

Journal

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

It was a rather gloomy, rainy Saturday early afternoon Above when Catherine ventured into the soft, quiet comfort of the Tunnels and entered Vincent's chamber. After a tough week at the D.A.'s office, she couldn't imagine anything sweeter than spending a day with the man of her heart. Especially after his illness, when he was still recovering, she wanted to spend every possible moment with him, to help him heal. And remember...

With a dreamy smile, she looked around, but found no trace of Vincent. Catherine didn't think it unusual when he wasn't waiting for her at the threshold. Since his almost fatal breakdown, their bond was broken somehow and Vincent couldn't *feel* her the way he used to before. That didn't stop her from hoping the bond would be restored in time, and even if not, nothing could ever change what they felt for each other. Of that she was certain.

With a sigh but smiling, she sat down in his favourite high-back chair, and her eyes started wandering around the familiar space. Catherine could never get enough of taking in all the details of this warm, beautifully softly-lit personal space of the man she loved so dearly.

Even with closed eyes, she could name all the objects in the chamber, from furniture, through books, up to even the smallest curios that Vincent had collected over the years of his life. They were like puzzle pieces, that made up the beautiful picture of the only man who had filled her heart completely and unconditionally.

Catherine's eyes landed on the small round table by her side. Her smile widened when she saw Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* lying there. Only the night before, Vincent was reading to her from the book again, while they were wrapped in his cloak sitting on her balcony. He had made his way there for the first time since falling ill. It was her favourite piece of poetry, ever since she had been old enough to understand poetry.

Her fingers caressed the precious, old leather-bound edition, and a loving smile graced her face when she remembered the day she gifted Vincent the book. Suddenly, her look fell on Vincent's new journal lying on the table as well - the new one she gave him just a few days before. It was open. That was quite unusual, for Vincent always closed this precious collector of his thoughts in his absence. He wasn't hiding it, but Catherine had never seen it opened when he wasn't writing in it.

She shook her head lightly and looked away, taking *The Idylls* to read until Vincent returned. However, her focus was still inexplicably directed on the journal.

Oh, stop it! It's his private thoughts, they are not meant for the eyes of others! Catherine scolded herself in her mind. And yet, the temptation of getting a glimpse into the mind of her beloved was growing much too strong for her liking.

With another sigh, she stood up and with the book in her hands, she moved to lay down on Vincent's large and comfortable bed. Her head sunk into the big soft cushions and she opened the volume of poetry in her hands.

After only a few minutes, Catherine realised she had been staring at the same line for some time. Frustrated, she closed the book and put it carefully aside, folded her arms and stared at the wall opposite her.

Suddenly, she squeezed her eyes shut and sighed loudly. Her curiosity got the better (or worse) of her, and with one swing, she got up from the bed and walked over to the table again.

This is wrong, so wrong, Cathy... You really shouldn't be doing this....

Where did this insatiable curiosity come from all of a sudden? Catherine couldn't understand it. She was having some lovely quiet days with Vincent, without any disturbing moments - no dramatic events, no life-threatening situations, no tensions. Why couldn't she just let it be then?

She truly didn't know. Maybe it was just the childlike impulse to discover a secret, find out something she didn't know. Her hand was very slowly and cautiously moving towards the journal to take it, but then, she quickly pulled it back and turned around swiftly.

"How dare you?! It's his thoughts, not yours, you mustn't!" Catherine cried aloud, burying her face in her hands in frustration.

"My thoughts are no secret to you anymore."

Catherine turned around startled, hearing the beloved soft baritone behind her.

He was standing at the chamber entrance, with a gentle smile on his face.

"Oh, Vincent..., " she almost whispered. "I'm so sorry! I don't know what's got into me, I almost... Forgive me, please..."

Her eyes were pleading, her heart beating in her throat. But when she noticed the loving twinkle in Vincent's eyes and the characteristic half-smile on his face, she knew he was not offended, and breathed a sigh of relief. He opened his arms to her and in a second, she was there to accept the invitation eagerly.

"Catherine..., " he whispered, holding her with all his care and love. "There is nothing to forgive." Pulling back, he looked into her eyes deeply.

"You've known me in my best and my worst times. By now, you know everything there is to know about me. Sometimes, I even think you know me better than I know myself..."

She smiled and reached up to stroke his stubbly cheek.

"But you still have the right to keep your thoughts to yourself, if you wish to do so," she spoke softly.

"I know, but I don't need to hide them from you," Vincent replied with a serene smile. "Not any more."

He took her gently by her hand and led her back to the table. There, he picked up the journal and passed it to her with an encouraging smile.

Catherine wanted to protest, but something in his eyes prevented her from doing so. With a sigh, she accepted the journal and hesitantly, her eyes started skimming through the last few lines on the newly written page.

"I have just returned from Catherine. The night was so beautiful, full of stars which shone so brightly, almost brighter than the city lights. I read from The Idylls of the King to Catherine again. She had asked me to; it is her favourite and I more than happily obliged her, especially when she leaned into my arms to listen, so willingly, so eagerly..."

There were times when just the mention of Lancelot would awake painful feelings in me... The feelings of hopelessness, sorrow and aloneness - but not tonight, not any more...

Catherine has changed my way of seeing myself, not only in her eyes but also in mine. I don't feel hopeless, sad and alone any more. And though she still sees a part of Lancelot in me, I know she sees only his best in me. That part of him, which despite his flaws made him the greatest knight of all - his love. The love for his king, his country, but most of all, for the woman he loved.

I am no knight, but I feel like a King when I am with Catherine. My dearest Catherine...

The past months have been hard; fate has tested both of us and the road ahead is still unclear. But there are things, feelings arising in me, which tell me even stronger that no matter what lies ahead of us, there is a truth which is as clear as the water in the Mirror Pool and will never change - the truth of how deeply I love her..."

Catherine lifted her eyes from the page of the journal, and Vincent saw tears filling them. She was unable to speak; words got stuck in her throat and she swallowed hard.

Vincent was observing her with a peaceful, knowing smile and his hand reached to her cheek to gently wipe away the tears that escaped from her eyes.

Catherine closed her eyes at his touch, savouring the sensation, reliving every one of his touches in the not so far past. When she opened them again, she smiled and finally found her words.

"And I love you..."

Vincent's smile reached his eyes and made them glisten. There was nothing that could have prevented him from what he was dying to do at that moment. All the time in the past, when he was holding on to the fence he built around himself, all this time was forgotten, like a misty memory from a nightmare. There was no fence around him anymore. Fear had no power over his mind and his heart knew his way, the only way forward...

Without losing eye contact, Vincent took the journal from Catherine's hands and placed it back on the table. His face slowly leaned down to hers and when their lips gently met, he knew exactly what the next words in his journal would be...

