

Courage and Love

- by Angie

*Poetry (is) the flower of any kind of experience, rooted in truth, and
issuing forth into beauty.*

- Leigh Hunt

As Vincent returned to his chamber to wash the dust off himself at last, Catherine's last words shone like silver in his mind.

"It wasn't courage it was love."

She had confessed her love for him – and left him mute ... again! He was so inexperienced in romance, and what he knew he had gleaned from books – mostly poetry. Of course he had seen romances bloom among his tunnel family. Northing, though, had really prepared him for Catherine. She was a gift he had never dreamed of having in his reality. Their friendship - and love - was a tale of coincidences, repercussions of the night he rescued Catherine.

He remembered the words of John Clare.

*I never saw so sweet a face
As that I stood before
My heart has left its dwelling place
And can return no more*

Why couldn't he express his love for her? He was sure she knew he cared deeply about her. How could it be otherwise? He had never hesitated to help her, rescue her, comfort her. That she had been able to rescue him, yet again, merely proved that their love was enduring. It had survived many challenges already. Yet Clare also said;

*She seemed to hear my silent voice
Not love's appeals to know*

If their empathic bond had not existed, he and Father would certainly have died in the rock fall. She had felt his distress and come below – literally falling into Mouse's chamber. That thought gave him pause. Why had no one responded to her taps? What if she had not been able to find them and had become lost in the tunnels for hours? It seemed that Fate had taken a hand. No one but she could have acquired the materials Mouse needed to blast away the rock that imprisoned them. Her fear and love had forced her to approach the one man she did not want to see again – Elliot Burch – and get his cooperation.

In the dusty aftermath of the blast, she had run to him and they had hugged, but had not been able to talk. Vincent had sensed her joy – and something else. His own gratitude and relief was so overpowering, he'd had no words then. He was worried about Father and had not been able to think of much else.

Neither had he and Catherine been able to talk as Father was carried to the infirmary. Mouse had talked enough for both of them, telling him exactly what had happened. The silence penalty had been dropped without comment. Everyone was clearly grateful that Mouse's skills and Catherine's materials had worked.

Mary and Winslow had taken charge of Father and had undressed and washed him, then tended to his injuries – which had fortunately been relatively minor apart from the cut on his head. He had some badly bruised ribs, but needed sleep more than anything.

With Father resting peacefully, they had both washed their hands and he had accompanied Catherine back to her threshold. Words could not express what they felt, so they said nothing, merely held hands and walked slowly. Neither really wanted the walk to end.

Their bond was stronger than ever and Vincent hoped Catherine could feel his love for her. He had not been able to express it, but he had told her of his gratitude.

Her confession at the threshold had revealed just how strong their bond had become – and removed any doubts he may have had about her love for him. It filled that place he kept her love – and made him ache for more. He felt as if his heart would break out of his chest with happiness.

Where their love would take them was still an unknown, but the fact of it could no longer be denied. He was humbled.

She had such courage that he found himself in awe of her – but also, as he thought of all this, disgust with himself. He was not courageous, at least as he defined the term. His challenges were other than those Catherine faced. He was different but accepted by his family. When he had to protect them with what nature had gifted him, he did so. No courage was required for that. He knew he was stronger and more deadly than any normal assailant.

Nevertheless, he needed the freedom of the world above, if only at night. He also needed to see Catherine, who had helped him to know that world as never before. Although she reminded him of everything he was missing, what he had learned would never come from books. He felt her emotions, giving him new insight into her world. She had also given him the most precious gift of all. She trusted him enough to love him.

Love had found him even here, he thought with amazement – under the city in the network and tunnels he called home. Wordsworth said it well;

*Not in Utopia, - subterranean fields, -
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us, - the place were, in the end
We find our happiness, nor not at all!*

Vincent sighed as he rinsed the soap off his body in the bath chamber and then stood on the side of the pool, drying himself thoroughly with a huge patchwork towel. Back in his chamber, he put on his night attire and lay on his bed, still musing about courage.

He would never have to do the things she took for granted in the world above. He went into her world cloaked and at night. There was no courage in that, as long as he was careful and vigilant.

He realized that while he could certainly recognize courage in someone else, he couldn't find it in himself. Was that always the way? Did anyone see themselves as courageous? Could one plan to be courageous? Perhaps not. Perhaps it was something only recognized by others, afterwards.

Why was he worried about courage? What could he do about it? Then it came to him. He could do the one thing that Catherine wanted most – he could confess his love to her. That would require courage of a sort. He had never been in this situation before, and he was certainly afraid – of what he wasn't sure. Was he afraid of what might follow that confession? He knew that Catherine would never demand more of him than he was willing to give. Walpole understood his dilemma;

Perhaps those, who, trembling most, maintain a dignity in their fate, are the bravest: resolution on reflection is real courage

He didn't honestly know how much he could give any woman, even one who loved him. He had tried to avoid such thoughts all his adult life – had not believed any woman would regard him as a lover. He couldn't even bear to look at himself. The women he knew were like sisters. He had grown up with many of them. Of course that had not stopped him from thinking about the possibilities. He remembered Wordsworth's Ode;

*To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour
Nor Man nor Boy
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy*

How had he managed to live so many years without the love a woman could give him? Now that he had it, he knew he could not risk losing it. It gave him hope and a new energy. As Coleridge said;

*Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve
And hope without an object cannot live*

He must continue on with his life, do the work he must to help his community. But now, he knew, he would never look upon it in quite the same way. Catherine was now a part of his family. Her role in saving himself and Father would not be forgotten by anyone. She would be made welcome whenever she visited and trusted with their secrets. He must suggest some changes so that she would never get lost in the tunnels again. She might have been injured! He could not depend on Fate always being so kind.

Yes, much had changed. He need only accept the gift he had been given. He had to. It wasn't courage he needed, he concluded at last, but determination. One day soon, he would be able to express his love.

He found hope in Shakespeare;

Courage mounteth with occasion

Perhaps books of poetry did hold some answers for him after all. With that, Vincent closed his eyes and slept.

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