

Kevin Barnes has magic in him. It's just really as simple as that.

I see what he creates and I see "soul" in every painting, and great depth of that. He's the kind of artist that will make you stare for long, long minutes, as you immerse yourself in the moment he's captured, and captured it well. You can't help but look... and then, look again. There's just so much there.

He creates with an almost transcendent level of talent. The tilt of a head, the shy smile, the look of wonder, of surprise... There's an expressiveness here that not many can match. Everyone here is "seeing" something. And you are seeing them.

Few artists have rendered both Vincent and Catherine so lovingly, and so faithfully. I have no idea how Kevin does what he does. I only know I'm so grateful that he does it, and decides to share it with us.

Because Kevin Barnes has magic in him. It's really just that simple.



Magic in Us

By Cindy Rae

Inspired by the magnificently talented Kevin Barnes. Thank you for sharing your light with all.

“Vincent,” Catherine said, tugging on a particularly heavy cardboard box – one that had been wedged beneath their bed – “there really isn’t any more room, here. What should we do?” It was cleaning day, and Catherine was tackling the chore with a vengeance.

“Do?” Vincent asked, coming over to help his wife. The box slid reluctantly forward, and revealed its very full contents. It was the large rectangle where he’d kept his past journals. And it was clear there was no more room for the full one that sat at the corner of his writing table. Or the one on top of that, the one he was currently recording his thoughts in.

“It’s a problem we’ve long had. Do you have a suggestion?” he asked.

Catherine chuckled a little, and brushed her hands free of the dust the box had stirred up with it.

“We’ve had this talk. Five years and... well, several journals ago, we had it.”

She eyed the reason they both kept their shoes elsewhere. As time had gone by, the once-smaller container had, by necessity, grown to large proportions. Now, it could scarcely be moved, without tearing the box itself.

“There must be thirty years worth, here,” Vincent said, eyeing the hoard.

“Thirty-five,” Catherine corrected gently. One of them had been counting.

“More, perhaps,” Vincent said. “The ones from my life before... well, before *you*, are tucked in the bottom of the armoire.” He passed a furred hand over the treasure trove before him. “But these... these are my favorites,” he said.

He settled down beside her, as unbothered by the dust as she was. His wife’s incandescent smile washed over him, making her look at least a decade – or two- younger, in his eyes.

“They all can’t be your favorites,” she admonished, picking up a brown leather book wrapped with a matching leather thong, to keep it closed. “Sometimes it was, well... it wasn’t always perfect, Vincent. Sometimes it was hard.” She offered the book to him.

He accepted it. “Yet, even in those hard times, there was joy, Catherine. Even our tragedies held their moments of... bliss.” He unwrapped the randomly selected journal and let it fall open to where it would. He began to read to her:

“The man Catherine says came to the tunnels last night has been revealed. It is Devin! Devin, and after twenty years! My heart has rarely felt so full...”

“Devin!” Catherine breathed, remembering the time.

Vincent offered her the well-worn volume and she turned the page, reading in the soft, breathless voice that had always enchanted him.

"He's gone." Catherine glanced back up at Vincent, and then continued: *"Gone again. Somewhere south of Oz and north of Shangri-la. But he carries our love, this time, carries it with him. This man who always dared to dream dreams that included me. Safe journey, my brother. Come home again, soon."*

Her green eyes rose from the page again, and met his still-vivid blue ones. "Oh, Vincent. That was years ago. Decades. Before Jacob was born, even," she said, closing the cover and wrapping it back up, carefully. She handed it back to him, and he settled it back in the place he'd pulled it from.

"The ones from my youth... those I could keep where I would. But after I met you... I think I wanted these near me. As near as I could get, at least," he said, knowing that keeping the journals stored beneath the bed did just that. He'd nixed the idea of shelving them on several occasions.

"I know that's where you wanted them," Catherine replied, not really understanding the "why" of it.

"I slept... alone, here, too many nights," he said, answering her unasked question. "I think I wanted to keep it all close because... because part of me couldn't quite believe it was happening, Catherine. Or at least that it was happening to *me*. That *you* were happening to me." His expression told her he was recalling a distant time, and felt himself back there, for a moment.

"But it was," she reassured, remembering the years when things had been less... settled, between them. "It really was. I was."

He returned to the present, and smiled softly, in reply. "Yes. You were. A greater blessing I never knew."

She smiled in return, and Catherine's hand wandered over the pile. "It's me who was blessed," she said simply.

She pulled a volume from the top right, selecting what must have been an early tome, one from their beginning. Vincent's nod indicated that she was welcome to open it, and explore its contents.

"She sleeps, and I can feel her dreaming," Catherine began, realizing what she was reading, as she continued: *"She wakes, and she's afraid. I don't know how much I can tell her. I don't know how long she'll be here. I read 'Great Expectations,' and I know it soothes her. She reaches for me, for anything, in her mind, and I come. I can feel something happening, inside me. I don't understand."*

"Oh, Vincent," Catherine said again, settling the book in her lap. "This must have been... from the first few days, after you found me."

"It was," Vincent said, looking over at the page she held. "I remember that day. I remember sitting there, writing it."

"Our bond. You felt it... even then," she breathed, amazed.

"Even before I understood that's what it was," he agreed.

He glanced back over toward his writing desk, and at the huge chair that still dominated the space. Catherine knew that that's where he'd been sitting when he'd composed the words.

She'd been laying, injured, in the bed she now sat on the floor in front of.

"I remember it too, I think, in a way," she replied, recalling waking up with bandages covering her eyes, and the sound of pipe song in her ears. "Though I suppose we both remember it differently."

"Memories are like that," Vincent replied, understanding. "Let's try some of the others." He plucked another journal from the rectangular stash, and flipped it open, curious.

"This is from the day Kanin came home," he said.

"Oh?" she asked, as curious as he was.

"Kanin is back, and it is a time for both joy and consternation. Olivia wars with her feelings, Kanin begs for forgiveness, and Luke does not know who his father is. All is in turmoil..."

"That time was difficult. I remember it the same as you," Catherine said. "Kanin felt lost. Luke was confused. Olivia wasn't sure she could trust her love, didn't know whether to be relieved or... something else. They worked through it, though. They all... found their way back to each other," Catherine said.

"As we always did," Vincent replied, setting the journal back in the box.

"There's treasure in here," Catherine said, beholding it all.

"Our treasure," Vincent replied.

Catherine settled herself more comfortably across from him, and the two began reading various entries from random journals, ones that spanned three decades and more, between them. Some of the passages brought laughter, though some brought tears, as well. Life had been a life full of riches. They both took turns citing different moments, in their lives together:

Catherine read from another early journal. *"Margaret passed away, today, peacefully, and while holding Father's hand. His loss is deep, and he mourns her that way. They had seven days."*

"Sometimes... I still feel like they had a beginning and an end, but no middle," Catherine confided.

Vincent nodded his understanding. "There are later times here," he said. He quoted from a grey covered volume: *"Jacob...er...Jacob took his first steps, today. Catherine and I are both at least a touch annoyed that it was Mouse he stumbled toward, rather than either one of us."*

Catherine could only laugh. "I'm not sure which one of them was prouder," she said.

A battered, brown-colored journal gave up some of its contents. *"Kipper has broken his arm. Father has forbidden him from riding his skateboard, again."* Vincent smiled, knowing the decree had been ignored.

Still more volumes revealed precious bits of content:

"Henry and Lin are parents, again. Wong's pleasure cannot be contained..."

"Tony Ramos will lead his people. They say he is the new King of the Gypsies..."

"Times grow hard, in the world Above. New people come down. They need our protection..."

"Arthur has taken Catherine's crystal, and it must be found..."

"It's a good thing we got that back," Catherine said, fingering the gift that rarely left her possession.

"It was quite the hunt," Vincent recalled, his tone indicating that he had been a good deal less than pleased with Mouse's pet.

"All's well that ends well." She perused the writing on another page. "Oh! This one is about Devin, again. From when he brought down Charles, for Winterfest, that year." Catherine turned the book toward him, showing him his own writing.

Vincent scanned the contents, recalling the time. "Charles learned to dance, that Winterfest. Mary taught him how."

Catherine read some more from the page, then closed it, and held it to her chest, lovingly.

"That was a good year," she said, smiling at the memory of it.

Vincent nodded his agreement, then looked down at the journal he held, an oxblood colored one with a metal clasp. It had been a gift from Catherine, for one of their wedding anniversaries.

"This is from when Peter was still with us. He delivered Kanin and Olivia's daughter: *"The newest member of our tunnel community is beyond lovely, with dark, curling hair, like her mother. They've decided to name her 'Hope.'"*

"Hope. It was so fitting. And she was... well, she *is* so pretty. I remember that Jacob had a crush on her, back when they were both teenagers," Catherine recalled, shrugging ruefully at her son's first heartbreak.

"They're still good friends. But her heart was always Geoffrey's," Vincent replied.

"Just like mine was always yours," Catherine declared, reaching for a dog-eared tan volume. The cracked binding opened easily, and her green eyes scanned the page it fell to. "Oh! The day we brought Joe down to the tunnels! I remember this like it was yesterday!"

Vincent gently tugged the volume from her hand and re-read his own writing. His voice grew solemn. "A truer friend you never had, Catherine. He did all he could to help find you, when you were missing," Vincent recalled.

"No bad memories," Catherine admonished, willing such things to be banished, for now. "Only good ones. Thank God for Diana," Catherine replied sincerely.

Vincent thumbed through a cream-colored volume, knowing it was one of his favorites.

"Indeed. Ah... here it is. Our wedding day. Shall I read it to you?"

"Please," Catherine said, adoring him.

Vincent's long nail swept down the page, until he found the line he wanted: *"She is more beautiful than any dream of beauty I have ever had, more loving than any dream of love. Today we pledge*

ourselves, each to the other. I can only hope she never has cause for regret, for I love her with all I am."

Vincent's soft voice caressed the words with a loving timbre. He stared at the page a moment, then closed the journal with careful reverence.

Tears had sprung to Catherine's eyes. "Regret?" She shook her head in denial. "What is that?" Her husky voice dropped low. "I don't even know what that word means," she whispered, loving him all the more.

I adore you. They both thought it at the same time. And knew it, thanks to the bond they still shared; one that had done nothing but deepen, over the years.

"Come here," he said, holding out one arm as he leaned himself back against the bed. "Let's read through them some more. Come and share our lives together again, Catherine."

Happily, Catherine clambered over to him and arranged herself beneath his outstretched arm, looking up at him, as the arm came around her. His golden hair was now somewhat silvered, and she knew she could say the same for hers. Soft lines creased his blue eyes, and deepened the furrows around his unique mouth. His once bright blonde beard was now touched with grey. But the place beneath his arm had always remained the same to her: It was a strong place, the place of protection, and of comfort, of sharing, and of love. She settled into it, happily, and leaned against him. His other hand went back into the box of books.

"Narcissa is in here, somewhere," he said, picking through the soft covers. They both knew he'd find her – eventually.

Catherine watched as his furred fingers roamed across the various spines of the many journals he'd filled. "And Jamie. And the day Laura got married," Catherine reminisced, recounting a tiny part of their history.

"The day Samantha became a nurse," Vincent recalled with her.

"And the day William baked Father's 90th birthday cake," Catherine replied, smiling up at him, as she nestled herself deeper into her most favorite place in the entire world.

He looked down at his love, at the woman who had made much of it happen, and had shared all of it with him.

"The day Michael left to study in Europe – and came back home, again."

"The day Zach joined the council," Catherine added. "He was so proud!"

"The day Lena went with Devin to see the mountains. Jacob's first day of school – and the day he graduated," Vincent listed. Each moment was a triumph, all its own. In its way, each page was a story, complete.

Catherine smiled up at him. "We're not going to get much cleaning done," she noted, knowing she was about to surrender – gladly – to that fact.

Vincent selected a dark-covered volume, wondering what adventures of theirs it contained.

"It can wait," he replied gently, with the kind of conviction only Vincent seemed to have. "It can wait, Catherine."

He opened the battered cover and began to read:

"There's a truth I have come to know. A deep truth, and it delights my soul. There is magic in us. In us, and all around us..."

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END

No matter where you are when the magic in you overtakes you, I wish you love ~ Cindy

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