINT

RATING: PG 13. LANGUAGE.

CLASSIFICATION: SND

SUMMARY: A take on how things could have happened after the episodes TLBL.

AUTHORS NOTES: For the purposes of this story anything, other than Vincent rescuing his son Jacob, after the episode Walk Slowing happened. Meaning Gabriel, Elliot, and Father are alive. Special thanks to JoAnn Baca for all your help in editing, encouragement and advice. This story will be told in four parts from a different vantage point of three characters.

VANTAGE POINT

By Maryann N Wood

PART ONE: VINCENT

CHAPTER ONE

It was a quiet evening in the tunnels. Vincent sat with his son, Jacob, reading at his writing desk in his chamber. Vincent looked up from his book at his son. Jacob was so absorbed in a picture he was drawing that he didn't notice his father watching him. He reminded Vincent so much of Catherine at times that it was almost painful to look at him. He had her nose, her hair colour, her eyes - the eyes that Vincent so desperately wished he could gaze into once more. Most importantly, Jacob had her warmth, her compassion, her gentle disposition.

The boy had just turned four two weeks ago. The date they celebrated his birthday was the day Vincent found his son. The day he held him in his arms for the first time. He decided to celebrate Jacob's birthday on that date instead of the date of his actual birth.

That date marked the worst in Vincent's life. A day that ripped a hole in his heart that never healed. The pain that never went numb. The day his Catherine died. A lump came to his throat thinking about it. Tears threatened to fall.

Vincent turned his gaze away from Jacob and looked around the room. There were tokens of Catherine everywhere. Books they had read together. Personal possessions Peter had brought down to him from Catherine's apartment. Her hope chest sat at the foot of his bed. Filled with memories from her childhood, her years at school and, most importantly, mementos of her time with him. The mask she wore to Brigit O'Donnell's book party, sheets of music from concerts they attended tucked under the stage of Central Park. Little pieces of fabrics, rocks, dried flowers, each labelled in her cursive: *Vincent's and my first hug*; *Vincent's and my first walk through the tunnels*; *Vincent's and my first trip to the falls*; *Vincent's and my first kiss*. His eyes then fell to the shelf behind Jacob. A picture of Catherine sat there, taken at her first and only Winterfest. She was a vision then and the picture captured her beauty. Vincent closed his eyes, trying to gather his composure before Jacob saw the raw emotion in his face.

When he felt safe to do so, Vincent opened his eyes and looked at his son once more. Jacob was smiling as he drew his picture, a determined look on the boy's face. Vincent looked down at what he was drawing. It was a picture of eight identical white one-story buildings on a plot of grass, arranged in an octagon. A fence surrounded the perimeter, with a forest wrapping around the whole property. Windows lined each building with what looked like bars on them. Jacob was concentrating on one window in particular. He was drawing flowers all around the window.

"Jacob, what is it that you are drawing?" he questioned his son.

"Flowers for mother," he replied without looking up.

Vincent was about to question him further when Mary walked into the chamber.

"Jacob, sweetheart, it's time for your bath," she said, walking up to the table.

"Aww, Auntie Mary, do I have to?" he whined, setting his crayon down.

"Yes. You and Luke got into the sand pits today; you both are filthy."

"Father, do I really have to?"

"Hmm?" Distracted, Vincent looked up from the drawing and saw his son and Mary staring at him, waiting for an answer.

"Do I have to have a bath?"

Vincent shook his head to clear it then smiled. "Yes," he replied. "Listen to Aunt Mary and have a bath. I'll meet you in your chamber to tuck you in and read you your story."

“All right,” Jacob replied, defeated.

Mary smiled at Vincent as Jacob hopped off the chair and took Mary’s hand. She gave his hand a squeeze and started to lead him out. “If you turn that frown upside down, Jacob, I just may bring you some cookies and milk for your bedtime story tonight,” she said.

“Oh, really, Auntie Mary? That would be wonderful. Could they be oatmeal? No, wait, peanut butter. No, no, I think William just made chocolate chip...”

Vincent smiled as his son’s voice faded off as he and Mary exited the chamber and headed down the hall towards the bathing chambers.

Vincent stood and started gathering Jacob’s drawings and crayons. He looked once more at the picture his son had drawn. He looked at the window with the flowers. “Catherine.” Vincent sighed lightly, touching the window their son had assigned her.

He neatly put Jacob’s drawings and crayons away in his son’s satchel. He would question him later about the drawing. Perhaps tomorrow, when they would sit for their evening together.

CHAPTER TWO

Vincent couldn’t question Jacob the next evening, nor the one after that, about the drawing. A leak in the pipes near the western exit kept him and some other tunnel dwellers busy with repairs.

The drawing was all but forgotten.

Vincent walked towards Jacob’s chamber late one evening; it was located right next to his own. He was about to enter when he heard Jacob reading aloud. It still amazed him how smart his son was. At just four years old, he was reading small chapter books. He was able to process information and come to intelligent conclusions that far exceeded his age, though he still had that child-like wonder that made those conclusions adorable.

When Vincent walked into his chamber, he looked around and smiled. It reminded him so much of his own chamber when he was a child. Wooden toys and stuffed animals clutter the shelves that surrounded the room. A bookshelf stood across the wall behind Jacob’s bed. It held an assortment of books. Picture books, chapter books, even books that were still too advanced for the boy, but that Jacob wanted

for when he was old enough. On his nightstand, next to a few trinkets and a lamp, stood a picture of Catherine, the same one from Winterfest that Vincent had in his own chamber.

Jacob was in his pajamas and sitting in his bed. He was holding a doll that once belonged to Catherine that Vincent had found in her hope chest among her belongings. Not knowing the name that Catherine had given the doll when she was a young girl, Jacob called the doll Alice, saying she looked like Alice from Alice in Wonderland. The doll sat in his lap as he read from one of his favorite books, The Velveteen Rabbit.

“‘Real isn't how you are made,’ said the Skin Horse,” Jacob read out loud. “‘It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become real.’”

“Jacob, you started without me,” Vincent said, smiling as he approached the bed.

“Sorry, Father. Mother was sad, so I started to read to her. It makes her happy when I read.”

Vincent frowned at his son's words. He sat next to the boy on the bed. “What do you mean, Jacob? Reading to Mother?”

“She was sad again. She's always sad. But when I read to her, she doesn't cry and it helps her fall asleep.”

“Jacob...” Vincent started slowly. “Jacob, you know your mother is up in heaven. She's happy there. She misses us as much as we miss her but, believe me, she's not sad, she's at peace.”

“No,” Jacob insisted, slamming the book shut. “No. She's sick and in the hospital. I keep asking her when she will get better and come home, but she doesn't answer.”

“Jacob,” Vincent said, his voice becoming stern, “your mother can't come home. I explained this to you before. I know you want her to. I would give anything to have her with us. It's not possible.”

Jacob looked at his father angrily. “Why don't you believe me?” he cried, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Jacob, I want to, I do. It's just not possible.”

“Fine! Go away then. I want to go to sleep now!” Jacob yelled. He slammed the book down on his nightstand then turned his back to his father and laid down, hugging Alice to his chest and covering his head with his blanket.

Vincent sighed and hung his head in defeat. He laid a hand on his son's shoulder and whispered, "Good night, my son. I love you." He stood and started to make his way out of the chamber, putting out the lanterns and lights as he left. He stopped at the threshold of the chamber and looked back. Jacob was still huddled under the covers. He barely heard his son whisper, "Goodnight, Mother, I love you."

Vincent walked slowly through the tunnels towards Father's chamber. The lanterns were lowered to save on oil. The pipes clinked with goodnight messages, reminders about tomorrow's events, and messages the children sent each other from their chambers, thinking the adults couldn't hear their chatter when they were supposed to be going to sleep. Light chatter could be heard in chambers where the drapes were drawn as families settled in for the night. The ambience was usually peaceful for Vincent, but tonight it didn't comfort him as it usually did.

He approached Father's chamber and spoke softly before entering. "Father, are you busy? May I come in?" he asked.

"Of course, Vincent," Father answered. "You are always welcome."

Vincent walked into Father's chamber and over to where the old man sat at his desk, a book in his hands. He sat in his customary chair across from Father and looked to the ground.

"What's troubling you, Vincent?" Father asked, concern in his voice.

Vincent sighed. "It's Jacob."

"What about Jacob? Is he okay, is he not well?" Father immediately asked.

"No, no," Vincent reassured him. "His health is fine. It's just some things he's been saying and drawing that have me concerned."

"What kinds of things?"

"He's been talking about Catherine lately. Or, really, talking *to* Catherine. He thinks she's in a hospital somewhere and that he can read to her, talk to her. He says she's sad and when he talks to her it makes her happy. He drew a picture of what I guess resembles a hospital complex, with flowers outside a window, saying that it was her room and the flowers were for her."

Vincent paused for a moment. He wanted to gather his thoughts before he continued.

"Father, you know how Catherine and I had a special bond before I lost her. You always said I had gift for empathy, that it was stronger than anything you ever

imagined. What if I passed some of that empathy along to Jacob? What if, somehow, he's envisioning when he was born, when he was taken from Catherine. And he's seeing it through his eyes now?"

Father thought for a moment before replying. "Anything is possible. It's extremely rare for anyone to remember something from an early age, let alone their birth, although you and your son are different. Your bond with Catherine was something extremely rare. It was extraordinary. It is certainly possible you passed some of that along to Jacob. He is an extremely intelligent child - a genius, I would even say. His reception to human emotions is baffling. As he gets older, he'll start to realize what really happened to his mother. This could be just a coping mechanism."

Vincent nodded and looked back at the ground. "That is what I thought. But to hear him talk about her, like she wasn't gone from us, hurts. I try to understand that he is just a child with hopes, but the wound in my heart from her loss is just as raw as it was four years ago. I don't know how much I can bear."

Father placed his book on the desk and stood. He walked over and stood behind his son, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "It's going to be difficult, Vincent," he said. "Jacob is old enough now to realize what the loss of his mother means, and he is trying to deal with it in his own way. Eventually, he will come to terms with the loss, but until then you will have to try to be understanding. Remember though, after being a father to Jacob and helping him through this, I, too, am a father, your father, and it will be my turn to help my son through this. I'll be there for you."

Vincent smiled sadly and placed his hand over the top of his father's. "Thank you, Father," he whispered.

"Anytime, my son." Father gave Vincent's shoulder a comforting squeeze, then returned to his chair and continued to read his book.

Vincent sat there for the rest of the evening with his father, taking comfort in the silence and his father's presence.

Late that night, Vincent made his way above. Traveling in the shadows, he made his way to the cemetery to visit Catherine's grave.

He came often during the week to sit with her and speak of Jacob and all the others who loved her. He would tell her how everyone was. What was happening in their lives. Every time, for the last four years, he would have a story to tell her. How Joe and Jenny were engaged and expecting their first child. How when Devin came to visit last year and met Diana, it was love at first sight; they both now traveled the world, working with Greenpeace and other non-profit organizations. Mouse, as usual, was inventing various contraptions. Most of the inventions, Vincent would laugh when he spoke of them, worked. How Jamie and Mouse were courting, as Father would say, slowly allowing their budding romance to bloom. Kanin and Olivia had twin girls a year ago.

Every other Saturday, Jamie or Samantha or another trusted tunnel dweller would bring Jacob up to visit his mother's grave. A dying bouquet of wildflowers that Jacob must have picked lay on the ground in front of the tombstone.

When he arrived tonight, Vincent slowly sat down and leaned against the tombstone. He gently traced Catherine's name and sighed. "Catherine," he began, "I'm so worried about are son. He misses you greatly. He seems to think he can visit you in his thoughts and dreams. It worries me that he thinks these visions are real..." Vincent paused, fighting back the tears that threatened to fall.

"I don't know what to do, Catherine. Part of me wants him to have these dreams, these visions of you, but I know the result will only hurt him. I know that hurt. Every time I close my eyes, I envision you tucked against me. It is a pain that saddens me greatly, but at the same time terrifies me to lose."

He stopped speaking for a moment and let his tears fall. A lump formed in his throat as grief overtook him once again. The pain in his heart intensified.

"Catherine!" he cried. "I know I must be strong for Jacob. To be there for him, but time does not heal all wounds. If anything, it only deepens them. I don't know how much longer I can continue pretending to be okay. Pretending that the pain I feel from the loss of you is turning into a dull ache. It's getting worse, Catherine. Seeing Jacob grow. Seeing how every day he looks more like you. He even has your laugh now."

Vincent closed his eyes, biting his lip, and struggled to gain control of his emotions. He clenched his fists, fighting his anger, his sorrow. Fighting to calm down enough to make his way back Below. After several long minutes, when he felt control returning to him, he opened his eyes. He traced Catherine's name once more and whispered, "Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have

no dominion.’ ” With a kiss to her tombstone, he whispered once more, “I love you, my Catherine. I shall return to visit soon.”

He stood and brushed off his pants and smiled sadly. With one final glance down, Vincent retreated towards the tunnels below the city.

CHAPTER THREE

The Painted Tunnels were always a favorite for the children. Elizabeth decided to start giving the children art lessons once a week.

Vincent and Kanin were in the tunnels setting up some desks and easels to help with Elizabeth’s classes. It was the first class and, as of now, a handful of children, including Luke and Jacob, sat in a semi-circle around the chair Elizabeth sat in. Each had a sketch pad and pencil in their laps.

“Now, children,” she began, “for our first lesson I want you to draw something that you love. Something that brings you joy. It could be a person, a toy, somewhere you like to visit. When you draw, paint or sketch, it’s best to start with things that make you happy. It could be just about anything. Picture what you want to draw in your minds, children, then use the pencil to bring that vision to life. Technique will come in time. No picture you draw today will be bad; all will be a work of art because it will be of something you care about.”

The children all nodded and then set to work on creating their first works of art.

“I’d bet you a sentry shift in the middle of the night that Luke is drawing a hotdog right now,” Kanin whispered with a smile on his face.

Vincent looked towards the children and smiled. “Perhaps,” he replied. “Jacob, on the other hand, is probably drawing a book. His nose is constantly stuck in one.”

“At least Jacob likes to read actual books. All Luke reads is comic books. I don’t know who brought those damn things down here, but that’s all he will willingly read.”

Vincent smiled at his friend and shook his head.

Ten minutes later, they were almost finished setting up the makeshift classroom when Elizabeth announced, “All right, children, set your pencils down. It’s now time to go around and share with the class what you drew. I’ll go first.”

She turned her sketch towards the children to show them her drawing. “I drew all of you children,” she said. “Teaching you all how to draw makes me happy, so I wanted to show that through my drawing.” The picture captured all the children’s likenesses in wonderful ways, all of them with their heads down, deep in thought as they drew what was in their minds.

“That’s beautiful, Miss Elizabeth,” Jacob remarked.

“Why, thank you for the compliment, Jacob. An artist is always pleased when someone appreciates their work. Now, let’s go around in a circle and share what we drew with the class. We are going to describe what we drew, including what colours you envisioned. You may have only used a grey pencil, but I want to hear about the colours that are hidden inside. Eric, why don’t we start with you?”

Eric nervously turned his sketch pad so the others could see. “I drew an airplane. It’s white with blue stripes. The clouds are white. One day I want to be a pilot and fly all over the world.”

“It’s a beautiful drawing, Eric,” Elizabeth remarked. “Is that you in the pilot’s seat?”

Eric smiled sheepishly and nodded.

Elizabeth looked at the next child in the circle. “All right, Sarah, you’re next.”

Sarah proudly showed her drawing to the class and said, “It’s a picture of *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel. She has a green fin, purple shells, and red hair, like the colour of a tomato. She loves Prince Eric and wants to kiss him.”

“Eeww, kissing. That’s gross!” Luke said, looking at the picture.

“It is not, it’s romantic!” Sarah fought back.

“No, it’s gross. What if she just ate brussels sprouts? Yuck. I’m never going to kiss a girl.”

“Well, a girl is never going to wanna kiss you, Luke.”

Kanin and Vincent looked at each other and chuckled, trying hard to suppress their laughter.

“All right, children, all right,” Elizabeth intervened. “Luke, you’re next.”

Luke smiled and showed his picture. “I drew a hotdog with red ketchup, yellow mustard, and a brown bun. Hotdogs are the best.”

“Told you so,” Kanin whispered to Vincent, setting up another chair.

“Whenever Dad and I go Above, he takes me to the hotdog stand before we come back home. Don’t tell Mom though. She says hotdogs are bad for you. Mom will make Dad sleep on the couch in our chamber again if she finds out he bought me one.”

Kanin stood up fast and looked towards his son. “Luke!” he whispered harshly, “Shhh!” He held his index finger to his lips and shook his head *no*.

Vincent couldn’t help laughing out loud this time.

Kanin turned back towards Vincent, his cheeks flushed with embarrassment. “Damn kid doesn’t have a filter,” he mumbled.

Vincent smirked at his friend. “You know, Kanin, we just got a shipment in from Harry’s repo furniture store. I’m pretty sure there was a decent couch among the deliveries. Sounds like you could use a new one.”

“Shut up, Vincent,” Kanin said, shooting him the middle finger.

The men continued setting up the classroom, giving each other dirty looks, as Elizabeth continued with her class.

“All right, children, let’s continue. Jacob, it’s your turn,” Elizabeth said, giving him a smile.

Jacob looked down at his drawing then glanced towards his father nervously.

“Jacob, we would all love to see your drawing,” Elizabeth said, encouraging him.

Jacob bit his lip and slowly turned his drawing around. “I drew my mother,” he said quietly.

Vincent shot up quickly and looked at the group of children. *No*, he thought. *Not here, not now*.

“Her hair is sandy brown like mine and her eyes are green like mine, too. She wants to look out the window but can’t.”

“Why isn’t she smiling, Jacob?” Sarah asked. “I thought people were supposed to smile in pictures.”

“Because she can’t see her flowers.”

Elizabeth looked back and forth between Vincent and Jacob for a moment before smiling down at Jacob. “Well, children, maybe next class we can all draw flowers for Jacob’s mother Catherine.”

Jacob drew his legs up to his chest and hugged his picture. “She’d like that,” he whispered.

That night, after Vincent tucked Jacob into bed, he picked up his son’s satchel and brought it back to his own chamber. He hesitated to look through it. He had conflicting emotions about wanting to look at the picture Jacob drew today. Did he want to look at it and see how his son envisioned his mother? Jacob’s recent dreams and visions of Catherine already weighed heavily on him. The mere mention of Catherine’s name brought tears to his eyes and an ache in his chest. He welcomed it most days, though. The thought of not keeping her in his heart was unimaginable.

I’ll ready for bed first, he decided, then I’ll look at the picture.

After he was washed and dressed for bed, he procrastinated more. *Well, maybe I’ll write in my journal, then I’ll look at the picture.”*

As usual, he wrote about the day’s events. He wrote about Jacob, even about the laugh he had at Kanin's expense. Once he was finished with that, he decided to go say goodnight to Father, perhaps play a game of chess. Once there, he dismissed Father’s concerns about his disposition, saying it was just a busy but mundane day.

Finally, after procrastinating enough, he could not think of another excuse to put off looking at the picture.

He searched through the satchel and pulled out the sketch pad from today’s art lesson. Flipping through the pad, he saw that the first few pages were drawings of flowers. He then came to today’s drawing. The drawing of Catherine. It was a picture of a woman looking towards a window. The likeness to Catherine was there, but then that could be because he knew it was a drawing of her. Her hair hung halfway down her back, and only the left side of her face was visible. You could clearly see the frown on her face. Though that wasn’t what troubled Vincent. It wasn’t what made his heart skip a beat. It was the scar next to the young woman’s left ear in the picture that captured his eye. The scar identical to Catherine’s. The scar Vincent knew for certain that was in no picture of Catherine they had. The scar he knew Jacob knew nothing about.

CHAPTER FOUR

Vincent paced his chamber. Ten strides, turn, another ten, and turn. The drawing of Catherine sat on his desk. He would occasionally stop and look down at it for a

moment, then continue pacing. He was trying to come up with a logical reason that would explain how Jacob knew about the scar.

He made sure, he insisted ever since Jacob was an infant, that only positive memories of his mother would be shared. He didn't want any negative memories tainting Jacob's vision of her.

Could some of the older children have told him? He doubted it. He doubted that the children who may have overheard things back when Catherine was part of the Below community would say anything. Only pleasant memories were shared amongst the community. Jacob relished those memories. Each time his mother's name came up in a conversation, he would stop whatever he was doing and listened intently.

Vincent himself rarely talked about Catherine. It hurt too much to do so. Selfishly, he depended on the community to answer the questions Jacob had. Of course, he did share a few memories with his son. The books she liked, the music she loved to listen to. But he could never take Jacob to Catherine's and his special spot underneath the park's amphitheatre. He couldn't even bring himself to go there alone anymore. But he did make sure someone would take Jacob Above frequently to listen to and watch the concerts in the park.

Vincent stopped once again in front of the desk. He placed his hands down on it in frustration. How could Jacob know? Who would tell him such a thing? He started to pace again but stopped midstride.

Jacob was troubled. Upset. He could feel through the connection with his son that he was scared. It was then he heard the first shout. "No!" Jacob yelled.

Vincent rushed from his chamber and down to his son's. He found Jacob tossing and turning in his bed in the midst of a nightmare.

"Leave her alone!" Jacob cried.

Vincent rushed to his son's side and gathered him in his arms.

Tears were streaming down Jacob's cheeks in his sleep.

"Jacob," Vincent whispered softly, gently shaking his son, trying to wake him.

"Stop. You're hurting her!" he cried, thrashing in his father's arms.

"Jacob," Vincent said a little louder, trying to wake his son without startling him.

"Please, no. You're hurting her!" Jacob continued to shout, his sobs becoming more desperate.

“Jacob, wake up. It’s okay,” Vincent pleaded louder, shaking his son.

Jacob shot up in his father’s arms, waking from his nightmare. He looked around the room, confused, then up at his father. Without hesitation, Jacob buried his face in his father’s chest and sobbed.

“Shh...” Vincent soothed his son, rubbing his back. “It’s okay, you’re safe.”

Mary, wrapped in her robe, appeared at the threshold of Jacob’s chamber. She stopped when Vincent looked up at her. Seeing Jacob in Vincent’s arms, she mouthed the words “Is he okay?”

Vincent nodded a yes.

She sadly smiled and nodded back and retreated to her own chamber.

Vincent continued to rub Jacob’s back, whispering words of comfort in his ear. Once Jacob’s sobs settled to sniffles, Vincent whispered, “Would you like to sleep in my chamber tonight?”

Jacob nodded *yes* against his chest.

Vincent hugged him close and stood up, holding his son in his arms. He started to walk away from the bed when Jacob stopped him.

“Wait, I need Caroline,” his son whispered softly.

Confused, Vincent turned back towards the bed and saw the doll, Alice, lying among the blankets. “You mean Alice?” he asked, picking up the doll and handing her to Jacob.

Jacob nodded and hugged the doll close. “Her name’s not Alice. It’s Caroline. Mother told me yesterday that is what she called her when she was a little girl.”

Vincent remained silent and carried Jacob to his chamber and laid the boy in his bed. Jacob turned towards the stained-glass window and fell back to sleep almost instantly. Vincent sat in bed next to his son, watching the boy closely.

Once again, the boy left him baffled and confused. Since Jacob had come into possession of the doll, her name had been Alice, and now he was saying her name was Caroline. Caroline, Vincent knew, was Catherine’s mother’s name. Nobody except for himself and Peter Alcott knew Catherine’s parents’ names. Peter would have no reason to tell Jacob. In fact, he didn’t have much contact with the boy at all.

How in the world did Jacob know that?

An hour later, there was a light tapping at the entrance to Vincent's chamber. Vincent rose from his place next to Jacob and quietly walked over to see who it was. Mary stood there, a frown on her face.

"Vincent, I'm sorry to disturb you. I know Jacob is having a rough night. Olivia just came to me and said Kanin is sick. He's been vomiting on and off all evening. She was hoping you might be able to take his sentry shift in an hour. I would have asked someone else to, but a lot of our people are away picking up our grocery order from Brooklyn. It's the big one, the pantry food. I can sit with Jacob until you return in the morning."

Vincent sighed and looked back at his son. He didn't want to leave him. He was scared that Jacob might have another nightmare. The things Jacob had been saying about Catherine had him deeply disturbed. He sighed again. "Yes, of course, Mary. Please keep him home from morning classes though. I want him to get some rest. Let him stay in my chamber until I return. Give me a moment to dress."

"Thank you, Vincent, I'll go let Olivia know."

He watched Mary leave then walked over to the bed. Leaning over, he kissed Jacob on the head and whispered, "Sleep well, my son. I love you."

He had just finished dressing when Mary returned with a cup of tea and her knitting. Vincent hesitated at the door, looking at Jacob. Mary patted his arm reassuringly. "Try not to worry, I'll keep a close watch on him," she whispered.

Vincent sighed and smiled sadly down at her. He gave her a peck on the cheek and whispered his thanks. With a final glance at his son, Vincent departed, fulfilling his duty to the community Below.

CHAPTER FIVE

The sentry shift dragged on for Vincent. His cloak dragged along the dirt floor as he strolled the tunnels, looking out for any intruders or unexpected visitors. Since it was a night shift, not much activity was expected. The pipes were relatively quiet, it being a late hour. The six-hour shift seemed more like twelve.

He planned on questioning Jacob in the morning. He wanted to know how Jacob found out the information he had about his mother, who told him such details. It was troubling that his son knew things about Catherine that he tried to keep from him. Things he didn't want Jacob to know until he was old enough to understand. This sentry shift gave him time to gather his thoughts and prepare what he wanted to ask his son.

Vincent was patrolling the eastern entrances. These entrances were rarely used, most having been boarded up. The eastern side also included the entrance that was below Catherine's old apartment. It had been sealed up years ago, but a plaque adorned the wall in her memory.

Vincent approached the old entrance slowly. He wanted to avoid the area but found himself there frequently. A pull on his heart led him there whenever he strolled the tunnels.

Jacob often asked to walk past there. Anything that was remotely tied to his mother, he wanted to be around. Vincent knew he should be happy about that. He wanted Jacob to know the kind and loving person his mother was. Though, like everything else, anything tied to a memory brought him both joy and sorrow.

He stopped in front of the bricked-up entrance. He placed his hand gently on the wall next to the plaque, smiling sadly as he read the words he knew by heart. *In memory of Catherine Chandler. Dear friend, mother, and soulmate. You will always be remembered for your kindness, generosity, and loving nature. You will be in our hearts forever more.*

Vincent hoped that Catherine had known how much the Below community loved her. How many lives she touched here and Above.

"My soulmate," Vincent whispered as his thumb gently brushed across the word. Blinking away tears, he gave the plaque one final glance before continuing his patrol.

The hours ticked by, and from the sound of the pipes coming alive with tapping conversation, Vincent knew his shift was ending. The pipes rang out with morning greetings. Reminders of the day's schedule. Announcements about breakfast. Finally, close to 9:00am, a message rang through the pipes indicating the sentries should return and give reports so the next shift could go on duty.

Quickly, Vincent circled his way back to the main Hub. He wanted to get back to Jacob and make sure he was okay. The conversation he wanted to have was going to be difficult. He needed Jacob to understand that his mother was gone. Vincent's own sanity depended on it.

Upon entering the main Hub, Vincent made his way to the Assignment Room, where he met up with the others both coming on and going off duty. Nothing much to report. Gary, a middle-aged man who had come to the community a year and a half ago, reported a few teenagers playing around in the upper tunnels. Nowhere near any of the community entrances. They were just drinking beer and smoking

cigarettes close to a ravine entrance. Someone would have to go and clean up the mess they had made. “Damn teenagers,” Garry swore. “No respect for anything.”

After signing off, Vincent and the others getting off duty made their way back to their chambers for some much-needed sleep. As Vincent approached his own chamber, Mary was just leaving. She smiled at Vincent and waited for him to approach.

“How was he?” he asked, concerned.

“He slept the rest of the night. Though it was troubled. He kept mumbling, but I couldn’t make out what he was saying. He hasn’t touched his breakfast yet. He’s just sitting at your desk, doodling in his sketch pad. He hasn’t said much at all. I asked him about the dream last night, but he didn’t want to talk about it. I think he’s waiting for you.”

Vincent sighed and looked towards the entrance of his chamber, where a soft glow of candles could be seen.

“Thank you, Mary. I’m going to speak with him this morning. I want to try and figure out these dreams and visions he has been having the last few months. He talks about Catherine like she’s alive and he’s visiting her. It’s troubling. I’m worried.”

“He’s young, Vincent. He’s young and brilliant beyond reason. His brain is more advanced than his emotions. He’s struggling to find common ground between the two.”

“I know. That’s what scares me. I don’t want to see him hurt when he realizes that these dreams are just that. Dreams.”

Mary drew Vincent down for a comforting hug. “It will be all right, Vincent” she whispered in his ear. “Jacob has Father, me, you, and the whole community to help him. He doesn’t have to go through this alone.”

They drew apart, and Vincent smiled down at the old woman he had come to consider a surrogate mother. “Thank you, Mary,” he said. “I appreciate your concern.”

She smiled back at him and patted his cheek before walking away to go tend to the other children of the community.

Vincent took a deep breath, trying to prepare himself for the conversation to come. He entered the chamber. Jacob was sitting at his writing desk, a troubled, sad look on his face. His legs were pulled up against his chest. His doll - Alice or Caroline,

Vincent still wasn't sure what to call it - was tucked between his chest and legs. His uneaten breakfast of toast and juice sat on the table in front of him. He was drawing flowers in his sketch pad.

"Jacob, how are you feeling, son?" Vincent asked as he approached the desk and sat down in the chair next to his son.

Jacob shrugged his shoulders but didn't answer. His attention stayed on his drawing.

"Why haven't you touched your breakfast? It's peanut butter and toast. One of your favourites."

"Not really hungry," Jacob whispered, not looking up at his father.

"Jacob, I want to..." Vincent began, but paused, trying to find the right words before he continued. "I want to talk to you about these dreams you've been having about your mother. I want to help you sort through them and realize that that is what they are. Just dreams."

"They're not all dreams," Jacob mumbled. "I can visit mother when I close my eyes and hold Caroline. She can't see me, but I can see her. She can hear me, though, and talk to me. She's scared. The nurses get mad at her when she talks to me. They hurt her."

"Jacob. I know you believe the things you see and you hear are real, but it's your imagination. You want so badly for your mother to be alive, to be here with us. So do I, but it's not possible."

Jacob threw his crayon down on the table in anger. He looked up at his father, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Why don't you believe me?" he cried. "She's sad, she's hurt, and she needs us, but you won't believe me."

"Jacob, I want to believe you. More than anything, I wish it were true but..."

"No, you don't!" Jacob yelled, interrupting him. "I keep telling you, but you won't believe. If you won't believe then at least let me show you. If I take you with me and show you how much she misses us and wants to come home, will you go get her?"

"Jacob, I want to, I want nothing more than for that to be true, its just..."

"Please, Father," Jacob begged. "Please, just hold my hand and I can show you. It would make her so happy."

The look of sorrow mixed with hope on his son's face brought tears to Vincent's eyes. He didn't want to indulge in this fantasy Jacob had, but he couldn't refuse his son in the emotional state he was in.

He sighed and lowered his head. Maybe once he did this for Jacob, they could start down a different path of healing. He looked up at his son and smiled sadly. "Very well, son," he whispered, "show me what you see."

Jacob smiled and jumped off his chair. He stood in front of his father and took one of his large hands in his own. "You need to close your eyes, Father, and think of Mother. Really think of her. I'll call to her and then you'll see."

Vincent watched Jacob close his eyes before doing the same.

Jacob held his father's hand tightly and began to speak. "Mother? Mother, it's Jacob. I brought Father today. You must tell him where you are so he can come get you and bring you home. Please, Mother. Don't be afraid. Father's here. He can protect you."

At first, all Vincent saw was the blackness behind his eyes. He pictured Catherine's face the way he remembered it. Her smiling up at him. Her beautiful green eyes filled with love for him. Then suddenly something flashed before his eyes. A white room. It was gone in an instant. Vincent's breathing increased slightly as he closed his eyes tighter, keeping Catherine's face in his mind. The white room flashed repeatedly before Vincent's eyes before he finally was able to focus on it.

Suddenly, he and Jacob weren't in his chamber anymore. Vincent looked around. They both stood in a plain white room with a single bed and a barred window. A heavy door with a small circular window was at their backs. A small woman with long sandy brown hair sat on the bed with her back against the wall. She hugged her legs to her chest, rocking slightly in self comfort. Her cheek lay on her knees facing away from them, looking towards the window.

"Mother, please," Jacob continued. "It's okay, don't be afraid."

The woman stopped rocking suddenly and tensed.

"Mother, please!" Jacob pleaded. "Father's here. Don't be afraid."

The woman covered her ears with her hands and started to rock frantically. "No," she mumbled, shaking her head. "No, please. It can't be real."

Vincent tensed suddenly. That voice. That voice he would recognize anywhere.

Still holding Jacob's hand, he took a step towards the bed. "Cath... Catherine," he mumbled in shock.

The woman's rocking stopped instantly at the sound of his voice. Slowly, she lifted her head and looked towards them, her eyes not seeing them.

Vincent's heart skipped a beat at the sight of her face. It was the face Vincent was sure he would never see again.

His Catherine looked around desperately, trying to see them. "Vincent!" she cried. "Vincent, is it really you?"

He took another step towards the bed, wanting to be closer to her. "Catherine, it's me. It's Vincent. I'm with Jacob. Catherine, where are you? Tell me where you are."

The door behind them suddenly burst open. Two men dressed in white uniforms sprang into the room, walking right through Jacob and Vincent. Catherine jumped up from the bed and backed away from them into the corner of the room. "Cathy," one of them said, "you know what happens when you start talking to yourself."

"No, please," she begged, panicking at the sight of them. "I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

The men ignored her pleas and advanced towards her, grabbing her and forcing her to the bed.

Vincent heard Jacob start to cry. "Father, help her!" he begged.

One of the men put his knee on her chest, pressing down, forcing her to gasp for air, as the other grabbed one of her forearms, pushing it down so he could restrain her to the bed.

"CATHERINE!" Vincent screamed, lunging towards the men who had grabbed her.

A painful shock went through Vincent's body, forcing him to let go of Jacob's hand. When he opened his eyes, he and Jacob were back in his chamber and he was lying on the floor, his chair having toppled over. Then he felt it. He felt her. His Catherine. Her heart beating rapidly next to his own, next to where he felt Jacob's. He felt her fear. Her pain. He felt her pleading with him. Her hope diminishing that what she had heard was real.

Jacob knelt next to his father. He was frantically shaking him. "Father!" he cried, "Father, are you okay? They're hurting her again, Father, please help."

Vincent looked at his son and sat up, pulling the boy into his arms. “It’s all right, Jacob. It’s going to be all right. I’m so sorry!” he cried. “I’m so sorry for not believing you. I’m going to get your mother. I’m going to bring her home.”

Jacob smiled and hugged his father tightly. “Thank you, Father. I knew you’d believe me if I showed you.”

“Vincent, what is it?” Mary asked as she and Father burst into Vincent’s chamber, alarmed by Vincent’s scream just moments ago.

“Vincent, what’s going on?” Father asked, limping up to him.

The tears streamed down Vincent’s face as he jumped up and rushed around the room, gathering his cloak and a satchel for supplies. “She’s alive!” Vincent cried, throwing items into his bag. “Catherine’s alive. I can feel her. Jacob...Jacob showed me.”

He threw on his cloak and knelt before his son, pulling him in for a hug. “I’m bringing her home,” he told his son again.

“Vincent, what on earth are you talking about?” Father questioned.

Vincent stood and looked between Father and Mary. “I don’t have time to explain. Watch over Jacob for me, please. She’s far away but I can feel her. I can’t pinpoint her exactly. North. Somewhere north of the city.”

“Stop for a moment. Please. We need some kind of explanation.”

Vincent sighed in frustration. “Jacob has a special bond with Catherine. Somehow he can visit her, talk to her with his mind. He can see her, but she can’t see him. They can talk to one another. I told you how he was talking to her, and I thought it was his imagination. He showed me. Oh, Father, they’re hurting her.”

“What you are saying...are you sure? Vincent, with the bond you share with Jacob, this could be a case of folie a deux.”

“It’s not a madness we share!” Vincent insisted angrily, his patience wearing thin. He remembered the picture Jacob drew. The picture of Catherine he drew in his art class. He frantically searched amongst the papers on his desk, remembering leaving it there after he took it from Jacob’s satchel. Finally locating the picture under some books, he held it up for Mary and Father to see.

“Look!” he yelled. “Jacob drew this. It’s of Catherine. Look next to her left ear. It’s her scar. Nobody ever told Jacob about it. No picture we have of Catherine shows it. How did he know about the scar if he didn’t see her?”

Father took the drawing from Vincent and studied it for a moment before handing it to Mary to see. "I don't know what to say. Are you sure?" he asked.

"Our bond is back, Father, I feel her. I feel her heartbeat next to my own. I feel her anguish. Her fear. She's in trouble, danger."

Jacob tugged on his grandfather's hand to get his attention. "We're telling the truth, Grandfather. Please believe us," Jacob said.

Father smiled sadly at his grandson. Mary knelt in front of Jacob and turned him towards her. "Jacob, sweetheart, what do you mean? How do you talk to your mother?"

"Whenever I hold Caroline, I can see her and talk to her. She can't see me, but she hears me. She told me Caroline's real name. She said that was her mother's name. She named the doll after her mother died when she was a little girl. She tells me she loves me. She's in a hospital. If she's sick, you can take care of her, Grandfather. You're the best doctor in the world."

"Hospital," Vincent whispered, remembering Jacob's other drawing. He quickly shuffled through the papers on his desk until he located the drawing. "I know it's crazy, it's insane," Vincent began, "but do either of you recognize this complex?"

Mary shook her head, but Father took it from Vincent, his eyes wide with shock. "My God, Vincent, it looks like Meadow Brook. I did a psychiatric residency there forty years ago when I attended Albany Medical College. It's just on the outskirts of Albany, next to one of the nature preserves. Jacob drew this?"

"It's the hospital where Mother is," Jacob answered, smiling up at this grandfather. "I'm telling the truth, Grandfather. Please believe us."

Father placed a comforting hand on top of Jacob's head and handed the picture back to Vincent. Vincent rushed over to a shelf in the corner and dug through papers until he found maps of the tunnels and road maps of New York. He threw both on his desk, trying to find a route.

He located Albany on the road map and tried to compare it to the tunnel maps. "Father, help me, please. What would be the best route?"

Father joined Vincent at the table and studied both maps.

"Once you get to the northern tunnels' boundary, take this tunnel north for around 150 miles to Albany. You'll be able to intercept this tunnel here." Father picked up a pencil and drew along the map with the direction Vincent should go. "That

should lead you almost directly to Meadow Brook. It's at least a three-day journey by foot, Vincent. You should take someone with you."

"No," Vincent said, folding the maps and placing them in his bag. "I need to move quickly. It would slow me down, and there's no one we can trust Above. Whomever put Catherine there wanted everyone to believe she was dead."

"Are you sure about this? The journey will be dangerous. If you get there and find out..." Father let the words fade out at the look his son gave him.

"I feel her so strongly. Stronger than anything before. She's alive and in danger. They've been hurting her, Father."

Jacob tugged on his father's hand to get his attention. "Are you going to bring Mother home?" he asked.

Vincent knelt in front of his son once again. "Yes. You must promise me, though, that until we return, you will not talk to her. We can't let the nurses or doctors know that I am coming."

"But what if she needs me?"

"Jacob, please, promise me. I swear to you, I will bring her home. I want you to help Mary gather some things for her. She'll need nightgowns and slippers. Some nice soaps. Can you do that?"

"Of course," Jacob answered, smiling. "I'll pick out pretty things for her. What is her favorite colour? Does she like pink? Maybe yellow."

Mary walked over to Jacob and took his hand. "We'll get things in all the pretty colours, Jacob. We'll make your father's chamber so pretty."

Vincent gave Jacob a kiss on his cheek.

"We'll be home in a few days. It's a long journey. Don't worry. When Mother and I are close enough, I'll tap a message to Pascal. You can meet us when are close to home. Go with Aunt Mary now. I'll see you soon. I love you, Jacob."

"I love you, too, Father," Jacob said, hugging him. "Give Mother a kiss for me. Tell her I love her."

"Of course. Now go with Aunt Mary."

Vincent stood up and let Mary lead his son away. He then looked at his own father, tears in his eyes. "If I don't return...if I can't get to her, or if I'm too late, I...I won't be back. Please take care of Jacob. Let him know that Catherine and I love him."

Father pulled Vincent into a tight hug, tears filling his own eyes. “Don’t say such things, Vincent. You’ll both be back in a week’s time.”

Father knew that if Vincent failed to locate Catherine in time, it would be his son’s undoing. He wouldn’t survive the loss. He looked at Vincent and rested his forehead against his son’s. “I love you, Vincent. Do not worry. Whatever may happen, Jacob will be taken care of.”

Vincent hugged his father one last time then rushed out of his chamber. He grabbed a traveling kit from the Assignment Room which held supplies for basic survival, fire-making, and first aid. He stopped at the kitchens for food and canteens of water. It wouldn’t be enough, but there were outposts in the outer tunnels with supplies where he could replenish. He checked his supplies once more and then started his journey to his Catherine.

CHAPTER SIX

The tunnels were not well maintained the further he traveled from the Below community’s boundaries. It made traversing them difficult. He avoided using the lantern. He wanted to save the fuel for when he and Catherine came back. His eyes were accustomed to seeing in the dark.

Vincent pushed himself to the limit the first day. He traveled at least sixteen hours with little breaks. After making a small fire and heating up some supper, Vincent laid down on a blanket to try and sleep. He reached inside his shirt and pulled out the suede pouch that Catherine had given him years ago. It held the white rose Catherine had gifted him, her crystal pendant, and a picture of Jacob from his most recent birthday. He pulled out the white rose, gently squeezing it in his palm.

Closing his eyes, Vincent tried to reach out to Catherine through their bond. He could feel her but didn’t want to scare her.

“Catherine,” he whispered softly. “Catherine, it’s Vincent. If you can hear me, know that I’m coming for you. Don’t let them know if you can hear me. Just whisper my name softly if you can. Please, Catherine, stay strong. I’ll be there soon.”

Minutes passed that seemed like an eternity with no response. A tear slid down Vincent’s cheek. Their bond must not be strong enough yet. He waited but finally gave up hope of hearing her voice reach out to him. Carefully, he placed the rose back in the pouch and tucked it against his heart. He closed his eyes, ready to succumb to sleep, when he heard the faintest whisper.

“Vincent, I love you.”

Catherine had heard him and reached back. He felt her sending her love to him, filling him with her warmth. Tears of joy fell from his eyes as he drifted off to sleep.

Vincent traveled two more days along the tunnels. He occasionally traveled up to the roads during the night to ensure he was moving along the right highway and to replenish his water supply.

At the start of the fourth night, Vincent knew he was close. The route he was taking was now turning into the drainage tunnel that led to Meadow Brook. The feel of Catherine’s heart in his chest beat strongly. He followed the tunnel until he came to an iron ladder that led up to a drainage grate. He set his bag and canteens next to the ladder and began his ascent. Once at the top, Vincent carefully lifted the grate slightly and looked around.

He was at the back of a parking lot. The moon was hidden behind storm clouds. Thunder sounded and the scent of rain was heavy in the air. Seeing no one around, Vincent emerged from the tunnel and scrunched down, taking in his surroundings. The parking lot was at the back end of the property, with a forested area behind him. The property was surrounded by a 15-foot fence.

Vincent stared through the fence at the buildings that were approximately two hundred yards away. The single-story white buildings were nearly identical to the ones in Jacob’s drawing. His eyes fell on the closest building to his right, the third window. She was there.

He left the grate open for quick access once he had Catherine. Seeing no one around, Vincent rose and started to walk along the back of the fence. There had to be a gate somewhere. He imagined people would take strolls on the trails in the woods behind him. His instincts were right. Halfway down the fence line, he found a lock gate. With a simple pull, he broke the lock off and tossed it in the grass.

The field leading up to the buildings was dark, but the buildings themselves had security lights. Silently, Vincent ran towards the building Catherine was being held in, keeping watch for any guards or employees. The closer he came to her window, the harder he felt her heartbeat in his chest. Once at the window, Vincent took a deep breath before looking inside. His heart soared at the sight he saw.

Catherine was curled up in a ball on the bed, in a defensive position. He felt her uneasiness as she slept. As softly as he could, he tapped at her window, reminding

him so much of the days when he would tap on her balcony doors to alert her to his presence.

She woke and sat up at once at the sound, her head darting towards the window. Slowly she rose and walked over to it. “Vincent” she whispered, reaching through the bars to press her hand against the glass.

Vincent’s own hand covered hers on the opposite side. “I’m here, Catherine,” he whispered to her.

She smiled at him, tears falling down her cheeks.

Vincent looked up and down the window. Breaking it would be the easy part. The bars on the other side would be a problem. They were placed far apart, and Vincent hoped he would only have to get one loose for Catherine to squeeze through. Once the window was broken, he would have to act quickly. It would alert the guards.

“Stand back and put on some shoes, Catherine, I need to break the window.”

She nodded and went to the foot of her bed and slipped on a pair of slippers.

With a powerful strike, Vincent smashed through the window and immediately began pulling on a bar, trying to loosen it. The alarms started almost instantly, and strobe lights started circling the yard.

Catherine ran up to the window and started pushing on the bar Vincent was trying to pull out.

“Cathy, don’t you dare!” a man screamed from outside her door.

Vincent saw someone looking at her with malevolence through the circular window.

Catherine glanced over her shoulder then back at Vincent, pushing even harder at the bar.

“Get me the f**k*** keys!” a man screamed. “Cathy, get away from that window or, I swear to God, you’ll spend a month in solitary!”

Rage soared through Vincent as the man threatened Catherine. With strength he didn’t know he possessed, he roared and grabbed onto two of the bars, pulling them out of their cement housings and throwing them behind him.

Catherine squeezed through the opening and launched herself into Vincent’s open arms, crying out his name. He staggered back at the impact. She wrapped her arms around his neck and gripped her legs around his waist, squeezing him tightly. He returned the tight embrace, cupping the back of her head with one of his hands.

“Tighter,” she begged.

He complied, hugging her as tightly as he dared.

A loud crash of thunder startled them both, and the rain started to pour down as Vincent lowered Catherine to her feet. He was about to cup her face when their reunion was interrupted as the door to Catherine’s room burst open and two men ran towards the window.

Vincent gave the men a look of pure hatred before he grabbed Catherine’s hand and told her to run. They ran across the field towards the gate, the shouts of their pursuers not far behind.

The open gate was in Vincent’s line of vision when Catherine’s hand was suddenly yanked from his own as she slipped on the wet grass and fell to the ground. Without hesitation, Vincent picked her up in his arms and ran the rest of the way, through the opening and towards the sewer grate.

Once at the grate, Vincent set her down and turned his back towards her. “Hang on to me, Catherine,” he said, not trusting that she would be able to make the descent down the ladder on her own.

She nodded her head and grabbed onto Vincent.

They could hear people coming, but no one was visible yet.

Quickly, Vincent started climbing down the ladder, shutting the grate behind them. Halfway down the ladder, they heard voices just outside the grate and could see the shadows of the men through the slats.

Vincent froze in place, looking up, not wanting to make a sound to alert the men to where they were.

“Did you see which direction they went?” one of the men asked.

“No. There was no car. They had to have taken off through the woods.”

A static sound followed by a beep echoed down in the tunnel. “Turner, it’s Fallon. Set up a perimeter check along the road leading towards the main gate. They’re going to have to exit the woods eventually. Over.”

“Fallon, it’s Turner. Roger that. Over and out.”

The one named Fallon swore a string of obscenities, ending with, “I swear, when I get my hands on that b**** she’s going to pay.”

Vincent felt Catherine tense up at the sound of the Fallon man's voice. She buried her face in Vincent's hair and began to tremble. He could feel that she was more than scared, she was terrified. He put a comforting hand on her forearm and stared up at the grate in rage. He wanted nothing more than to go back and tear the man's throat out for causing her this distress.

"Why all the fuss?" the other man asked. "Cathy's harmless."

"Do you have any idea who she is?" Fallon asked angrily. Hearing no reply, he continued, "That's Burch's girl."

"Elliot Burch?" the other man asked, scared.

"Yes, you idiot. He was notified when she woke up four months ago. We were told to start on her, make sure she doesn't remember. He's been stuck in Russia for half a year with the big bosses. He's supposed to be here the day after tomorrow. If he comes and she's not here, we're dead. Let's go. We need to find her...now!"

Vincent waited for a few minutes after the men left, then continued descending the ladder. Once at the bottom, Catherine let go of Vincent. Without thinking, he bent over and picked up the supplies then grabbed Catherine's hand and began to run, wanting to put as much distance between them and the buildings as he could.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Vincent didn't know how long they had been running before he felt Catherine start to falter.

"Vincent, I need to stop," she pleaded. "I can't see. I need to rest a moment."

He was so determined to get them as far away as possible that he hadn't realized what he was doing. Her safety was the only thing on his mind.

He stopped suddenly in the dark tunnel. He heard Catherine fall against the wall and slide to the ground, trying to catch her breath. "Catherine," he wheezed, out of breath himself.

Realization hit him. Catherine was here with him. Catherine was alive.

Instantly, he was at her side, pulling her into his arms. "Catherine?" he cried, his hands running up and down her arms and face.

He felt her hands on his own face tracing his features with her fingers. "It's too dark, Vincent, I can't see you!" she cried.

He let go of her momentarily and searched for the lantern attached to his satchel, finding and lighting it.

The lantern gave the tunnel a soft golden glow. Then he saw her tear-stained face smiling at him. He stared at her for only a second before taking her face between his hands and brushing her tears away from her cheeks. "You are my Catherine," he whispered.

She nodded at him, raising her own hands and gently placing them on his wrists.

He looked into her beautiful green eyes then pulled her towards him and covered her mouth with his own in a gentle kiss. When he pulled away, Catherine grabbed onto him and pulled herself into his lap, burying her face into his neck. She started to sob hysterically, begging to him, "Please tell me this is real. That I'm not imagining this. Please tell me you're real, Vincent. I don't know anymore."

Vincent rubbed her back and held her tightly, whispering soothing sounds in her ear. "This is real, Catherine. I'm here. You're not imagining. I need you to try and calm yourself."

Catherine cried harder and started to hyperventilate.

"Catherine," Vincent said again, more loudly, squeezing her more tightly. "You're okay. Breathe, Catherine. Breathe. I'm here. You're safe." He rubbed her back and held her close until her sobs faded into the occasional hiccup. Only then did he let go of her long enough to grab the canteen of water, opening it. He handed it to her and said soothingly, "Small sips, Catherine, so you don't choke."

Listening to him, she drank some of the water and handed the canteen back.

He set it down then he started rubbing his hands up and down her arms and face again, searching for any injuries. "Are you hurt anywhere? Do you have any pain?" He lifted her hands close to his face, taking in the red and purple marks around her wrists from being restrained.

"I'm okay. I'll be okay. Just tired," she told him, trying to reassure him.

"Are you able to walk a bit farther? I want to put as much distance between us and that place as possible."

Catherine nodded as Vincent assisted her to her feet. He gathered their supplies and put an arm around her waist. "Lean on me, I won't let you fall."

Catherine managed to walk for an hour before Vincent had to pick her up and carry her. "I'm sorry," she cried softly.

“Nonsense. Don’t worry. You know how much I love having you in my arms. This just gives me a reason to hold you.”

She smiled sadly at him and then rested her head against his chest. “You never need a reason. I welcome your arms always. I love you, Vincent,” she whispered to him before drifting off to sleep.

The feel of her heartbeat and the tickling sensation of her breath against his neck soothed him. The feel of her in his arms did give him some peace but also brought concern. She was much lighter than he remembered. He looked down and studied her face, taking in her sunken in cheeks and the dark circles under her eyes.

The rage he felt earlier started to make its way back. Now that Catherine was safe in his arms, the conversation they overheard from the men who chased them started coming back to him. One of them had said she woke up four months ago. That was when Jacob had started saying he was talking to his mother. The person they said was keeping Catherine at the hospital was Elliot Burch. He had almost gone to Elliot to ask for help in rescuing Jacob. He would have if Diana hadn’t found out Jacob’s location.

Would Elliot have betrayed him, as well? Did he know that Catherine was alive back then and was he hiding her? Was he working with Gabriel? There were so many uncertainties. So many questions that Vincent wanted answers to. Catherine was his priority though. He needed to get her to their home Below. Bring her home to Jacob. Only then would he seek out his answers and take revenge on those who did this to his Catherine.

Vincent walked for another two hours before he felt Catherine start to shiver against him. He stopped and looked down at her in his arms. Her hair was still wet and the simple white cotton shirt and pants she wore were damp. Vincent cursed himself for not thinking about their run through the rain and how it had saturated their clothes.

Carefully, he knelt and wrapped Catherine in his cloak before laying her down on the ground. He then went to work starting a small fire to warm her. Once he had one going, he removed the outer layers of his shirts. He then carefully removed his cloak from Catherine and put it around his shoulders. He gathered Catherine back into his arms and leaned against the wall, holding her close to his chest and used his body heat to warm her. He wrapped them both in his cloak and tried to relax.

Almost an hour later, Catherine began to stir in his arms. He smiled down at her as she opened her eyes and looked up at him.

“You’re still real?” she asked softly.

“Yes, my love” he answered. “I’m real. You’re safe in my arms.”

“Vincent, our son. His name is Jacob?” she asked.

“Yes, his name is Jacob, and he’s beautiful. He’s so intelligent. He’s the one that showed me to you.”

Catherine smiled and relaxed in his arms. “When I first heard him, I thought I was dreaming, but he kept coming back even when I knew I was awake,” she began. “I could hear his voice but couldn’t see him. Oh, Vincent, just to hear him. Hear him read to me and talk to me, it was heaven. Then the orderlies overheard me talking to him one day. They were already trying to manipulate me into believing I wasn’t who I thought I was. Telling me I wasn’t Catherine Chandler. That Catherine Chandler was dead. Over and over again they would say that. Catherine Chandler is dead. Catherine Chandler is dead. Then when they heard me talking to Jacob they would tie me down. Saying I was crazy. That it wasn’t real. That it was all in my head.”

Vincent felt Catherine’s anxiety growing. Her fear coming through their bond. He started to rock her slightly, trying to comfort her as she told her story. “It was real,” he whispered in her ear. “You’re alive. Catherine Chandler is alive.”

“I’m alive?” she asked softly, looking for reassurance.

Vincent gently kissed her temple. “Yes. You’re alive. Catherine Chandler is alive and in my arms.”

“Tell me about him, Vincent. Tell me about our son.”

Vincent reached underneath his shirt and pulled the suede pouch that sat there over his head.

Catherine smiled at the sight of the pouch. “You still have it?” she asked softly.

“I never take it off. It holds everything that is dear to me,” he answered. “Hold out your hands,” he requested, opening the pouch.

Catherine did so and watched as Vincent first pulled out the white rose that she had gifted him on their first anniversary. He placed it in her hands then pulled out her crystal pendant. “I thought I’d lost that” she whispered happily. He just smiled and placed the pendant in her hands next to the rose. Lastly, he pulled out the picture of Jacob and handed it to her.

Squeezing the rose and pendant in one hand, Catherine held the picture of Jacob in the other. “He is beautiful!” she cried, looking at the picture.

“He is the spitting image of his mother,” Vincent replied softly.

Catherine looked up at Vincent then back down at the picture.

“When I look at him, all I see is you. Your hair. Your eyes. Your mouth. He even has your stubbornness. Most of all, he has your heart and compassion,” he whispered to her.

Catherine leaned her head against Vincent’s chest and stared at the picture. “Is he healthy? I was so afraid. When Gabriel first kidnapped me, they injected me with drugs, trying to get me to tell them about a book Joe gave me. I told them I was pregnant, but they didn’t care. I was afraid that the drugs were going to harm the baby.”

“He’s perfectly healthy. In fact, that is one trait I passed to him. My immune system. I’m also beginning to believe he will have my strength. He’s showing signs of it.”

Catherine laughed softly. “Good. I want him to have as many of your traits as possible. He’ll be remarkable, like his father.”

Vincent took a deep breath in at her words. Hearing her say that she welcomed Jacob sharing his qualities touched him deeply. It was something he feared but hearing her say she welcomed those traits brought a peace to his heart. He kissed the top of her head and looked at the picture with her.

“Are you hungry?” he asked a few minutes later. “You need to eat and get some more rest. We have a long way to go before we’re home.”

“As long as you eat and rest with me,” she answered. “I’m going to need your help. You must keep up your strength for me. Promise me, Vincent, that you’ll rest and eat, too.”

“As you wish,” he whispered and kissed her softly.

Catherine handed him back the rose and pendant so Vincent could put them back in the pouch. She then kissed the picture of Jacob and handed that back to Vincent to put away.

“Hold this for me until we get home,” he said, and placed the pouch around her neck. Tears came to her eyes as she nodded and squeezed the pouch. Vincent kissed her once more before settling her on the ground in his cloak, and went about preparing them a meal.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The journey back through the tunnels was long and difficult. Catherine tired quickly, making them frequently stop. "I'm sorry, Vincent" she would apologize each time. "Just give me a moment and I can continue."

Vincent tried to reassure her that it was all right, but it worried him. She ate little, and when she did manage to sleep, she would wake up from nightmares. She spoke little of what happen to her. He knew that she was holding back to protect him. He wanted to press her to talk, to let out what she feared, but it was not the place for it. He needed to get her back home, to a place where she felt safe.

It took them four days to make it to the northern boundaries. Vincent smiled in relief when they came upon the first sight of pipes. "Look, Catherine," he said, pointing at the pipes. "We're almost home. I can send a message that we'll be home in a couple of hours."

Catherine nodded and softly kissed Vincent. She then slumped down against the tunnel wall, exhausted, and watched as Vincent tapped out a message to the Below community. "Tell them to let Jacob know that we're safe. That you found me and you're bringing me home," she asked then closed her eyes.

Vincent watched her squeeze the pouch that hung around her neck then whisper, "Mother's coming, sweetheart. Don't worry. I love you."

Vincent wondered if she could communicate with Jacob like their son did with her but held the question back. *Later*, he told himself. Right now, he needed to get her home. Finishing tapping the message, he pulled Catherine to her feet. He held her hands in his own then pressed his forehead against hers. "Are you ready?" he asked her.

Catherine smiled and nodded.

"Then let's go." Without another word he picked her up in his arms and began to run.

When they reached the closed entrance to the Below community, Vincent placed Catherine on her feet and pulled the lever to open the hidden entrance. The tunnels were lit by torches that hung on the walls, lighting the way. He wrapped his arm around Catherine and helped her walk down the tunnel towards the golden glow coming from the main hub.

Halfway down the tunnel, two people appeared, walking towards them. They were Mary and Jacob, coming to meet them. At the sight of his mother and father, Jacob broke away from Mary and ran towards them. "Mother!" he yelled happily.

Catherine staggered a few steps forward at the sound of his voice then fell to her knees. She held out her arms as the little boy ran to her. "Jacob!" she cried, hugging her son tightly for the first time. "Oh, my sweet boy," she whispered then held him slightly away so she could see his face.

Vincent watched, crying tears of his own, as Catherine cupped her son's face between her hands and wiped his tears away with her thumbs.

Jacob himself held his mother's face, his hands studying her. "You're even more pretty than the picture I have of you. Are you okay, Mother? Those men didn't hurt you again, did they? You're safe now, Mother. Father won't let anything happen to you," Jacob said all at once.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'm fine now that I'm home with you and your father," she answered, trying to reassure the boy.

Jacob smiled then tugged on Catherine's hand. "Come, Mother, I want to show you my chamber. Caroline is there and some of your old storybooks. Would you read to me before bed?" Jacob began to pull his mother down the tunnel, excited to show her his world.

Vincent rushed forward and took Catherine around her waist again just before she would have fallen. "Jacob, slow down," Vincent said, stopping his son.

Mary rushed forward, taking Jacob by his shoulders. "Jacob, dear, your mother and father just came back from a long journey. They need to take a bath. Perhaps after supper they can tuck you into bed," she said. Mary then pulled Catherine into her arms. "My sweet girl," she said, rubbing Catherine's back. "You don't know how happy I am to see you."

Catherine hugged her friend back, crying. "Mary I, I..." Catherine began but couldn't find the words.

"My dear, it's all right. You're home and safe." Mary held Catherine's face, kissing her cheeks and smoothing her hair down. She then stepped towards Vincent and hugged him. "Thank you for bringing our Catherine back to us," she whispered in his ear.

Vincent hugged his surrogate mother, having no words to reply.

Jacob pushed forward and hugged his mother around her waist.

Mary stepped back and smiled at the sight before her. A family reunited. "Jacob," she said, smiling at the boy, "why don't we escort you mother and father to the

hospital chamber? Grandfather just wants to make sure your mother is okay and then we'll go and have some supper before all the food is gone."

Jacob nodded and took his mother's hand and led her and his father down the tunnels and to the hospital chamber. They didn't encounter any tunnel dwellers on their way, to Vincent's relief, most being in the dining chamber.

At the entrance of the hospital chamber, Catherine knelt down and pulled Jacob into her arms once again. "Sweetheart, go with Mary and have some supper. As soon as I'm cleaned up, I'll come and tuck you in. Okay?" she said to him softly.

"All right." He sighed. "You are a little smelly. Maybe you do need a bath."

Catherine chuckled at the boy's candor and kissed him on the cheek. "Go now, I'll see you soon," she said and patted his cheek.

Jacob hugged her once more then took Mary's hand. "I'll bring Jacob to the dining chamber and be right back to help," she told the two of them then led Jacob away.

Vincent helped Catherine to her feet and pulled her into his arms as she started to cry. "It's all right now, Catherine," he whispered in her ear. "Everything will be all right now."

She nodded against his chest but continued to cry and sagged in his arms, exhaustion taking over. Vincent picked her up again and carried her inside.

"Catherine!"

Father rushed forward as fast as his old hip would let him. "Vincent, set her down here," he said, pointing towards a gurney. Vincent walked forward quickly and sat Catherine down where Father instructed. "My dear child, what have they done to you?" Father said, hugging her before stepping back and looking her up and down. "Vincent, grab me my bag off the table, would you, please."

Vincent nodded, removing his cloak and retrieving the bag for Father.

Father began a thorough examination. Mary returned carrying clean clothes and towels. She set them down and went to assist Father.

Vincent stood silently but close by, noticing the way Catherine trembled throughout the exam, wanting to be close should she need him.

"Well, my dear," Father began after the exam was done, "your blood pressure is extremely low, you're dehydrated, anemic, and borderline malnourished, to start. I want you on IV fluids for at least the next 24 hours, and bed rest. Would it be all right if I took a bit of blood to send off to the lab?"

Catherine tensed, a look of panic on her face.

Vincent stepped forward and sat down next to her, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. "Catherine," he whispered, "it's all right. You're safe. Father doesn't have to if you don't want him to, but it will help to make sure you get well. I'll stay with you. Will you let him?"

Catherine looked up at Vincent then back at Father, shaking. Hesitantly, she nodded and held her arm out before closing her eyes and burying her face in Vincent's neck. Vincent whispered to her reassuringly as Father quickly drew the blood and handed it to Mary to put away for delivery.

Father took Catherine's hands in his own, drawing her attention to him. "My dear, I want you to go with Mary and get washed up. Vincent is going to help me bring the IV equipment to his chamber so we can get you resting."

Panicking, Catherine shook her head no, grasping onto Vincent's hand. "I can't. Please. I don't want to leave him," she pleaded.

"Catherine, listen to me," Father continued, "like Vincent said, you are safe. Nothing will harm you here. Please go with Mary and get cleaned up. I promise you it won't be more than ten minutes. Then you'll be back with Vincent in his chamber. I promise you he will not leave your sight until you allow him to."

"It's all right, Catherine", Vincent said, trying to comfort her. "Go with Mary. I need to help Father with the IV for you."

Catherine looked back and forth between everyone in the room before finally nodding. Vincent helped her down from the gurney and into Mary's waiting arms.

"Come, sweet girl, let's get you washed up and then into bed," Mary said softly, picking up the clean clothes and towels, slowly leading Catherine away to the hospital's bathing chamber. Catherine continued to look back at Vincent for reassurance.

He smiled and nodded at her until both women were out of sight. He waited a moment, making sure Mary and Catherine were out of earshot before turning to Father. "Tell me the truth, what is wrong with Catherine? I know you held information back from her," he asked, his face filled with worry.

Father sighed and removed his glasses. He sat down on the gurney Catherine had just vacated. "Did she say anything to you about what happened to her?"

"She hasn't said much. She remembers waking up about four months ago in that hospital I found her in. I think she may have been in some sort of coma. She said

they were trying to manipulate her into believing she wasn't herself. Telling her that Catherine Chandler was dead. I saw with my own eyes, with Jacob before I left, that they would restrain her on the bed. I know she remembers a little from before Jacob was born. She said they were injecting her with some drug to make her answer questions. She was afraid it was going to harm the baby."

"Is there anything else? The smallest detail can help with her recovery. How did you end up getting her out of the building?"

"When I got to the facility, I had to break the window and pull the bars off so she could squeeze through. There were men outside her door, trying to open it and threatening her. The look on her face, the fear in her eyes, it's something I'll never forget. Once I got her out, all I could think of was getting her to safety. I made her run across a field in the rain. She fell. I grabbed her and continued to run to the grate where I came up from the drainage tunnels. She held on to me as I climbed down the ladder, I didn't trust she could climb down on her own. Halfway down, we heard the voices of the men who were pursuing her. I stopped. I didn't want to alert them to our presence. They started talking, communicating with someone over a radio, trying to figure out where we went. One of the men wondered why they were chasing us, he said she was harmless. Then the other, the one who threatened her, the one that was hurting her, said that they needed to find her. That she was Burch's girl."

"Elliot Burch?! Vincent, are you sure?"

"Yes. She was terrified, Father. Terrified. The first two nights of our journey home, she would wake up screaming. I don't know the extent of his involvement. The men had left before we could hear more. I fear for her safety. They're looking for her. Burch was supposed to arrive at the hospital two days ago. Something about him being away in Russia with some other powerful men. He was notified that she was awake. He's going to be looking for her. He has money and resources. I know that she's safe down here, Below, but desperate men will stop at nothing to get what they want. I know that feeling. I proved that feeling by going for her. I know the love he has for her, the obsession. I share the same feelings, and if he is willing to do the same things I am willing to do, I know he'll stop at nothing until he has her in his grasp."

"Vincent, Elliot Burch knows next to nothing about this place. He won't find her as long as she stays Below."

"But he knows something, Father. He and Catherine escaped through the tunnels years ago when they were being shot at on the docks. He's a smart man. With all the evidence of her escape I left behind, he'll put two and two together."

Father placed a comforting hand on Vincent's shoulder and told his son, "We'll increase the watches. We'll alter all the entrances and seal up many of the little-used ones. No one is going to get down here, Vincent. We protect our own, and Catherine is one of our own."

Vincent nodded, looking down at the ground, trying to gather his thoughts. Suddenly, his head jerked up and he looked at his father in horror, a realization coming forth. "I left her there!" he said, his voice filled with anguish. "I left her alone in her apartment that night I found her on the roof after she delivered Jacob." Vincent stood and paced the room, wringing his hands.

"She was alive and I abandoned her there. I left her for dead. I left her, Father. I left Catherine to die alone. If I hadn't left her, none of this would have happened. Burch wouldn't have known about her. She wouldn't have been subjected to all that pain and torture."

No longer able to hold in his emotions, Vincent let out a short roar and fell to his knees, sobbing. "I left her to die. I left Catherine to die alone," he sobbed.

Father stood and walked over to his son, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "You couldn't have known, Vincent," he said, trying to reassure his son. "The coma she woke up from she must have been in since that night. Nearly an overdose injection, possibly morphine, could have done that. Unless you were a trained physician, anyone would have thought a person to be dead. Her vital signs had to have been almost nonexistent.

"Vincent, I know the guilt you're feeling right now, but I need you to pull yourself together for Catherine's sake. She's not well, son. She's going to need you to be strong for the both of you."

Vincent took a few deep breaths, trying to get his emotions under control. He stood and assisted Father back to his chair. "I'm sorry, Father, you're right. Please tell me your diagnosis so I can help her."

"Not to worry, my son. One thing at a time.

"As I told Catherine, she's dehydrated and anemic. She is malnourished, but that has nothing to do with your journey home with her. It took weeks for her to get in that condition; there was nothing you could do to prevent that.

"Once I get the results from her blood work back, I'll be able to make any further diagnosis. Peter will be back from his vacation come the weekend, and I would like to send for him immediately.

“Her mental health is a great concern, Vincent. I can’t imagine what she’s been through. Encourage her to talk about it as much as possible. We don’t want her holding in those emotions to fester.

“Now, Vincent, I don’t want you to panic but I am most concerned about her heart.”

Vincent stopped breathing at Father’s words. “What’s wrong with her heart? Tell me what is wrong now!” he said, his voice rising with each word.

“Calm down, I told you not to panic.”

“How can I not panic when you’re telling me something is wrong with her heart?!” he asked angrily.

Father sighed again, searching for the right words that might calm Vincent slightly. “Her heartbeat is irregular, and with the low blood pressure, I just want to rule out any complications. It very well could be nothing. When Peter returns this weekend, we’ll ask him to bring an EKG machine and Holter monitor with him. Both will help monitor her heart, and we’ll know more then. Until then, I want to get her rehydrated and on bed rest. If possible, I would like her to remain as stress free as possible, but in her current mental state that is going to be a problem. That is why I need you to hold yourself together as best as you can. She’s going to need to lean on you. She may say things that are going to upset you, but you need to hold back the anger and frustration until we know more about her condition. Can you do that, Vincent? Can you do that for Catherine?”

Vincent nodded, wiping away frustrated tears.

“Good. Now, help me gather the IV pole and the saline IV bags and bring them to your chamber. I want to put her on a slow drip for the next 24 hours,” Father instructed as he grabbed his medical bag and put everything he would need to insert the IV in it.

Vincent nodded and grabbed the items Father requested, carrying them down the tunnel to his chamber. Catherine and Mary were already there when Vincent walked in. Mary was just pulling down the covers and trying to assist Catherine in climbing into the bed.

Vincent set down what he had in his arms and rushed over to them. Lifting Catherine, he gently laid her in the bed and covered her up. He sat down on the bed next to her and smiled, stroking her face. “Are you feeling better now after your bath?” he asked her.

She smiled and took his hand in her own and kissed his fingers. “Yes. Thank you,” she said. “Now you need to go get cleaned up. Quickly though, I like having you close.”

Vincent hesitated to leave her side again.

“Go, Vincent,” Father instructed. “You’re filthy and you smell. I don’t think Catherine wants you sleeping next to her like that. Perhaps Mary can go grab you both something to eat from the kitchen. You both must be famished. Nothing too heavy for Catherine right now. Some soup and crackers I think are best. But for him,” Father pointed his cane towards Vincent, “try to get as many sandwiches as William is willing to part with.”

“Of course, I’d be happy to,” Mary said, smiling at the couple. She patted Vincent’s arm as she left the chamber.

“Now, Vincent, if you would just bring the IV pole and bag of saline over to the bed, I can get Catherine’s IV going while you’re cleaning up.”

“Will you be all right while I’m gone, Catherine?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, just go. Don’t worry. Will you bring Jacob with you when you return? I promised I’d tuck him in but maybe I can still read to him before he goes to sleep.”

“Whatever you wish.”

Vincent reluctantly rose from the bed and gathered the supplies Father needed, bringing them to the bedside. He hung the bag on the IV pole for Father then took Catherine’s hand once again.

Father dragged a chair next to the bed and gave Vincent a shove. “Go, Vincent,” he said. “The sooner you go, the sooner you can come back, and you won’t have to leave again anytime soon.”

Vincent kissed Catherine’s fingers then set her hand down. He walked backwards towards his wardrobe so he wouldn’t have to take his eyes off her. Catherine’s eyes followed him, smiling. He stood just in front of the wardrobe, unaware of Father taking supplies out of his medical bag and setting them down on the bed. They continued staring lovingly at each other, unaware of anyone else in the room.

“Vincent, go!” Father said loudly.

Vincent jumped slightly, coming out of his trance. Catherine giggled slightly and looked down. Finally, Vincent turned away and grabbed a change of clothes and walked towards his private bathing chamber. He stopped just before leaving and looked over at Catherine and Father. Father was explaining to her step by step

about how he was going to insert the IV, keeping her calm and encouraging her to close her eyes and relax. Knowing she was in safe hands, Vincent left quickly, wanting to return to Catherine as soon as possible.

After bathing, Vincent made his way to Jacob's chamber. He found his son in his pajamas, sitting on the floor in front of his bed playing with some Lego bricks.

Jacob jumped to his feet at the sight of his father. "Where's Mother?" he asked, his face falling into a frown when he didn't see Catherine.

"Grandfather ordered that your mother stay in bed for a few days. She was upset that she couldn't tuck you in but would like you to bring a book to our chamber so she can still read to you," Vincent explained.

Jacob smiled and jumped up and down. He ran to his desk and grabbed his book bag. "Which one should I bring, Father?" he asked, searching through all his books. "Matilda? The Paper Bag Princess? Maybe we can start The Bridge to Terabithia." He started putting every book in his bag. "Wait, I know, Father. The Velveteen Rabbit. It's one of her favorites."

Jacob ran over to his bed and jumped on top of it to reach the book on the far side of it, next to his doll Caroline. He grabbed both the book and the doll and jumped off.

"Jacob, calm down. Your mother is very tired. She won't be able to read all these books tonight," Vincent said, smiling at his son.

"I know that, Father. I just want to make sure she has a choice."

"All right, Jacob, that's enough," Vincent said, walking over to him and picking him up. "Mother is waiting for us. She really wants to see you. We don't want to keep her waiting, do we?"

Jacob shook his head, resting his head against Vincent's shoulder as they left the boy's chamber.

When they entered Vincent's chamber, they found Catherine and Father seated at Vincent's writing desk. Jacob wiggled out of his father's arms when they entered and ran over to his mother, jumping into her lap and hugging her before anyone could stop him. Catherine immediately hugged her son, pulling him tightly against her.

“Jacob! Careful,” Vincent said, rushing over to remove the boy, but Catherine waved her hand at him. “No, Vincent, it’s fine. I want to hug him,” she said, closing her eyes, her face relaxed and peaceful.

He set the book bag down on the bed then took a seat at the table. Crunching his brow in a displeasing look, he looked between Catherine and Father. “Why are you out of bed, Catherine?” he asked. Expecting no answer, he immediately asked Father the same question.

“Why is she out of bed, Father? You said bed rest. This is not bed rest.”

Father sighed and gave Catherine a scowling look. “Why, you ask? Well, dare I say, because she is even more stubborn than you. She insisted on eating at the table. We came to an agreement that if I allow her to take her meals at the table with you and Jacob, she promises to stay in bed and by no means will leave that bed without the assistance of either you or Mary for at least 48 hours. Isn’t that right, Catherine?”

They both looked over to Catherine for a reaction, but she was oblivious to them both. Jacob was sitting in her lap, facing her. He was outlining her face with his hands, as if trying to memorize her. Catherine held him at his waist gently to prevent him from falling. She was just staring at him, tears forming in her eyes, a peaceful smile on her face.

A tear escaped one of her eyes and Jacob wiped it away with his thumb. “Are these happy tears again, Mother?” he asked.

Catherine only managed to nod, more tears escaping. Jacob leaned forward and kissed both her cheeks. Catherine pulled him close again, whispering, “I love you, sweetheart. Thank you for helping your father bring me home. You are such a brave boy.”

Both Vincent and Father watched the exchange, tears coming to their own eyes.

The moment was broken when Mary entered, carrying a tray of food. She walked up to the desk and placed it down in front of Vincent.

“Well, I think it is time for me to go to bed,” Father said, rising from his chair. He took a step towards Catherine and Jacob and placed a hand on her shoulder. Catherine looked up at him, smiling. “Remember your promise, my dear. You stay in that bed unless it is mealtime,” he told her sternly.

“I promise, Father. Thank you.”

Pointing to the soup on the tray, he told her, "Eat as much of that soup as you can. Slowly. Your stomach needs to adjust. If you eat too fast, you'll get sick." He then looked at Vincent. "See to it that she listens. Don't let that pretty face of hers entice you."

"I won't, Father. Both Jacob and I will ensure that she listens to your instructions. Won't we, Jacob?"

Jacob nodded, resting his head on his mother's shoulder, fiddling with the suede strap of the pouch that Catherine still wore around her neck.

"Very well then," Father said, then held his arm out to Mary. "Mary, would you be so kind as to escort me to my chamber? Perhaps for a cup of evening tea?"

"I'd be delighted, Father," she answered. Mary approached Father and stopped to give both Catherine and Jacob a peck on the head before taking Father's arm and walking out of the chamber with him.

Vincent stood once they were gone and walked around the table so he could lift Jacob up. "Come now, Jacob, your mother needs to eat some supper. Why don't you sit on the bed and pick one of the books you brought for her to read?" Jacob shook his head no and wrapped his arms around Catherine's neck tightly. "Jacob," Vincent repeated, tugging at the boy. "Let's go now. I told you, your mother needs to have her supper."

"No!" Jacob said, refusing to let go of his mother.

Vincent was about to pull his son away when Catherine looked up at him and shook her head no, then held up one finger, indicating for him to wait a moment. "Jacob, sweetheart," she said, taking his face between her hands. "If you listen to your father now, I promise to read to you until you fall asleep. You and I can curl up on that bed, all warm under the covers, and read whatever story you wish. First, though, I promised Grandfather that I'd eat a little supper, and I can't break a promise to Grandfather. So please, listen to your father and go sit on the bed and pick whatever book you wish. Will you do that for me, please?"

Jacob sighed and slowly climbed off his mother's lap. "Yes mother," he said then turned and ran over to the bed, jumping up into it.

Vincent looked at his son then back at Catherine and squatted down in front of her, holding her hands. They stared at each other for a moment before he asked, "Are you feeling okay? Are you in any pain?"

"No, I'm fine. Just very tired."

He kissed the fingers on both of her hands then rose and walked back around the table to sit. He set a bowl of soup broth in front of her then watched her through hooded eyes, making sure she ate, as he ate three roast beef sandwiches and a hearty stew. Finishing his meal, and being happy that she ate half the bowl of broth, Vincent lifted her up in his arms, being mindful of the IV, and set her down in the bed next to Jacob, who was eagerly waiting with a book in his hands.

“What’s the tube in your hand for, Mother?” Jacob asked as Vincent tucked the blankets around them both.

“It’s called an IV line. It helps me get the medicine I need to get better,” Catherine told him. She then saw the doll that Jacob held in his arms. “Caroline,” she whispered, gently taking the doll from Jacob and holding it in her lap. “My father gave me this doll when I was ten years old. I named her after my mother. I’m so glad she found her way to you, Jacob. She can be a good friend, and never tells anyone any secrets you tell her.”

“Can I keep her, Mother? I’ll take good care of her.”

“Of course you can keep her. That would make me happy. Now, which book did you pick?”

“The Velveteen Rabbit. You said it was your favorite when you were little,” Jacob said, handing her the book and cuddling up next to her, resting his head on her chest.

Vincent stood up and looked down at Catherine and their son. It was one of the most beautiful sights he had ever seen, the two of them together. “Will the two of you be okay for a few minutes while I take the supper dishes back to the kitchen?” he asked them softly.

Catherine smiled at him and nodded. “Yes, we’ll be okay,” she told him, “but hurry back, we both want our goodnight kisses before we fall asleep.”

“As you wish.”

Vincent gathered the dishes and walked towards the exit, smiling as Catherine’s voice followed him out of the chamber.

There was once a velveteen rabbit. He was fat and buncy, his coat was spotted brown and white, and his ears were lined with pink sateen. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged on top of the Boy’s stocking...

Vincent made quick work of returning their supper dishes to the kitchen. He washed and dried them, not wanting to leave a mess for William in the morning. He was getting ready to leave when he spotted a container of freshly baked cookies on the counter. A note that read DO NOT TOUCH! was taped to the top. Vincent smiled mischievously and gathered a few in a napkin before departing and making his way back to his chamber.

He was gone no more than twenty minutes, but when he returned, both Jacob and Catherine were fast asleep. Jacob was curled up against the wall, underneath the stained-glass window. Catherine laid next to him, hugging him close to her breast. It was a vision that Vincent wanted to immortalize in his mind forever.

It was hard to think, Vincent thought, that just over a week ago, he was depressed, dejected, heartbroken. He was so close to letting himself fall into the Abyss and leaving everything behind, including Jacob, that the thought still scared him. Then a true miracle occurred. His Catherine was returned to him.

He placed the stolen cookies on his desk. Then, unable to contain himself any longer, he carefully climbed into the bed next to Catherine and pulled her tightly against him, tucking her head under his chin.

Catherine sighed happily and opened her eyes slightly, smiling at him. She turned her head slightly to look up at him, her eyes half closed. “Do I still get my goodnight kiss?” she asked softly.

“Of course, a night will never pass again that we don’t share at least one kiss.” Carefully, Vincent brushed her lips with his own.

Catherine smiled and closed her eyes. “May I have one more? You know, just in case. It’s good to have one in the bank.”

Vincent chuckled and gave her two more kisses. “There you go,” he whispered. “Have two. Go back to sleep and I promise that we’ll build that bank of kisses up so much in the coming days that you’ll be a wealthy woman.”

He watched as Catherine laid her head back down and promptly fell back to sleep. Vincent closed his own eyes, a feeling of contentment overcoming him. He fought to stay awake, relishing the way Catherine felt in his arms, but exhaustion soon overtook him and he fell into a peaceful sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

Vincent slowly woke the next morning to the sound of whispering. He kept his eyes closed, feigning sleep as he listened to the two most important people in his life have a quiet conversation.

“Mother, are you going to be okay? You’ve been in the hospital a long time. Grandfather’s a doctor, he could have taken care of you,” Jacob said to his mother quietly.

It was a moment before Catherine replied. “I was asleep for a very long time. I only just woke up when you started to come and visit me. I’m sorry for what you had to see, Jacob. Those were bad men at the hospital. Your visits helped me, though. It was the only time I was happy.”

“Why did they hurt you, Mother?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes people do terrible things to others and we don’t know why.”

“Will they make you go back? Please don’t leave, Mother.”

Vincent heard the sadness in his son’s voice and knew he needed to reassure him. He sat up in bed and smiled down at the boy. “I don’t want either of you worrying about that,” Vincent said confidently. “No one, and I mean no one, is ever going to take your mother away again. I won’t let them. I won’t let anyone hurt either of you.”

“I know you won’t, Father,” Jacob said, sitting up in bed. “I’ll protect Mother, too. When you have to go and work in the tunnels, I’ll take care of her.”

“My brave men,” Catherine commented, looking between the two. She tried to sit up but struggled to do so. Vincent quickly jumped up and helped her sit on the edge of the bed, frowning that she seemed to be out of breath from the small task.

“Jacob, why don’t you go brush your teeth and get dressed? It’s almost breakfast, and it’s Thursday. You know what Thursday is,” Vincent said as he helped Catherine to stay sitting up.

“Pancake day!” Jacob said, jumping to his feet on the bed, then leaping out of it. He started running out of the chamber before he stopped and ran back to give Catherine a kiss on the cheek. “Can I stay home from morning classes today, Father? Please? I want to sit with Mother. I promise to be quiet and practice my letters here. Maybe Mother can help with my phonics.”

“That would be lovely, sweetheart,” Catherine answered before Vincent had a chance to oppose. “First, you must do as your Father tells you and wash up before

breakfast. Though I'm sure he would want you to go to your afternoon classes. Especially if one is math. I was terrible at math. Lucky for me, being a lawyer only requires basic math."

"Okay good, okay fine," Jacob said, mimicking Mouse, then ran happily from the room.

"Dear God, Vincent, how do you keep up with all his energy?" She laughed.

Vincent chuckled and helped Catherine to her feet.

Mary appeared at the chamber entrance before Vincent could respond. She had with her clean clothes and towels for Catherine. "How are you feeling today, Catherine?" she asked as she walked up to them.

"A little shaky but rested. I need to use the washroom though. Would you mind helping me?"

"Of course, my dear. Vincent, I'll push the IV pole if you want to help Catherine walk. We'll use the private wash chamber here. I imagine Vincent's going to have to get used to sharing it now. Later on, I'll bring some nice-smelling soaps and lotions, some flowers. Before you know it, we'll turn it into a nice lady's powder room."

Catherine chuckled as the three of them slowly made their way to the wash chamber. Vincent helped Catherine sit on a chair inside the room. "I'll be right outside when you're finished," he said, kissing the top of her head. He turned to leave the room.

"Wait, come back," Catherine said, grabbing his hand. Vincent went back to her and bent over to look her in the eye. She took him by the collar and pulled him towards her for a quick kiss. "You promised last night that we'd start banking kisses."

"That I did."

"You won't go far will you Vincent? I'd like it if you could stay close for awhile."

"That I did."

"You won't go far, will you, Vincent? I'd like it if you could stay close for awhile."

Vincent pulled her into a comforting hug and whispered reassurance in her ear then looked to Mary and said, "Call to me when you two are finished and I'll be right back to assist you."

“Of course. Go get changed yourself. We won’t be that long. I asked William to have breakfast delivered to your chamber this morning. Father will be by shortly after to check on Catherine.”

Ten minutes later, Catherine was seated at the table, nibbling on some toast. Mary stood behind her, braiding her hair. “Your hair has gotten so long. It’s beautiful. Do you plan on cutting it?” Mary asked, tying off the braid.

“I haven’t really thought about it. I’ve haven’t had it this long since I was a girl.”

“Vincent? Vincent, what do you think?”

Vincent was staring at Catherine, lost in thought.

“Vincent!”

Mary’s voice finally broke through to him. He blinked a few times then tried to focus on what he was asked. The look of confusion that was on his face made Mary smile. “I asked whether you thought that Catherine’s longer hair suited her. I’ve been telling her how beautiful it is and we wanted your opinion.”

Both women stared at him with amused looks, waiting for him to answer. “I...well, I think...I think it’s lovely,” Vincent answered, struggling to find any words. He was saved from any further questions as Father and Jacob entered the chamber. Jacob had his schoolbooks in his hands but tossed them in a chair near the entrance and ran to Catherine, jumping onto her lap and hugging her.

“Jacob, no. Careful,” Vincent said, stepping forward to lift him off his mother’s lap. The boy had other ideas as he latched onto his mother in a fierce grip. Vincent was reaching again to pull Jacob away when Father interrupted.

“Jacob, will you please pull a chair in front of your mother so I may sit and have a look at her?” he asked.

Catherine whispered something in his ear and Jacob nodded, jumping down and pulling a chair over for Father. He then went over to Vincent and tugged at his hand. “Mother wants you to sit down and eat breakfast,” he said, then jumped on the bed to wait.

Vincent looked between Father and Catherine then sighed and slumped down next to Catherine and began to eat. Mary assisted Father to the chair then took a note pad and pencil out of her apron pocket and stood back to take notes from the examination.

Father began looking Catherine over. Taking her blood pressure and temperature. Listening to her heart. Examining the ugly bruises on her wrists. “How did you

sleep? Did you eat something? Are you in any pain?" He asked question after question, Mary making notes of each answer.

"I'm feeling better now that I'm home," Catherine said after answering all his questions. "I am tired and I get a little winded when I walk, but I'm sure after a few days' rest I'll be able to move about more and help out where needed."

"Hmmm, well, I'll be the judge of that," Father said, packing up his medical bag. "Peter will be back from vacation in two days, and I've made sure he'll be made aware of all that has transpired down here."

Catherine teared up at the mention of her godfather's name. "Peter," she whispered, smiling. "Make sure he's Below before you tell him, in case he needs assistance from the shock."

"Of course, Catherine," Father reassured her. "I'm also going to request he bring some equipment with him when he comes. There are just a few tests I want to perform on you."

Vincent watched Father glanced over his shoulder at Jacob, who was waiting patiently for the exam to be done with his mother so he could have her attention. Vincent looked his father in the eyes, communicating that nothing should be said that would worry Catherine or Jacob.

"What sort of tests, Father?" Catherine asked, looking at him with concern.

Father smiled and patted her hand. "Just standard tests, my dear. We don't have access to any of your medical records from the last four years, and from what we understand, you were in a coma for many years. I just want to make sure all is well."

Catherine nodded and looked down at her hands. Vincent felt her anxiety building. He stood and quickly rounded the table so he could kneel next to her. "Catherine," he said placing his hands over hers, "try not to worry yourself. All will be well. You're safe here. Please remember that. Whatever happened back at that facility, whoever hurt you, they will not harm you again. This I promise." He watched her fight the tears that threatened to fall but fail. As she began to weep, Vincent pulled her to him in a tight hug. "Hush now, my love," he whispered, rubbing her back.

"Mother!"

Jacob jumped off the bed and ran to his mother when she started to cry. He grabbed her around the waist from her side, hugging her. Catherine quickly tried to gather her composure and smiled at her son, hugging him back. "It's all right, sweetheart," she said, kissing the top of his head.

“All right, Catherine, back to bed,” Father said, standing up. “I want to check that IV before I head back to the library. Jacob, turn down the covers so your father can help your mother into bed.”

Jacob nodded and went to the bed and pulled the covers down. Vincent helped Catherine into bed and tucked her in comfortably. Jacob immediately jumped in next to her, cuddling up against her.

“Did you bring your schoolwork with you, Jacob?” Catherine asked as she stroked his hair. Jacob nodded and closed his eyes, hiding his face against her side.

Father examined the IV line and checked the bag. “All looks well. This bag should be empty by this afternoon. I’d like to run one more through the IV. Make sure your mother stays in bed, Jacob. I’m leaving you in charge,” Father said, patting his grandson on the head.

Jacob peeked up at his grandfather and smiled. “I will, Grandfather.”

“Let me walk you out, Father,” Vincent said, taking Father by the arm and helping him towards the chamber’s door. They stopped just beyond the threshold. “Ensure she rests and sleeps. I know she wants Jacob close right now but if he becomes too rambunctious, send him to me.”

“I will, Father, thank you.

After Father left, Vincent turned and walked back towards the bed, picking up Jacob’s schoolbooks as he did. He dropped the books onto his writing desk then quickly lifted Jacob away from Catherine before he had a chance to object. He deposited the boy in a chair and pointed towards the books.

“Schoolwork now, Jacob. That was the agreement. You promised that if you stayed home from your morning classes you would work on your letters and phonics. If you don’t, I will send you off to class.”

“But I promised Grandfather I’d take care of Mother. How can I take care of her if I have to do schoolwork?”

“You make sure she stays in bed and sleeps. Keep quiet and let her rest. I’m going to work on my class lessons, as well. Now, enough, start your work. We’ll wake your mother for lunch and then you go to your athletics and afternoon lessons.”

Jacob huffed and reluctantly grabbed one of his workbooks and started his lessons. Vincent smiled at his son then turned and walked over to the bed. He took Catherine’s hands and sat down next to her. “Are you feeling okay, Catherine? Is there anything you need?” he asked, giving her hands a squeeze.

She shook her head and squeezed his hands back. “No. I’m okay, Vincent. I just need you close and need to know that Jacob is safe,” she said, leaning back into the pillows.

“Close your eyes and get some sleep. Jacob and I are just a few feet away should you need anything,” Vincent said, motioning towards the table. She nodded and smiled when Vincent kissed her hands before placing them on her stomach. He sat there for a few minutes, just watching her, before he rose and grabbed his own classwork and joined Jacob at the table.

CHAPTER TEN

After the first night, Vincent made sure that Jacob slept in his own chamber so Catherine could rest. Her IV was removed and she seemed to be recuperating physically. But the nightmares continued.

Vincent was glad that Jacob never was there to witness when she woke up crying and panicking. He would hold her close and rock her, trying to soothe her. It worried him, because he could feel her heart beating impossibly fast. Father’s concerns ran through his head. “I’m concerned about her heart.” If there was something wrong, how long ago had her symptoms started? Did the nurses and doctors at the hospital she was held at ignore her symptoms?

On the night before Peter’s arrival, Vincent held Catherine in his arms after a particularly bad episode. They both laid in bed facing each other. Catherine burrowed close to him, which indicated for him to hold her tight. She finally calmed down enough that there was only a slight shudder of her breath.

“Talk to me, Catherine,” Vincent whispered, trying to encourage her. “You mustn’t keep this inside of you. It will help you to say what you are feeling. You yourself once encouraged me to do the same thing. Please, let me help you.”

Catherine took another deep, shuddering breath then started to talk softly into Vincent’s chest. “Why would Elliot be keeping me there all that time? I thought he cared for me. I thought that we were able to move forward and be friends. But that man, Fallon, said Elliot was coming. Why would he betray me like that? First John Moreno then Elliot. Why?”

“I don’t know, Catherine. I think John Moreno was so afraid of Gabriel that he was ready to sacrifice anyone to save himself. He ended up losing anyway. Joe made certain of that.”

Catherine nodded. Vincent had told her about everyone who cared about her from Above. Where they were. How they were doing.

“My sweet Joe. He idolized that man. I wish I could see him and Jenny just once. Perhaps one day.”

“One day you will. I promise.”

“Elliot’s betrayal hurts the most, Vincent. I’m sorry. I can’t imagine the feelings you have towards him, but I just keep thinking that he cared for me.”

Vincent took a couple of deep breaths before responding. Father had warned him that she might say things that would upset him. He knew that Catherine trusted Elliot to a certain degree. The thought filled him with jealousy, even though he knew her feelings for the man were purely platonic. It wasn’t about him right now though. It was about comforting Catherine. Helping her come to terms with what had happened to her.

“He loved you, Catherine. Men will do almost anything for the woman they love. He may have thought he was saving you.”

“Perhaps. It still hurts. Fallon said that Elliot told them to work on me. To make me forget who I was. Elliot ordered them to psychologically torture me. Why? If he cared, how would doing that fit into his agenda? Fallon. That man is evil, Vincent. The things he did, the things he said. ‘Catherine Chandler is dead. Catherine Chandler is dead.’”

Vincent felt Catherine tense and start to sob as she thought about what had happened to her. He rubbed her back as she started to hyperventilate, her heart rate accelerating. “Shhh, Catherine. You are all right. You are safe,” he said, trying to soothe her. “Say the words with me. ‘I am safe. Catherine Chandler is alive.’ Come now, say the words with me. ‘I am safe. Catherine Chandler is alive.’”

Vincent repeated the lines a few more times before he heard her start to whisper, “I am safe. Catherine Chandler is alive.”

“Yes, Catherine. Say it again with me. ‘I am safe. Catherine Chandler is alive.’”

He managed to get her to say the words a few more times and she started to calm, her breathing returning to normal. He continued to repeat the words in her ear until she fell into an uneasy sleep.

Vincent laid awake for the rest of the night, holding Catherine in his arms. The anger and rage were building inside of him at Elliot Burch for placing her in that place and ordering those people to hurt her, though it was nothing compared to the

rage he felt for the man named Fallon. He had heard and seen with his own eyes how evil the man was. And he knew there was more that Catherine hadn't said about what he did to her. He would coax it out of her eventually, when she was ready. Until then, he would bury the rage that he felt, knowing that one day the man would pay with his life for what he did to his Catherine.

Peter arrived the next day and almost fainted when he saw Catherine. Her happiness at the sight of her old friend warmed Vincent's heart. Peter himself broke down in tears when he first saw her standing in the hospital chamber. Holding her in his arms, he demanded to know what had happened to her and how this came to be.

Vincent and Father explained to him the events of the last two weeks. "No one must know that she is alive, Peter. There are people looking for her Above. It's not safe," Vincent told him.

"I understand that, Vincent," Peter said, holding on to Catherine still. "But if what you say is true, I need to know the extent of the illness that kept her in a coma for four years. Cathy, I need to take you above to run some tests. A CT scan, an MRI."

"Is Cathy the reason you wanted me to bring the EKG machine and holter monitor? Is it her bloodwork you had me pick up from the lab? If it is, I must say, I am very much concerned. I've read over the results of the blood work, Jacob. You and I need to have a consult immediately about her health."

"Peter, I'm not leaving the tunnels," Catherine said, pulling away from him. "Whatever care I need, I will receive down here. I'm not leaving Vincent. I'm not leaving my son."

"Cathy, be reasonable. You need specialized care that you can't receive down here."

"I'm not leaving! Do you know what they did to me last time I was in a hospital, Peter?! I'm not going back Above ever!"

Vincent quickly went to Catherine and pulled her close, leading her away and over to a gurney to sit. He sat next to her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her against him. He needed to calm her. "No one is going to force you to do anything you don't want to do," he said. "Take a deep breath. Everyone here has your best interests at heart."

"They'll find me if I leave here, Vincent," Catherine cried, hugging her legs against her chest, rocking. "Elliot will have someone on every corner of the city

looking for me, let alone the hospitals. He'll have them take me again. They'll take me away from you and Jacob."

Vincent could feel her heart racing. He looked at both Father and Peter, his eyes pleading for help.

Father approached them and sat down on the other side of Catherine on the gurney. "My dear, neither Peter nor I will make you leave. Will we, Peter?"

Peter walked up to Catherine and placed his hands on her shoulders. "Cathy, sweetheart, I won't make you leave, but I'm going to need you to follow Father's and my instructions without any argument. Whatever it is that happened to you while you were missing has had some lasting effects. With Father's observations and the results of your blood work, I'm concerned you may have a type of arrhythmia. That is why I brought down the EKG and heart monitor."

Catherine stopped rocking and looked at Peter, a panicked look in her eyes. "Is there something wrong with my heart?"

"We don't know anything for sure until we run a few tests. If it is arrhythmia, it is a very treatable disorder. The most important thing is for you to keep yourself calm. Keep your stress level low. Light physical activity. Take Jacob for a walk after dinner each night. We'll run the EKG today and have you wear the monitor for a week. Then we'll go from there."

Catherine buried her face between her knees, hugging her legs tighter.

"I'll be here with you every step of the way," Vincent whispered to her. "Let them run their tests. There's a concert in the park tonight. It's not exactly classical. Highlights from the composer John Williams. I hear he is a talented movie score composer. I'm sure Father and Peter will not object if you and I go to our special place and listen. Some of the adults are taking the children above, including Jacob, to listen."

"That sounds like a lovely idea, Vincent," Father said, trying to sound cheerful. "Mary has this beautiful gown that she just finished sewing. I'm sure you'd look splendid in it."

"*Jaws*," Catherine whispered softly.

"What was that, Catherine?" Vincent asked, having a challenging time hearing her, her voice being muffled from her face being between her knees.

"*Jaws*," she said again, looking up at Vincent. "He composed the music for *Jaws*. I saw the movie back in the '70's. I refused to go in the ocean for the entire summer

after seeing it.” She gave Vincent a small smile, relaxed her muscles slightly, and rested her cheek on her knees, facing Vincent.

“Well, it’s settled then,” Peter said, walking over to the EKG machine and wheeling it back to the gurney. “Let’s get this out of the way so Catherine can get some rest before her and Vincent’s concert date.”

Father and Vincent stood up. Vincent helped Catherine lie down so Peter could attach the EKG electrodes to her. Then he leaned his elbows on the gurney and held one of Catherine's hands with one of his as he stroked the hair away from her face with the other. “All will be well, Catherine,” he said, squeezing her hand.

Catherine nodded, squeezing his hand back, and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The weeks went by fast for Vincent. Catherine was diagnosed with a form of tachycardia arrhythmia. Peter and Father could only assume it was from extreme stress that was brought on from her treatment before Jacob was born. The drugs they were injecting her with didn’t help, including at the hospital when she woke from her coma.

The treatment plan they had prescribed for her seemed to be working. Vincent was overjoyed to see her able to move about the tunnels on her own, though he made sure she was under constant observation when he was not present.

Catherine and Jacob became extremely close, sharing a bond that even left Vincent perplexed. They were able to communicate with each other without speaking a word out loud. Catherine’s nightmares and panic attacks continued, but they were becoming less frequent as she opened herself more to Vincent.

They lay in bed one night, a month after Catherine’s rescue and return to the Below community. It was the first time they had made love since her return, and for Vincent it felt like their first time ever, having little recollection of their actual first time down in the caverns during his illness. Catherine lay against his shoulder, their fingers entwined, resting her head on Vincent’s chest.

“Will you marry me?” he asked and kissed the top of her head.

Catherine raised her head and rested her chin on his shoulder, smiling at him.

“You’re asking me this after we made love? Are those endorphins wreaking havoc on your brain?” she teased.

“Perhaps,” he said, looking down at her with a smile of his own. “Or perhaps I wanted to find the perfect moment to ask you, and how more perfect can the moment be than after we’ve expressed our love to each other to such a degree that, if the world would end now, I would be content because I have you in my arms for my final journey.”

“Well, when you put it that way, it would be the greatest honor, consenting to be your wife.”

Vincent’s smile broadened. He gathered her into his arms and pushed her onto her back, kissing her passionately. “I haven’t a ring to give to you, only my heart,” he whispered, trailing kisses along her face.

“Your heart is the only thing I desire,” she whispered back, giving him kisses of her own. “Plus, I already consider my crystal my engagement ring. So, all is well.”

Vincent lifted the crystal that never left her neck, letting it dangle between them. He looked at the crystal then at her and nodded. “I think I like the thought of that.”

“Then it’s settled. Come. It’s time to sleep. You have a busy day in the lower tunnels, and I promised Father I’d help him start to categorize the library. You’ve seen the library, Vincent, there is absolutely no system in there. I have my work cut out for me.” She pushed him onto his back and rested her head against his shoulder once more, closing her eyes.

Vincent gently stroked her back, lulling her into a peaceful sleep. He lay awake for some time after Catherine fell asleep. Happiness filled him. The woman he loved more than life itself was returned to him and agreed to marry him. He thought about how much his life had changed within a month’s span. He went from giving up on life to being the happiest he could ever remember being. He closed his eyes, feeling at peace. He let the sound of Catherine’s heartbeat lull him to sleep.

It was a peace that Vincent was unaware wouldn’t last. As he lay with his entire world in his arms, three men stood outside the drainage tunnel in Central Park. Dressed all in black, Elliot Burch stood with Cleon Manning and another one of his bodyguards.

“Are you sure this is where the entrance is, Mr. Burch?” Cleon asked him.

“Yes. When Catherine agreed to help me with the transportation of my father back at the docks years ago, we escaped through a sewage grate in the ground when everything went sideways,” Elliot answered, staring at the tunnel. “Cathy knew her

way around down there. She led us to a hidden door just inside this tunnel. She opened it and let me out. This is where I emerged.”

“We all saw the video footage that Gabriel had from his building in Brooklyn where he was questioning her about that stupid book. You both saw that...that man...whatever he is. He was coming for her. I knew she was hiding something back then. All the signs point towards this place.”

“How can you be certain this is where Miss Chandler is?”

“Because the stupid idiots I left her with let him take her. You saw the bars ripped out of the wall in her room. What else could have done that?”

“Maybe you should just leave well enough alone. If Gabriel finds out you’ve been hiding her away all these years, he’ll destroy you. Even you don’t have enough money and resources to stop that man. He has people everywhere. He very well might kill you both.”

Elliot looked at Cleon, his eyes filled with hatred and rage.

“It’s Catherine, Cleon. Catherine’s in there somewhere. I protected and hid her away for four years, praying for the day when she would wake up and I could take her away from all this blasted madness. I love her. She and I belong together and I’m not about to let some freak of nature take her away from me. I didn’t let Gabriel do it, and I’m not about to let anyone down there take her away. Let’s go. Tonight is simply a reconnaissance mission.”

Elliot took a step forward and started to walk towards the drainage tunnel entrance. Cleon and the other guard look wearily at one another before following Elliot Burch.

COMING SOON

PART TWO: CATHERINE