

Windflwr

## **BAtB Fanfiction - And Death Shall Have No Dominion** (Complete)

### **Chapter 1**

As Vincent slammed the guy's head into the cement block wall and heard the crunch of bone and sinew, he smiled in satisfaction—more than he had in a long while. Maybe it was the smell of dead animals all around that end of the shipyard—a miserable failed attempt at smuggling the poor exotic creatures—he didn't know. But the place reeked of it. A disease had taken them all. They never stood a chance. But the guy, supposedly the one who'd ordered this carnage, died too quickly.

His sensitivity to the smell made the blood lust roar in his veins. He wanted justice! But as he looked around for another victim, he heard the sirens. He needed to leave the scene before the police arrived.

There was something still hot in his gut, and it drove him home . . . toward her—*Catherine*.

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“One day at a time,” that's what Catherine told herself aloud as she dabbed on her make-up, preparing for work. Her father's death was still fresh in her mind, but life went on and so would she. After all, she had a lot to look forward to. She and Vincent were growing closer together, day by day. In fact, he was becoming her rock.

She missed him on the nights he didn't spend with her, but she needed the sleep, especially on work days such as this where staying up all night didn't exactly equate to her being terribly sharp the next morning.

She held up the chintz blouse, a recent purchase. The fabric was silky, cool and white - a power color. It made her feel professional.

Having just done up the buttons, she was bare footing it into the bedroom to select her shoes when she was suddenly yanked to the side and flattened up against the wall. Before she could do anything more than gasp, his hands and mouth were all over her. *Vincent!*

The intensity with which he claimed her was breathtaking. *Literally*. They hadn't had an encounter quite like this since he'd first returned. Not that she was complaining—just short of time. She started to tell him that when he scooped her up, threw her down on the bed and covered her with his body, his murmurs and growls telling her just how strong his need was. A sharp tingle of excitement ran up her body from toes to nose.

He smelled faintly of salt sea air and she fleetingly wondered what he'd been doing all night. When he moved from her mouth to kissing her neck, she was finally able to speak, although gasping was a better description for what came out. The bristle on his chin was doing crazy shivery things to her brain, not to mention her tender skin. “Uh . . . wait . . . I need to . . . tell you something. Vincent! . . . I have a meeting . . .”

He wasn't exactly paying attention and pretty soon she didn't care, either.

Vincent started undoing the long line of buttons on her shirt and grunted in frustration at how snugly they were fitted. Catherine started to reach up to help him when he found his own solution. The rip of fabric was loud in the quiet room.

He froze, his eyes on her. "I didn't mean to do that. Or that," he added when more ripped. Then he covered his face and rolled away from her onto his back. They were both panting. When she turned to him, his eyes—which had been faintly glowing moments before—were tightly closed.

Still reeling from the surge of her own adrenalin, it took her a moment to find her voice. "Are you okay?" The whole incident was wildly different from their normal, sweet and slow encounters. They usually worked up to frenzy, not started at it. She shivered involuntarily.

"Yeah. Give me a minute."

When his breathing finally settled, he peeked over at her with a painful grin. "Oops." He slid his fingers, nails now dull and smooth, through the flimsy, shredded fabric on the front of her blouse.

She glanced down with a laugh. "No, it's okay. I'll . . . I'll just go change. But you owe me one, Mister," she said, and dropped a kiss to his lips. "This blouse was brand new."

Vincent nodded and sat up, still rubbing his head. "I don't know what came over me."

"No. It's okay. I'm just . . . I'm sorry I can't stay," she said. Sorrier than he knew. She was pretty sure she felt as frustrated as he looked. "I've got to be across town for a deposition in—" she looked at her watch and cringed, "ten minutes!"

Vincent frowned. He wasn't usually so careless, especially with Catherine. His head hurt. "Go. I'll . . . clean this up." He picked up the remains of her blouse as she ran into the closet to change into something else. "Must be this job I had last night. Been down at the docks dealing with smugglers of the worst kind."

"Don't worry about it."

He scanned her up and down when she reappeared. She seemed fine, had even straightened her hair again, no worse for wear. Wish he could say the same for himself.

"We'll talk tonight when I'm off?"

"Okay."

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"I don't know, Tess. It was like he was a different person. Aggressive."

Tess shot her a look. "*Aggressive?*" Alarmed, she dragged her partner off to one of the alcoves set at intervals in the long hallway of the Federal Building. "The words 'Vincent' and 'aggressive' in the same sentence are terrifying enough, but he was aggressive with *you?*"

"Not in an . . . angry way. More like sexually—"

“Okay. Too much information!” Tess sighed at her partner. “The man is incredibly strong, Cat. He can seriously hurt you. I hope to God he’s being careful because if I ever hear of him injuring you, even accidentally—”

“Tess, he has never hurt me and never will. But I am worried. He didn’t seem to be his normal self this morning.”

“Whatever his *normal* self is . . . ?”

“Okay, enough. He said something about being down at the docks. Have you heard of anything going on there over the last twenty-four hours?”

“No, but I’ll look into it.”

“Thanks.”

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When Catherine finally returned home in the evening, she was a little surprised to find no note or text from him. She tried his burner. No answer. Rather than wait around, she fixed herself something quick to eat and headed over to JT’s—the old Gentlemen’s Club he and Vincent had been occupying ever since the warehouse was destroyed.

“I haven’t seen him, but then, he doesn’t exactly keep me informed of his whereabouts anymore. Says he has more freedom to come and go. Personally, I don’t like being out of contact.”

“I saw him this morning—briefly—but we talked of getting together tonight. When he didn’t show, I thought you might know where he was?”

JT got up from the table to take his microwave dinner to the trash. “Not a clue.”

When she didn’t say anything else and continued to stand there, he lifted his eyebrows at her.

Catherine looked around the room. JT had never been comfortable with her, one on one. She thought by now things would be easier, but he always seemed somewhat suspicious of her. Or perhaps jealous was the word. He had been Vincent’s only friend and ally for ten years; it made sense that he felt crowded out of his friend’s life since meeting her. But that was far from the truth. Vincent was an extremely loyal friend.

“Has he seemed different to you lately?”

“Define ‘different.’”

“I don’t know. More intense?”

“Not that I’ve noticed. Maybe he saves that for *you*.”

Okay. This was going nowhere. She turned to go, but saw the open card on the edge of his desk.

“JT, what’s this? Someone’s birthday?”

“Uh, oh. You weren’t supposed to see that.”

“Why not?” Her eyes widened. “Is it *Vincent’s* birthday? When?”

He frowned. “We don’t do birthdays, remember?”

“But you *have* them. Is it already past?”

JT relented. “It’s two days from now, but we made plans to watch a game together. Tomorrow.”

“Oh. Well, okay. No problem. I’ll plan on celebrating it with him in two days, then. That will work, won’t it?”

“I guess. But don’t tell him I told you. He gets kinda funny about it every year.”

No doubt because he can’t share it with family or other friends. Maybe that was what had him so amped up this morning—anticipating a day that didn’t exactly have a lot of good memories attached to it in recent years.

“I’ll pretend I found out through his military records.” That’s when she realized he’d had a birthday very close to when she’d first found him and he’d never said a word. Keeping all of that in mind, she headed out. Tess would come to the rescue.

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“So I found out there was some trouble at the docks the other night. Smugglers. They found an open crate with a bunch of dead people and animals.”

“Animals?”

“Some kind of exotic animal smuggling ring. Mostly birds. But they were all dead.”

“Dead—*how*?”

“It’s not what you’re thinking. Coroner said the animals all died of a disease. The people died because they’d run out of clean air and water long before they made it ashore in their container from hell. Pretty gruesome. There was one suspicious death, though—one of the dock workers. The uniforms on the ground said it looked like at least one of the animals must have survived and killed the poor guy when he opened the container.”

“But you think it was Vincent?”

“I don’t know. But Reynolds took a personal interest. He went down to the scene.”

“That doesn’t give me any warm fuzzies.”

“No, but if it *was* Vincent, then that means maybe Reynolds was there covering up his involvement?”

Catherine shuddered to think what that meant. She tried Vincent’s burner cell again. It went straight to voice mail. She sighed. Surely Michael Reynolds would let her know if something was wrong?

They stepped out of the empty subway car into the platform. “Okay, tell me again why you are dragging me downtown *not* to go to a club?”

“We’re shopping—for a very special gift.”

“For Vincent. I get it. But what are we looking for? I mean, the man has almost nothing to his name. You could buy him practically anything and he’d be happy. Get him a shirt. Wait. I have a better idea. Get that man a new jacket—preferably one without pockets!”

Catherine laughed, despite herself. She’d add jeans to that pocket-less list, as well. No. Clothes were too easy and nothing special.

“I know. How about a gift card? Then he could get whatever he needed. You’d be showing him your practical side.”

“Tess, no! I’m not going to give the man I love, who has saved my life on numerous occasions, such an impersonal gift. This has to be something special. Unique.” Oh, bother. She was never any good at this.

“Well, homemade gifts are the best—at least, according to my brothers. One year they had this brilliant idea that everyone in the family had to *make* Christmas gifts for each other—nothing store bought.”

“How did that work out? I mean, I don’t see you as the crafty type.”

“No?” Tess gawked, mock insulted. “Well, I’ll have you know . . . I cooked! Gran’s pumpkin spice bread. It was a family recipe, but I made it myself—a dozen little tiny loaves. You should have seen them, they were so adorable. And not burnt at all. It wasn’t anything fancy, but it tasted pretty darn good, if I do say so myself.”

Tess said that so proudly, Cat had to laugh again. “I’m impressed.” Her partner wasn’t exactly the Suzy Homemaker type. She herself loved to cook, but she’d cooked for Vincent on a number of occasions—it wouldn’t exactly be special. But a homemade gift . . . hmmm. “I’ll have to give that some thought. Meanwhile, can we go into that world market place? Maybe something in there will spark an idea.”

They were about to leave empty handed, except for the jewel-colored jacket Tess managed to find when she should have been helping her hunt, when Catherine spotted it—a small, painted box. “Tess—what about this?” she asked, picking it up.

“A box? Gee, nothing says ‘I love you’ like a black lacquered box. It’s pretty, I suppose, but what would he use it for? Chips on game day? Too small.”

“No. Have you ever heard of a memory box? Or some people call them promise boxes.”

“For what? Promises?”

“Okay, I’m being serious. A memory box—it’s a place to keep little reminders of the special events in your life or relationship. People give them at weddings in some cultures.” She picked up the small chest and examined it from all sides. It was on the plain side, but then he’s a guy—guys like plain. The box wasn’t the important part anyway. It was what went inside. She placed it into her cart. She had two days to fill it with memories . . .

When they got home, her phone buzzed. “No,” she answered JT’s question. “He isn’t with me. I thought he was spending the evening with you. Perhaps he got hung up somewhere.” She sounded more confident than she felt.

“Never mind,” JT informed her. “He just showed up.”

Catherine relaxed for the first time all day. “Perfect. Tell him I’ll see him tomorrow.”

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“You want another slice before I put it away?” JT carried the pizza box over to the refrigerator with a frown. Vincent had barely eaten any of it.

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Pizza makes the best breakfast, anyway.” As JT cleared a spot on the coffee table, he spread his chemistry tests open on it. He still had some papers to grade before classes the next morning.

Vincent took the hint and got up. “I think I’ll—” He made a little gasping sound, then whoosh! He sneezed, blowing JT’s papers off the table and onto the floor.

“Whoa! Cover it up next time! Geez. Who do you think you are—Clark Kent? You got enough wind to knock down a horse! What is this—a new manimal ability coming on?” He bent to pick up the scattered exams.

“So sorry, man. I didn’t see that coming.” He helped JT.

“You catching a cold or-or- what?”

“Not that I know of, but—wow. Maybe it’s the mold in this old place.”

“The mold that didn’t bother you last week?”

“I don’t think I’ve sneezed in years.”

“I’ve never seen you catch anything. I thought it was all part of your suped-up DNA. You sure you’re fine?”

“Yeah.” Vincent shrugged. “What’s a little cold?”

“For you? Who knows. You catch something from Catherine? Because you’re not exactly around a lot of virus-spewing children or anything.”

“No, Catherine’s fine. I don’t know, JT. Must be a head cold. I do have a slight headache. Probably best if I don’t hang around you much. I don’t want to get you or Catherine sick.”

“I’m fine, but why don’t I take a blood sample, just in case? You said you felt hot the other night?”

“I don’t really think it warrants any panic, JT. But I’m kind of worn out. I think I’ll head to bed early tonight, if you don’t mind.”

“Hey. No worries. Games on are all the time.” JT watched him go with a frown. The only other time in ten years that Vincent had acted peculiar was when he’d had those blackouts and that led to him developing more super senses. He shrugged. Maybe it was nothing, but maybe he’d keep that tranq gun with him tonight, just in case.

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“I’m coming over.”

“Catherine, you don’t have to. I’m fine.” Vincent paced his room talking on his cell phone. “This just feels like a cold virus, but I don’t want you catching it.”

“I’m not going to let you lie in bed, suffering, with no one to take care of you. JT has classes. You need someone there and I’ve got the day off.”

Despite his repeated protests, Catherine was having none of it. She showed up an hour later with a bag of cold remedies and first aid supplies, along with a couple movies on DVD. If he had to be sick in bed, at least he’d have something to do.

When he met her at the door, she took one look at him and frowned. He looked dead on his feet. “You poor baby,” she said and pushed a lock of sweaty hair back from his face. Without further talk, she pulled him through the living room to the back where the bedrooms were. JT came out of the study.

“I didn’t expect for you to get the door. Wow.”

“I know. JT, he looks bad.”

Vincent straightened. “Hey. I resemble that remark. And I am standing right here. If you’re both going to insult me, you could at least—” He swayed, then his eyes rolled back and he collapsed to the floor. JT just managed to get in front of him in time to soften the fall.

“Vincent!”

“Think you can help me get him to his bed?” JT asked.

“Sure.”

After they half-dragged him to the room and got him up onto the bed, Catherine removed his shoes and shirt and made him more comfortable. Then she curled up next to him so she could change the cool cloths on his head every few minutes.

“What do you think?” she asked quietly, as JT hovered.

“I think I’ll take that blood sample while he’s out.”

“Good idea.”

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Vincent roused an hour later. He turned his head and met her eyes. “Hey.”

“Hey, yourself. No, don’t try to get up. Just rest.”

"I'm sorry about this."

"Don't worry about it. How's your head? Still hurt?"

"Yeah. But it's better in this low light."

Because he had extremely sensitive eyes.

"I just wish you didn't have to see me like this."

Catherine grinned at him. "I know you don't want me to see you all puffy and everything, but really—you are not that vain. And I've seen you at your worst, remember?"

"I'd listen to her if I were you, Big Guy." JT walked into the room and turned to Catherine. "You okay, or you want me to stay?"

"No. We'll be fine."

"I can take care of myself," Vincent protested. "You two don't need to play nursemaid."

"Yeah. How's that working out for you? You fainted like a girl the last time you tried to walk across the room."

"JT, I didn—"

"You did." JT and Catherine said simultaneously. That shut him up.

When JT returned later in the day and Vincent was sleeping, albeit fitfully, he sent Catherine home to get some rest, herself, and took over the nanny duties.

When he heard growling noises sometime later, he checked on him. Vincent wasn't in a good place. JT had grabbed the tranq gun, but when he pushed open the door, his buddy hadn't transformed—that was the good part. But he was burning up with fever.

He dialed Catherine. "You better get over here," he said when she answered the phone on the first ring.

By the time she arrived, Vincent had slipped into unconsciousness. JT checked his vitals then looked back into his microscope. He didn't like what he was seeing. "Heart's racing; temp's off the charts. What was he exposed to on his last mission?"

Catherine blanched. "Why? You think this isn't just a normal virus?"

"There's that word again. Nothing about him is *normal*."

She tried to think. "He-he said something about dead exotic animals—mostly birds. It was some kind of smuggling ring."

"From China?"

"I don't know. Why?"



“All those scary new flu strains come from China.”

“Okay. So, if it’s just a flu—”

“*Bird* flu. Different.” JT went over to his computer and tapped the keys. “I’ll see what I can find out from the CDC. He’s in superb physical condition. By all accounts, he should be able to recover from it easily.”

“But?” She heard the unspoken word.

JT sighed, worried. “Normally, Vincent’s white blood cells do a fantastic job of fighting off infections of any kind, but not this time. Uh-oh.”

“A new flu strain?”

“Yeah, but this one only affects birds.” When she didn’t react, he added. “This matches a new strain on their website. Humans can’t catch it—neither of us will.”

“Okay. That’s good, then.”

“For you and me, yes. Not for Vincent.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s a disease only transmitted animal to animal—rare birds. Something Vincent has in his DNA.”

“But now that you know what it is, you can treat it?”

“Nobody can treat it. They don’t have vaccines for that—only for *human* viruses. Nobody cares about the animal ones. If he isn’t any better by morning, I’m not sure what we’re going to do.”

But Catherine was. She left Vincent thrashing and mumbling incoherently the next morning and went straight to the precinct and Michael Reynolds’ office.

## Chapter 2

“So will you help?” There was a hint of desperation in her voice, but she didn’t care if he heard it. She was long past pride and quite willing to beg, if need be.

Michael Reynolds spied the crack in the open doorway and frowned. “Why would I do that? You’re asking me to expose my entire operation to an unknown—and-potentially deadly—virus.”

He said that to scare her, no doubt. It was working perfectly. Yes, and who knew what other half-human/half-animal beasts he had lurking downstairs on that farm? “I’m asking you, as your daughter, to save the life of the man I love—who also happens to be a very valuable asset of yours.”

“Oh, so *now* you’re my daughter?” Reynolds held her gaze for a moment, then turned away, frustrated. He was her father when she needed help; not before. He fumed.

There was no way to win this. From the sounds of it, Keller was as good as dead. "Perhaps it would be better for all of us if he didn't survive," he finally said, turning back. "Reality, Catherine."

He watched as she visibly paled, but she recovered quickly, just like he knew she would.

"If he doesn't survive," she said, voice shaking, "then neither will you."

"What's that supposed to mean? Threats, Detective?" Turn-about was fair play. Let's see how *she* liked the change in relationship!

"It means I'll do everything I can to take you down because there'd be no reason not to anymore."

She would do it, too, with a little determination—something she had in spades right now. He stared at her—his proud, fearless daughter. But one who'd never truly recognize him as her father. "I think you grossly overestimate your significance, much less your power. That being said, I don't like cleaning up other people's messes. You're telling me the only thing standing between me staying in operation or not . . . is you?"

"Is *him*."

He stared her down and made her wait. It was the only satisfying moment of the whole encounter. Finally, he sighed, "Get him ready. I'll have a crew pick him up in one hour from now." Pulling the cell phone out of his jacket, he paused and gave her a look.

"Wherever you're taking him, I'm going, too."

"I wouldn't expect anything else, *Detective*." He raised an eyebrow toward the door. She got the message.

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How Reynolds knew where Vincent was being held didn't bear thinking about, but exactly one hour from the time he made the call, a white van with an ambulance logo pulled up to the curb in front of the club. Four men in white waistcoats carried an unconscious Vincent out on a gurney. Not wanting to risk being separated from him, she climbed into the van after him, daring them to argue by brandishing her gun. The tall man sitting in front of her laughed.

As she guessed, their destination was the farm.

Reynolds, who somehow managed to beat them there, met them at the door. When he directed them to take Vincent downstairs to the same location he'd been kept in a cage months before, she balked.

"You can't put him in there again!"

"In his current condition, I doubt he could crawl over a kiddie gate." Reynolds had the men roll the gurney over to a bank of monitors instead. "You asked for my help, Catherine. I'm helping. Now stay out of this. It's out of your hands."

A team of doctors swarmed around Vincent as Catherine looked on helplessly. She moved back into a corner so she wouldn't be in the way and asked to leave. They wouldn't like the confrontation they'd get over that. At least she still had her gun.

An armed guard pounded down the stairs. "Sir, there are two people at the front door demanding to see either you or—" he turned toward her, "Ms. Chandler. And one of them is threatening to call the cops."

"Oh, for God's sake. Tall, thin and smart-ass?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Vargas," he ground out. "By all means, do invite them in."

Moments later Tess and JT were 'escorted' down the stairs and into the room. Catherine breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of them. Together, they could handle anything.

Reynolds stopped them. "Don't tell me. Dr. Forbes, I presume?"

JT's eyebrows went up to his hairline. "How do you know that?"

"Just go with it, JT," Catherine said and drew them both over to where she stood.

Over the next couple of hours, they waited and watched as the team worked on him, at one point pulling a clear plastic curtain around them and their only patient. If that wasn't frightening enough, they then hooked him up to a respirator and had so many wires and tubes connected to him, Vincent resembled a marionette on a string. The monitors were pinging and beeping little warning bells at regular intervals. Reynolds came and went, at one point directing the lab-coated technician who appeared to be in charge to "go get her blood." She could only wonder if the 'her' they referred to was Cameryn Teague, the female super-soldier they'd paired with Vincent a few months back but who died saving his life. It was the only thing that made sense. If that was the case, they would surely have a store of Vincent's blood as well. Why wasn't it being used?

If she could, she would have given her own, just as she had for Thomas Chandler after his accident, little good that had done. When her blood type came back no match for his, they learned she wasn't actually his daughter, but Reynolds'. And that's when everything had come crashing down.

Catherine paced. She wanted to be closer—touch him, hold his hand, wipe his brow . . . tell him everything she'd been holding back. He was her world. But there was nothing she could do.

After a while, she lightly dozed on Tess' shoulder but came fully awake when Vincent's heart monitor started screeching and the single tone that indicated a flat-line pierced the room. Chaos erupted. Reynolds returned in the midst of it all brandishing a large syringe.

"Move him into the cage. Now! And strap him down, hard," he shouted.

Catherine stood. "*No!* What's happening?"

The heart rate monitor continued its ear-piercing screech.

“Get her out of here, will you? If her friends give you any trouble, you have my permission to . . .” he looked their way, “escort them out.”

Catherine spied the large syringe. “Wait! What do you intend to do? I swear, if you care about me at all—”

“Calm yourself, Catherine. It’s too late. I’m going to do what needs to be done—what I should have done a long time ago.”

All she heard was the ‘too late.’ They were shouting ‘clear!’ and using the electric shock paddles on his lifeless body, even as they were rolling him into the cage.

“Please! Don’t do this!” She was fighting the guards for all she was worth. “*Vincent!*”

“Doctor?” Reynolds shouted from behind him as he positioned the needle against Vincent’s arm.

Catherine was being dragged kicking and screaming from the room.

Reynolds turned back to Vincent. “Not such a tough guy now, are you?” he murmured to the man lying deathly still on the table. “You’re lucky I care about my daughter, much as she believes I don’t. This might hurt a little. Try not to kill me while I save your damn hide.”

Despite her resistance, someone managed to stick a needle in Catherine’s own arm. The last thing she heard before the door slammed shut and she passed out was a terrifying roar.

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Catherine awakened to the sound of a lawn mower, of all things. Her lips and tongue felt paper dry and her head fuzzy. As she slowly came to, she glanced around the room. It was a small, cheery bedroom done up with typical country frills down to the eyelet window coverings, which were half-way open. Flipping aside the quilted coverlet, she carefully placed her unsteady legs on the floor and made her way to the window. A wide expanse of green lawn greeted her view, broken up only by a row of fruit trees and bordered by woods. A man on a riding mower was off in the distance. *The farm*. She must be in one of the upper bedrooms.

How long had she been out? And where was Vincent? She tested the door and was surprised to find it opened easily and noiselessly. No one was in the small hallway, but there were voices coming from a room at the end, one of which she recognized—Reynolds. With as much energy as she could muster, she stormed down the hall in her stocking feet and shoved the door wide open.

The two men looked up.

“Ed, we’ll finish this later. Come in, Catherine.”

“Take me to him. *Now!*”

“All right.”

Catherine didn't know whether to be glad he acquiesced so easily or mortally terrified. She followed him silently down the hallway, past the room she'd been in, a few other small offices, then through a doorway at the end leading to a stairway to the ground floor. She didn't know what they'd done with JT and Tess, but it was extremely quiet in the building. And that could only mean one thing.

"I'm going to kill you for this, you know. Don't think I won't."

He turned to look at her. "A bit of an overreaction, don't you think? Even for you," was all he said in response.

When they opened the door at the bottom, she could see him, Vincent, stretched out on the gurney inside the cage. Still as death.

Without her needing to ask, Reynolds punched in the code and unlocked the cage door. She ran past him and yanked it open, rushing to the bed. Peripherally, she heard Reynolds tell someone in the room to 'fetch her shoes.'

"Vincent! Oh my God, Vincent! *No . . .*" She touched her face to his, tears dampening his cheeks, then pressed tiny kisses to his chin, his nose, his eyes, his lips—needing to touch him, be near him, even though he was gone, and . . . breathing. He was *breathing!* She swiveled toward her father.

"He'll be fine. Just needs to sleep it off."

"Wh-what? How?"

"How about 'thank you'? You could have trusted me, Catherine. But you didn't." Disgusted, he turned and walked back out.

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Hours later Vincent wasn't in great shape, but he was conscious. She learned that Tess and JT were being held in another room under lock and key. A guard brought them out, returned Tess's service revolver, and told them they were free to go—with Vincent.

Not wanting to do anything to cause those orders to change, they followed two more guards out to the car with the gurney, packed themselves into JT's car, and headed home. Vincent was still asleep, Catherine curled up with him in the back seat. The scene was eerily reminiscent of the last time Vincent had been in Reynolds' clutches in the cage, but this time she felt an odd kind of gratitude for the rustic farm as she watched it fade in the distance of the early morning light.

It took the three of them to get him into his bed back at the club, and by then they were all exhausted. Tess gave Cat a hug and bid her a solemn good-night, and JT quietly closed the door on Vincent's room.

Sometime during the next few hours, Vincent stirred but didn't come fully awake. In the throws of a deep dream state, he wrestled back and forth so much he became hopelessly entangled in the bed sheets, aggravating the situation. Catherine first tried to sooth him, then wake him for his own comfort—he still felt hot to her touch—to no avail. Finally, she touched on a solution.

When JT knocked softly and opened the door later in the day carrying a tray of food and something to drink, he stopped, alarmed. Catherine's head popped up at his soft exclamation.

"*Oh, my God.* Are you all right?" The sheets were shredded as if Vincent had raged all night long in beast state.

She grinned and held up the pocket knife she'd found in one of his drawers and had used to free her sleeping lover from the tightly wound fabric.

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It was two days later that a weak but smiling Vincent showed up at her door.

They sat together on the fire escape, his arms around her loosely. He'd made an amazing recovery, but he still seemed a little fragile yet.

"So, I have Reynolds to thank?"

She grimaced. "I'm sorry. I didn't know where else to go. I'd never seen you so weak; I didn't know what to do. I was frightened half to death. You know we would have gone anywhere else first, but . . . there was no vaccine available."

"You said something about Cameryn Teague."

"They gave you her blood. Apparently, it had properties to fight infection that yours didn't, but it wasn't enough. Then I thought he killed you, and instead—"

"He pumped me with adrenalin to help my body fight off the disease. Yeah. Maybe we can skip that part the next time?"

"Hopefully, there will never be a 'next time.'" She frowned. "I . . . didn't make many points with 'dear old Dad,' I'm afraid. I didn't trust him. But he did save your life. For me."

"He's given you no reason to trust him over these last few months, Catherine. Don't beat yourself up over that."

She nodded and threaded her fingers through his. "I thought I'd lost you."

Her voice choked up when she said it. He knew that feeling all too well—the night he'd come upon her mutilated car and held her, shot and bleeding to death in his arms. Vincent cupped her cheek. "You'll never lose me, Catherine. 'Death shall have no dominion.' Not over us."

She turned to look up at him, surprised. "You're reading Dylan Thomas?"

"Yeah, well, I found this strange box on my headboard and one of the things inside was a book of his poetry."

The memory box! She'd forgotten all about it and his birthday. When she'd gone to the club the last time to nurse him, she'd taken it along since it was already his birthday, hoping he'd recover enough for her to share it with him.

"That was supposed to have been your birthday present!"

“I love it, but . . . what were all those other things inside? There was something that looked like a lightning bolt, a few pine needles, a Christmas bulb . . . ?”

She smiled. “Yeah. Did I ever tell you I wasn’t very good at arts and crafts? It’s supposed to be a memory box. I started it with things that represented the important events in our relationship so far. The lightning bolt—that was supposed to be your scar.”

“Ah.”

“The pine needles are from the woods where you saved me the first time. The Christmas bulb—the way you lit up the rooftop for me on the anniversary of my mom’s death.”

There were other mementos, too: a petal from the orchid he gave her the day they visited Milltown, an empty pill bottle like the one Gabe had given him with the cure, a ticket stub to the ball park batting cage. Every one of them had a story to tell.

Vincent touched his lips to hers. She was all the gift he ever needed, yet she kept on giving. It humbled him, and that reminded him of what was in his pocket. He pulled out the folded sheet of paper. “I thought I’d add my own.”

Catherine looked down at the single page and realized it was the letter Thomas Chandler had written years ago ‘the man worthy of my daughter’s heart.’ It had been something he’d no doubt intended to give to her fiancé if and when that time ever came. As soon as she’d found it, she knew it could only be for Vincent.

His eyes shiny with emotion, he licked his lips while trying to find the words. “You know, the day you gave me this . . . I’ll never forget. I can’t even express what that meant to me. I don’t . . . I don’t deserve you, Catherine. I’ll never feel worthy. But here you are.”

His voice failed on the last word and her own breath caught.

“I never expected anyone to feel this way for me again, and now I don’t know what I’d ever do without you.” He continued softly.

When they got back to his place the next evening, they spent time going through the box, talking about each one and remembering—because they were all pieces that made up the tapestry of their love.

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The next morning the precinct was in an uproar. People with boxes were coming and going from Reynolds’ office. Confused, Catherine stopped one of them. “What’s going on?”

The man shrugged unhappily. “He’s moving—again.”

“Moving?” She looked around for Tess but she wasn’t anywhere nearby. Finally she made her way to the corner office. “What’s is this?” she demanded of her boss.

Reynolds glanced up from his now cleared-off desk. “Detective. Glad to see you’ve finally decided to show up for work again.” When she remained standing there with a question on her face, he relented. “I’m moving my operation.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“It means I’m leaving New York City. For good.”

Catherine started to stammer. “And Vincent?”

“What about him? He’s remaining here. I find I don’t need the . . . complication.” He looked at her. “This is too difficult for the both of us, Catherine. We’ll end up killing one another.”

“So this is good-bye? Just like that?”

“I don’t expect you to say anything.”

“No, you just roar into my life, turn it upside down, and then leave as quickly as you came.”

He shrugged.

She held his gaze one more moment before turning to go. “I’m sorry, too.”

Catherine went back to her desk and tried to concentrate on the latest case before her, but nothing was working. The office at the end of the hall was blaring in its silence, the room now dark and vacant. She rubbed her forehead, frustrated. This was not how things were supposed to go. He’d saved Vincent’s life and now, essentially, had freed him as well. And all she’d done was yell at him and demand . . . what? That he stay and participate in her life? She didn’t even know, herself, if she wanted that.

Finally, she went in search of someone who could direct her to Reynolds’ city apartment. She needed to at least smooth things over before he left.

“He’s already gone,” the assistant told her. “He was taking a private jet out of the country this afternoon.”

Catherine gasped. “When?”

The assistant checked her watch. “Anytime now.”

“Do you have his flight information?”

She grabbed the info hastily scrawled on the back of a business card and ran for her car. There was only one private field close by large enough to handle an international flight for a private jet.

Catherine got to the field and flashed her credentials at the guard gate. Then, without waiting for confirmation, she roared through the chain link access gate with her lights and sirens blaring. A single plane sat on the tarmac, its door ajar.

Michael Reynolds heard the distant wail of sirens and turned half-way up the portable staircase to the plane’s access door. He recognized the car. “Too little, too late, Catherine,” he sighed and mounted the stairs the rest of the way. As soon as he was on board, he ordered the plane taken to the runway. He took his seat on the airport side and looked out the window.



Catherine stopped short once she saw the plane begin to taxi to the runway. She had half a mind to chase after it, but what good would that do? She was too late. Putting her car in park, she got out and watched the private leer jet take off.

The plane banked to the north first then turned east, heading out over the water. She watched and waited, lights still flashing, until it was nearly out of sight. Just as she started to turn away, a giant fireball materialized in the very spot the plane had been. The sound of the explosion reached her moments later. She watched in horror as flaming pieces of metal fuselage, where his plane once had been, dropped to the water in black streaks of billowing smoke.

### Chapter 3

Catherine climbed the hill next to Vincent up to the knoll where Cameryn Teague's body lay hidden and buried. It was nothing more than a windblown hillside, now, where little evidence remained that there'd ever been a grave there at all. They both held a small spray of flowers.

"Was Tess able to confirm anything?" he asked, speaking of Michael Reynolds.

Catherine nodded. "She verified both the flight and the passenger list. It was definitely his plane. The pieces of wreckage still have to be pulled from the water, but they honed in on the flight deck recorder and it's at the bottom of the sea. There is a search party still combing the area, but it isn't an easy area to search. They found no survivors. Vincent, do you think he's really gone?"

Vincent looked off into the distance and shrugged. Could fate be so cruel to have taken the only remaining parent she had? Was a rogue Muirfield agent responsible? Or, and this was probably the most logical scenario, could Michael Reynolds have put the slip on all of them? He'd seen stranger things. "You think he faked the whole thing?"

"Maybe. To make it easier for me."

He pursed his lips. He couldn't know. "You know, there are still bad people out there." And if there was—"And I'm still here." And now there would be no reason for him to leave.

She leaned into his strength. "I have no grave to go to for *him*."

The *him*, Vincent understood, being Reynolds. Nor would she ever, most likely.

They would never know, and perhaps that was best. That was a question for another time. He swung his arm around Catherine and they moved to the spot where Cameryn and her father lay.

"Do you think we could move her sometime, both of them?" Catherine asked. At least they were together.

He nodded. "Possibly." Further down the road. When he was sure it was safe. "She saved me. Again. Post-mortem. JT said without the infusion of her blood, the adrenalin wouldn't have worked."

“And for that I’ll be forever grateful to her.” She looked down at the rock that marked the grave and placed the flowers there. “You may be gone,” she whispered to the earth, “but I swear, as long as I live, you’ll never be forgotten.”

“No, neither of us will,” Vincent agreed, “because ‘death shall have no dominion.’ ”

**\*\*The End\*\***

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