

Love in Time

by Angie

"The grave's a fine and private place"

Vincent had quoted this to Father after he had bandaged the hand cut by the machete in the fight on the docks. He had given Catherine and Elliot time to escape. He had no regrets.

Father had, of course been concerned about infection, and after determining that Catherine was safe, had expressed the wish that he could keep them both safe from harm and pain. Vincent had shrugged that off. Even love, he told Father, could cause pain.

That was the problem. The quote from the poem did not begin to express what really bothered Vincent. The rest of the poem made clear why it *should* bother him.

Catherine and Elliot had escaped into the tunnels. She would return to him when she had guided Elliot out, he knew. He wondered what she would tell Elliot, whom he knew was not a man who gave up what he wanted easily. And he wanted Catherine. That was no secret.

But why had he quoted that poem to Father, which was written '*To a Coy Mistress*' by Andrew Marvell? It more perfectly described himself, a virgin and unwilling to take that last step that he knew Catherine wished. He had felt that desire in her, no less strong than his own,

Now, instead of focusing on that lack of purpose, he was obsessing about Elliot – again. Catherine would understand, after all she knew he would have felt them kiss.

He could not let this opportunity pass, he realized, but he had to clear the air first, find out if what he thought had any relevance to their situation now. So many of the changes in their relationship seemed to centre around Elliot.

Oh, he did not doubt Catherine's love for him – he never could – but he had to know what she felt about Elliot. It shouldn't matter, he knew that too - but it did.

So he was sitting at his table, his bandaged hand in plain sight, with the volume of poems sitting nearby. He and father had been playing chess and he picked up two of the pieces, the King and the Queen, and then put them side by side in front of him. They seemed singularly appropriate tonight.

Then Catherine walked into his chamber, looking somewhat dishevelled, plainly tired as well.

He almost lost his resolve. What right did he have to inflict this on her at this time? He looked at her as she sat down next to him, regarded his hand, and asked him what he was feeling. He told her the obvious, of what Elliot could mean to her. She admitted she had never felt closer to Elliot. And then admitted that she had wished the kiss would have been with himself instead.

That admission had rendered Vincent momentarily speechless - but he gathered up his courage and softly addressed her as she rose to leave.

"Please don't leave, Catherine. Please sit down."

She did so and he explained how he had justified his injury to Father, just a short time ago, and the name of the poem he had quoted. She nodded.

"That poem, Catherine. It haunts me. Do you mind if I read it to you?"

"Please do," she replied.

He took up the book and opened it to the page held open by his pen.

*"Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.*

*Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,*

*And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;*

*An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;*

*An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.*

*But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.*

*Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,*

*And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

Now therefore, while the youthful hue

*Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,*

*Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.*

*Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:*

*Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.” **

Vincent stopped reading and looked at Catherine, who was smiling softly.

“That was beautiful, Vincent. I think it’s every woman’s hope that someday, they’ll have the great passion spoken of in this poem - while young enough to enjoy it.”

“And yet, Catherine, I think we do have that, if only we choose to embrace it.” He coughed. “If I choose to embrace it, before it’s too late, or we are too old. It is I who is the hesitant one, Catherine. Me. You can’t deny it.”

Catherine looked at him, speechless in surprise, but her heart was beating harder, and he felt that passion he knew well beginning to build. Yet, he also felt her fatigue. There was an answer to both.

“I know you’re very tired, Catherine, but would you stay with me tonight? I would like you to sleep in my bed with me. No more than that, unless you wish it.”

Catherine smiled at him. “I would like that very much, Vincent. I know tomorrow I’ll have to have answers for what happened tonight. I think I’ll sleep better knowing you are beside me. I cannot promise I will be a quiet sleeper, but I’m willing to try.”

It was Vincent’s turn to smile. “I would not ask the impossible of either of us, Catherine,” he stated wryly.

Within minutes, they were both under the covers of his big bed, and both sighed contentedly. Neither had any fears about what the night would bring, and that was enough for both of them to fall asleep quickly. If they later woke up, devoured time and made the sun run... it was no one’s business but their own.

**(*Listen to Patrick Stewart read ‘To His Coy Mistress’ by Andrew Marvell :
<https://poetryarchive.org/poet/andrew-marvell/>)**

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