

# Anaïs Nin Knew

by Angie

To love and to labour is the sum of living.

- Anaïs Nin

Catherine and Vincent looked forward to their 'fireside chats', for so they called them, although they meant something quite different in the world above, as both knew.

In their brownstone's den, they each read books that interested them, and discussed them, reading excerpts as the mood took them. They had often explored one Shakespeare sonnet or another.

This time Catherine was reading something quite different.

Her eyebrows went up as she browsed the book, and Vincent wondered what she was reading. He never cheated and looked – they liked to introduce their books; it was part of the joy of the discourse, for each had a wide-ranging interest in literature.

"Catherine?" Vincent asked at last, intensely curious as always.

She looked over at him and smiled, then sighed. "It seems impossible, but this woman has condensed our life together into quotes so accurately, that I begin to believe in ... I'm not sure what to call it, Vincent. Prescience?"

"And she is?" Vincent pressed.

"Anais Nin."

"Ah, yes, she observed the human condition as a woman, almost unheard of at the time – especially erotically. Born in France of Cuban parents, gave up religion at age 16, then focused on her inner self, learning, observing, and recording."

"Yes," Catherine agreed. "She's famous for her diaries and her erotica - but Vincent, she was exactly right on so many things - on so much that we have endured."

"Tell me," Vincent asked softly, putting his own book face down on his lap.

"Beginning with when we first met, that terrible night. You told me I had the strength to endure. It took me some while to discover what Anais Nin claims – that '*the scar meant that I was stronger than what had tried to hurt me*'.

"And as we grew closer, she had a comment on that too: '*What is love but acceptance of the other, whatever he is.*'"

"For a while, Vincent, I wondered if we would ever be together. Remember that time outside the culvert when Kristopher interrupted us?"

Vincent nodded. That time, he had been a long way away when he felt her coming.

"I found this quote, '*Our love of each other was like two long shadows kissing without hope of reality*'."

Vincent had nothing to say to this, merely wished that he had not been so reticent for so long.

"But you ... there was always you, Vincent, the most courageous man I know. *'Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.'* And this one too: *'Create a world, your world. Alone. Stand alone. And then love will come to you, then it comes to you.'*"

Vincent nodded. "That could also apply to our world Below, which was built by those who were alone, but who found love together. She had great insights into life, Catherine."

He lifted up his book, allowing her to see the cover, which made her laugh softly.

She laughed. "Somehow, I knew you must have read her too – and I really shouldn't be surprised that we chose the same author tonight."

She sighed. "Tell me," she asked in turn.

"Catherine, I have read many of her works. Father has them in his library – albeit not easy to find, high on a shelf in a dim corner. Even he could not deny their literary value, or deny them to us completely."

"And you found them," Catherine noted, unsurprised.

Vincent gave her a quick smile. "Fortunately, they were never out of *my* reach, although sometimes out of my depth. Father awakened my interest in literature, so he could not berate me for going beyond his boundaries. She was unique in her day and when I learned of her, I had to read her. She wrote truths that spoke to me – as outcast to outcast in a sense - and she too kept diaries.

"I have tried to live by her insights, although many are difficult ... for me."

"Vincent, I think they are difficult for everyone. Because she recognized that too. Catherine opened her book and read from a marked page. *'We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are'*."

He inclined his head in agreement. "Yes, for she also said, *'I will not adjust myself to the world. I am adjusted to myself'*."

"That one took some time to accomplish, Catherine. I had learned to accept what I was, but adjusting is more - it meant living my best life in spite of it, not hiding, not denying myself new experiences, even if they were dangerous. I had difficulty explaining that to Father. Often. Particularly after I found you."

Catherine nodded, well aware of what Father had thought of her in those early days.

Vincent leafed through his book for a moment or two. "There is a quote I like very much. *'I don't really want to become normal, average, standard. I want merely to gain in strength, in the courage to live out my life more fully, enjoy more, experience more. I want to develop even more original and more unconventional traits.'*

"She also gave me a mission, Catherine. *'To take pride in my thoughts, my appearance, my talents, my flaws and to stop this incessant worrying that I can't be loved as I am'*. It took me a long time to accomplish this, but you made it possible."

They sat in silence for a few moments, and then Catherine opened her book at another of the markers.

"Nin had the perfect quote for what I love about you too," she commented. *'I, with a deeper instinct, choose a man who compels my strength, who makes enormous demands on me, who does not doubt my courage or my toughness, who does not believe me naïve or innocent, who has the courage to treat me like a woman.'*

"The other men in my life, Vincent, even Elliot, didn't accept me for what I truly am, what I could be – and I knew this instinctively, although it wasn't until I met you that I was able to put

it into words, understand what it meant. That terrible night changed everything. I had been conditioned to a life as a socialite, so naturally I accepted what the men in my social class saw in me, an ornament for their life. I was something to be cherished, but not encouraged outside those confines.

"You gave me my freedom, to do what I had to do in my world. *'Had I not created my whole world, I would certainly have died in other people's'.*"

Vincent sighed, "Because you disallowed yourself to dream. She had a quote for that too: *'Dreams are necessary to life'.*"

"You were different from the first," Catherine told him. "You never told me I couldn't do something, only to be sure I understood the dangers and acknowledged the risks."

"You were always honest with me, Catherine, and Nin spoke for me. *'I adore the struggle you carry in yourself. I adore your terrifying sincerity'.* You did terrify me ... often, with your work."

"But you understood that I HAD to do what I did. I had to prove that I could. But after a time, I no longer needed to do that. I had succeeded – and the cost on you was too great. I'm sure I am not the heroine in some of your journal entries – deservedly."

"I was honest – my motive for advising caution was often selfish," he agreed. "I was afraid of losing you. I kept my journal for exactly the same reason that she did, to *'taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect'.*" I prayed the retrospect would not include your death.

"Yet, Nin had great courage too, Catherine, and was not afraid to go outside established lines. She even seems to have predicted our love, and paraphrased me – or perhaps I was inspired by her. I can no longer remember."

He turned a few pages and read. " *'You carry away with you a reflection of me, a part of me. I dreamed you; I wished for your existence. You will always be a part of my life. If I love you, it must be because we shared, at some moment, the same imaginings, the same madness, the same stage'.*"

"That's so beautiful, Vincent," Catherine whispered.

For some time, neither said anything, just reflected that they might have been destined to meet, to love, to live together, for all their lives.

"We have such wonderful memories, Vincent," Catherine said at last.

"Anaïs Nin had a lovely thought about that too, Catherine," he commented, turning to that page, and reading it slowly and clearly, in the voice she loved.

*"We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."*

Catherine nodded her approval and turned to the last of her markers and read the final passage she had marked to the man she loved.

*"Life is truly known only to those who suffer, lose, endure adversity and stumble from defeat to defeat."*

"We have lived, Vincent."

"Indeed we have, my Catherine."

The END