

# REVELATIONS

by Janet Knights

A soft bed of mist rested quietly on the tunnel floor. Undisturbed, it had found its own place and settled there.

One moment later it flew in all directions as a pair of ragged feet paced quickly through - followed by another smaller pair clad in expensive suede boots.

"Vincent, wait!" called out the owner of the second pair, as she hurried to catch up. However, the minute hesitation taken to call out only served to increase the distance between them. It also disturbed her concentration enough that she stumbled over a rock that was irritatingly positioned mid-tunnel and took a large gouge out of her new boots. In frustration, she stopped dead and yelled out.

"Damn it, Vincent! I'm stopped right here and I will not move until you come back."

Catherine then heard an audible sigh emanating from some distance down the passageway. She suspected its loudness was for her benefit. Then impatient footsteps echoed in her direction as Vincent rounded a corner and trudged into view.

"Catherine, I can recall on any number of occasions I have suggested to you that high heels and expensive footwear have no place Below. I do also remember a twisted ankle when you caught your heel on the Whispering Bridge. Do all women not learn from these events, or is it just you?" asked a slightly annoyed Vincent.

Catherine responded quickly. "Come on. That's not fair. I'd been down in the tunnels exactly twice when I did that! Besides, I just got these boots and I wanted to show them to Jamie."

"Perhaps bringing them in a box would have been more sensible," Vincent suggested.

"Well, in that you may be right," she agreed, with a hint of a smile as she gazed down at the mess of mud and damaged suede. "But, they were once very nice boots, weren't they?"

With the return of her smile and a slight bow Vincent conceded. "Yes - they were once very nice boots ... Now, must we continue this discussion or can we move on?"

Walking across the open area to stand closer to her companion, Catherine looked up into his clear, blue eyes. She could see a mystery hidden behind his expression and she wanted details.

"All I know is I get this strange, cryptic note saying ..."

" 'Meet me Below no later than eleven this evening'. There is something special I wish to share."

"Well, here I am. Share!"

Returning her gaze, Vincent responded. "Here you are at eleven-thirty - and if we do not hurry the moment will be lost."

"What moment, Vincent?" asked Catherine, moving even closer and looking up at him from beneath her bangs. She was confident that her proximity and tone of voice would drive Vincent to give in and give up the details. "Tell me."

"Very well," he capitulated - defenseless against her teasing. "But I will only tell you as we walk."

With that Vincent reached down, and taking her small hand in his massive one, he turned them both back in the direction from which he had just come.

With the journey once again underway, Vincent began his tale. "Twenty-five years ago Devin and I made an agreement that calls to be met today."

"Agreement?" queried Catherine. She was always a little wary of anything involving Devin. But she was sure of one thing - if it involved Vincent's brother then it would certainly not be boring.

"A new building was underway not far from the parkway tunnel entrance," continued Vincent, "and Devin and I had been watching its progress, hidden from sight in a sewer grate. One day, we saw a group of very well-dressed men placing a box in an open cement block and then we watched as it was sealed and laid as a cornerstone. Later Devin went back to see if he could find out what was in the box, but it had already been incorporated in the structure."

"A time capsule!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Yes," he responded. "Of course we had never seen anything like that before and that night we questioned Father about it. He told us that often when a building was being constructed the owners would bury, in the cornerstone, a box containing items of interest from that period, in the hopes that far into the future others would find the box and gain an understanding of the world as it was the day the box was sealed."

Vincent extended his gait forcing Catherine to adjust to this new quickened pace. It became necessary to keep her eyes on the ground to avoid any further damage to her footwear. She also noticed that she was being led down a passage that was unfamiliar to her, but was probably very familiar to the residents of Below, as each few feet there was a torch. Some of these were kept lit and others had either been left unlit, or had been extinguished by one of the tunnel breezes that swept through occasionally.

"In the middle of the next night," Vincent was continuing, "I was awakened by a flying pillow and looked over to see Devin cross-legged on his bed, smiling at me. I knew this smile. This was the smile that had led to many adventures. Most of these led to my getting into trouble with Father."

Catherine took a moment to look up into Vincent's face as they walked. It touched her heart to see his gentle expression of love and affection for those times in his past.

"And tonight is the culmination of one of these adventures?" she guessed.

"Yes," he returned. "Devin had an idea. We were going to bury our own time capsule, one that we ourselves would dig up ..."

"Twenty-five years later," finished Catherine. "Tonight."

"Yes," said Vincent, slowing his pace to stop and lean against the tunnel wall. He lowered his eyes shyly and continued. "And I wish to share it with you, Catherine."

Stepping across the space to stand closer to him, Catherine reached up to gently raise his head enough to meet his eyes.

"I am honoured, Vincent, but shouldn't Devin be here in my place?"

Smiling, Vincent explained. "You see, Devin and I argued for days about what to bury in our capsule. In the end, we decided we would each bury one for the other to retrieve. I filled mine with memories of our times together and hid it behind a brick in the Great Hall."

A small laugh escaped him as he went on. "Devin lasted only two days before he went to see what I had buried for him. He was not known for his patience then ... or now."

Sharing his laughter Catherine stated, "You, of course, did not touch the one he had buried for you." She knew that his character would not allow for the breaking of an agreement, even one made as a child.

"No," said Vincent. "And I think I have waited long enough!"

This time Catherine reached for his hand and pulled him onwards along the route.

"Then let's stop wasting time and get going."

The journey lasted only a few more minutes, as Vincent guided her into a small chamber. Apparently once used for storage, it was littered with old crates and spent torches.

"In here?" asked Catherine. She was a little disappointed. This was a decidedly unromantic place to end such an adventure.

Understanding, Vincent explained, "This place itself holds no meaning. It is just that there are few places this far below where the bedrock allows for a hole deep enough to bury something that will remain undiscovered for some period of time."

Gazing around the dirt floor, Catherine nodded and wondered to herself how he was going to locate this capsule without digging up the entire chamber. She could see that he had been here earlier as there was a shovel leaning against the rock wall in the far corner.

"Vincent, how on earth are...," she began.

Seeing the question in her eyes, Vincent answered. "When Devin was here for Father's birthday, he too had remembered the agreement and brought me here to show me the place that he had dug up so long ago. It was near where that shovel is."

Pacing across the room to stand on the spot he had just pointed out, he turned to Catherine and said with a smile. "He mentioned something about me being too old to do a lot of unnecessary digging."

"I hope you reminded him just who is the older brother," she joked.

"Certainly."

With that he picked up the shovel and began to dig.

Catherine watched his actions from against the wall opposite him and trembled just a little as she took in his obvious strength. She enjoyed each shovelfull as the pile of dirt steadily grew. As time passed, she sank onto a crate and continued to watch the show.

Vincent had dug to or three feet down when he quit and stepped back.

"Did you find it?" asked Catherine excitedly.

"No," he said as he glanced around the chamber with no small amount of exasperation. "It appears Devin did not recall the correct location. I know him. He is far too lazy to have dug down this far."

Nodding, Catherine could not help but agree. "Perhaps you should dig in the most opposite piece he mentioned."

"Yes... and that would be..." Looking across the chamber, "... just below where you are now."

Catherine rose and shifting the crate she moved away. Vincent began to dig once again. Barely five minutes and about eight inches later Vincent struck something hard. Reaching down he unearthed an old cookie tin. He brushed off a layer of dirt and placed the thing on top of the crate.

"I knew he had taken it!" exclaimed Vincent, more to himself than to Catherine.

"Taken what?"

"When I was a small boy I collected buttons - every kind of button. This highly-valued collection I stored in an old cookie tin that I managed to talk Mary into giving me. One day, I returned to the chamber Devin and I shared to find the contents unceremoniously dumped in the center of my bed and the box that contained them missing. I accused Devin, but he steadfastly denied it."

"And this is the box?" asked Catherine as she reached down to run her fingertips over the top of this thing that was so much a part of his past. Without hearing his answer she knew that it was.

"I wonder what he used it for before he buried it? It must have been two years between when I discovered it missing and our agreement to hide the time capsules."

He stooped to pick up the tin and turned it over in his hands, being careful not to upset anything that lay enclosed in its protective housing. "Probably nothing. Quite often there was no logic behind Devin's actions... merely a need to test his dominance."

"Strange that he should choose this box to bury. He must have known you'd recognize it."

Vincent turned and smiled into her eyes. "I suspect that by the time we decided to bury these capsules, he had forgotten it had ever belonged to his irritating little brother!"

Catherine enjoyed hearing Vincent talk of his childhood. It spoke so much of the man he had become, the man she loved. And ... there was so much that was wonderful and enchanting left to learn.

Impatiently, she tapped the top of the tin still contained in his hands. "Well, are you going to open it? If the box itself was a surprise, I can just imagine what must be inside."

"Is it midnight yet?"

"It is long past that time and I for one have waited long enough. Open it!" she demanded.

Seating himself upon the mound of dirt he had created, he reached out and pulled the crate to rest next to him.

Catherine accepted this invitation to sit and the unveiling began. Only a small amount of rust had permeated the outside of the tin vault, so Vincent had little trouble removing the top. Inside was a note covering the contents. It read;

*'Herein lies a group of first times.'*

"First times?" Catherine asked, looking from the paper to his face.

"Your guess is as good as mine. I am sure that all will become apparent in time." With that Vincent reached in and removed the paper to reveal the secrets below.

Catherine leaned over to peek inside and she began to giggle. Vincent also looked and soon found her laughter rather damaging to his pride.

"This is not funny, Catherine."

"Not only is it funny," she responded. "It is also extremely cute."

Cute was not a word Vincent often heard in reference to him, but he could understand, to a lesser degree than she, why Catherine might find this amusing. Glancing down he found himself also smiling. Nestled in a cloth, laid across the top of the tin, was a tooth, a single small tooth. It was slightly more elongated than the average tooth and very obviously one of Vincent's baby teeth. It was held in place by a piece of yellowed tape and positioned approximately on a caricature of Vincent sketched crudely on the cloth. The childlike picture was completely toothless except for the real one taped there.

"I don't see why you are so embarrassed, Vincent, everyone loses baby teeth. Did you leave this one under your pillow for the tooth fairy and Devin stole it?" asked Catherine.

"No... And if I had, Devin would have stolen the coin, not the tooth. Catherine," he said, turning his eyes to stare at the wall of the chamber, in order to avoid meeting hers. "I did not lose my baby teeth like the other children. The teeth I developed as an infant are the ones I still possess."

"Then how?" she began.

Vincent's mind took him back as he told the tale of its loss. "This tooth was lost in battle. Devin, Winslow, Pascal and I were playing far down in the Maze when it happened. Even then, Pascal was fascinated with the pipes and carried tapping rod with him everywhere. On this day we were

pretending to be medieval knights. Pascal and I were the white knights and Winslow and Devin were attempting to capture our fortress. Winslow was getting too close to doing so, so Pascal took a lunge at him with his 'sword.' He knew that Winslow was too far away to really be struck so he swung with all his nine year old strength and too late realized I was standing directly behind him. I took the mighty blow full in the mouth and one tooth came flying out."

"But Vincent, I've never noticed a missing tooth," said Catherine curiously, as she leaned over to study his face more carefully.

"No. As I grew, so did my teeth and the ones next to the escapee grew to fill in the gap. But I had many years of uncomfortable eating."

"Well," she sighed. "At least it was given up for a worthy cause. Did Devin and Winslow take your castle?"

"Of course they did. But ... whenever we played any sort of game that took a direction away from Devin being victorious, he would always find some excuse to quit before his impending loss."

Catherine thought back to her own experience with Devin Wells. "He didn't change much, did he?"

"No," said Vincent. "He did not and perhaps that is the secret of his charm."

Reaching over, Catherine entwined her fingers in his. "I personally find maturity, courage and dignity considerably more charming."

Vincent accepted her compliment quietly, acknowledging it with only a slight tightening of his hand over hers. "I think this tooth does explain the note about '*firsts*.' As this is the first, although only, tooth I lost. Perhaps the other items in this box contain other first times."

"There's only one way to find out. What's next?" she said, pulling her hand from his and urging him to reveal another '*first*.'

Vincent reached into the tin and lifted off the cloth, with its attached tooth, and placed it gently on top of the lid. Underneath was a plethora of small items each wrapped in a box or envelope. Tucked amongst them was a small plastic toy.

"A rubber ducky!" exclaimed Catherine. "I don't believe it." And off she went into another fit of giggles.

Vincent smiled with her as he lifted it tenderly from the box. "Rasputan... I had forgotten all about him."

"A rubber ducky. You, in a tub, with a rubber ducky." Trying to create the picture in her mind was quickly edging Catherine to a stage of uncontrollable laughter.

"Rasputan," said Vincent, in a tone denoting mock outrage, as he attempted to bring Catherine back from that edge. "Never saw water. He was far too important to risk in the Bathing pools." He rose to his feet, his dignity being washed away in front of his eyes, and meandered about the small cavern. "I don't remember it, but Father told me Winslow collected bottles from Above to turn in for money, and he actually purchased this toy in a department store as a gift for me. It was my '*first*' and only store-bought toy. I loved it, Catherine. It was smooth and shiny and such a wonderful shade of yellow. It had all the colour and texture, I could never experience Above. I know it is only a plastic duck, but I treasure it. I will treasure it even more knowing that it was a gift from a lost friend."

Rising also, Catherine walked over to examine the man-made fowl more closely. On inspection she could see that it was pierced with a multitude of tiny holes. She looked up to Vincent and without her having to voice the question, he answered.

"I chewed things, Catherine," he confessed. "All of my toys were covered with perforations."

Catherine understood. All those tiny holes had been made by small, but very sharp incisors!

With another memory passed, Vincent retrieved the box from its place near the crate and withdrew a

small envelope, With some trepidation he slit the top with one deft nail. Catherine leaned over his arm to get a look as the next item was revealed. But Vincent turned away enough so that only he could see its contents. The last two objects had caused too much embarrassment and he wanted some advance warning if this was to be another.

Denied the pleasure of seeing the item, Catherine instead watched Vincent's face as he glanced inside the envelope. She was watching intently as he looked toward her and smiled. She could almost see the memories playing themselves out through his eyes. She hoped intently that this was also a memory he would share.

Taking her hand, he held it palm upward and turned the envelope upside down above it to release its precious cargo into her care.

Looking down into her hand she saw a bit of colour; a bright red paint chip. It was hardly bigger than her thumbnail, but its small size obviously bore no resemblance to the size of the memories it brought with it.

"A paint chip?" she asked, staring at the tiny object.

"A piece of adventure, Catherine, a piece of the night, a piece of danger, a piece of experience, it is a piece taken from a carousel horse. Devin must have gone back for it. It know this colour. This is a part of the horse I rose that night in the park. A piece of adventure and...."

"...Your first trip Above," finished Catherine.

"Yes."

Afraid of losing the small remembrance, she took the envelope from his hands and returned it to safety. She folded over the top to seal it and placed it on the tin lid with the tooth and the duck. She already knew this story and the part it took in Vincent's life. Then Catherine bent to pick up the container itself and offered it to Vincent. Catherine was impatient as he pulled out the next and sat down on the crate to wait until Vincent was ready to open this box of mystery.

Vincent shook it slightly in his examination and discovered it rattled. Slowly, he removed the top. After a quick glance inside he handed the box to Catherine. His expression dared her to guess its meaning. She looked inside and saw only a pebble, a rough piece of granite.

"I have no idea," she said.

"Devin called it a chunk of the moon."

"The moon?"

"In those years when Devin was old enough to go Above and I was not, I would always question him about what it was like up there. Devin, being Devin, made up all sorts of wild tales. This particular one involved the moon. One night he brought me this stone and told me it was a chunk of the moon."

"And you believed"

"Of course I did. He was so much older and wiser than I. When he said that every month, on the night when the moon was closest to the earth, that the force of gravity would pull off pieces of the moon and that you could watch them fall like rain, I believed him. He said that this stone was one of those pieces. For years, I treasured it because I knew how far it had come. It was some years later when Father heard about the tale and told me the truth. I was so disappointed, Catherine, and angry with myself for being taken in. After that, I learned to doubt much of what Devin said. I was not going to be so easily fooled again!"

During his storytelling Vincent appeared to grow restless. He paced back and forth across the small cavern, carrying the stone with him. Gazing down at the small piece of moon sitting on his hollow hand he enclosed it in a tight fist and looking upwards he sighed.

"So many memories, Vincent? Memories of times when others could go Above and you could not -

times you could not share," Catherine said quietly as she watched his movements.

"Yes... so many experiences that I was forced to live through others."

"But you did go to the carousel!"

"But I had to go under a blanket of darkness." Vincent turned to her. "There was no ride in the sunlight for me, Catherine... no seeing the moon fall like rain... no times spent staring in childish wonder at shelf upon shelf of toys in a store."

"It is true and I am sorry you missed those things," offered Catherine. "But look at what you did have... your underground adventures, good friends to share them with and a family who loved you."

"I know. I am not bitter. I hear many harsh stories from the children who come to us from Above - about their struggles to survive and remain whole. No, I know what I had, but I cannot stop myself from wishing..."

"I, too, wish those things for you." Catherine rose to stand with him, giving him comfort with her nearness. "Vincent, those things you were denied, and those things which you weren't, are what made you the man you are today. They brought you to where you stand now."

Gathering her close he whispered into her hair. "I would choose no other place than by your side."

Catherine smiled and though she did not show him the smile, he knew.

"Well," she said, pulling away. "What does this item have to do with first times?"

"I have no idea and perhaps Devin did not either. As I said before, Devin is not always logical in his actions." Vincent released her and walked over to the near empty tin. Reaching down he pulled out another envelope. Inside he found a piece of paper, a page torn from a book. Moving to hold it closer to a lantern he saw a note scribbled along the top of the page.

"*Vincent,*" he read aloud. "*I guess by now you are old enough to read this.*" When he skimmed down the page a small smirk appeared on his face. Catherine watched as he took the offending document, folded it quickly and, instead of inviting her to read it, he tucked it away inside his vest.

"Vincent, what was that?" She was curious to know what would make him hide this paper from her. If the light wasn't so poor she would be more confident that she had actually seen him blush.

He turned away from her question.

"Come on," she urged. "I promise I won't tell Father!"

"If you insist on knowing everything - here you are," and he revealed the page to her.

After reading the first few lines of print, she also blushed and handed the sheet back to Vincent. "No, I will definitely not tell Father, or anyone for that matter."

"This is the first uncensored book that arrived in my chamber. Mitch brought it from Above and gave it to Devin. As boys will do, they made a special point of not showing it to me. So, of course I had to read it. Devin tore that page and told me I could read that part when I got older... and here it is."

Catherine laughed. "Boys will be boys, no matter where they grow up. I wonder if Devin saved the whole book or just that page?"

"No, Father found it and made very sure that none of the other children came in contact with it. I doubt he ever knew I had read it, or at least most of it. Or, that many other such books made it Below along the same route. Yes, I suspect Father would be quite shocked to know what his sons were capable of - or perhaps not. Although it is often too hard to believe Father was also young once."

"But, I think to preserve your sterling reputation, this is one item that is best kept between ourselves," Catherine suggested with a smile.

"I think that this is one item better destroyed now before it can reappear anywhere else. And also, I

must remember to thank Devin on his next visit for suggesting that you join me in this unveiling!" He took the page and stooping to the lantern, he allowed the corner to catch light and both watched as the evidence quickly disappeared.

Vincent crossed the room to retrieve the last item from the tin. It was housed in a small cloth bag and a note was attached to it with an old safety pin. Removing the pin, he unfolded the page to read its message. With a quizzical explanation he opened the bag to peer inside. With a small smile he turned to Catherine.

"Devin must have come here on his last visit and added this item," Vincent said shyly.

Catherine was dying to know what it was, but she waited quietly. She could tell that this was something that Vincent would reveal in his own time. His gentle and reflective manner told her that this thing concerned her. His face carried an expression that only appeared when she was in his thoughts.

Crossing to stand near her, he emptied the small bag into his open hand. Catherine drew in her breath when the item dropped. It was a beautiful gold filigree hair comb. Its workmanship was so fine it appeared too delicate to handle.

As she stared, Vincent read her the note. "*This is to be given as a gift to your first and only love.*"

"I understand now," Vincent said quietly. "Why Devin suggested you share this time with me." Letting the bag fall to the ground he reached to raise her eyes to his. "This is meant for you, Catherine. It is far too precious and beautiful to have been for anyone else. When he was here, we talked often of you. He knew I felt lost when you gave so much to me, and to the others Below, and I could offer you nothing."

"But Vincent, you give me so much. I don't need things from you. All I need to continue living is..." she hesitated.

"... My love. Oh, Catherine. You possess every part of my being... My heart, my soul... every waking thought is of you... every dream is filled with you. There is no part of my life that does not spin itself around the woman I love." Gripping her shoulders he brought his face to within inches of hers. "I do love you, Catherine."

Catherine threw herself with force into his embrace and whispered, "And I love you... with more passion and intensity than I knew was possible."

They both took time to revel in the closeness of the other. It was Catherine who pulled away first. With tears falling freely, she spoke to his soul through his eyes.

"Vincent... perhaps it is finally time for another first." And brushing aside the tears she reached for him.

END