

Oblivion

by Angie

*... that traitor to learning, that hostile and
faithless stepmother to memory, oblivion.*

- John of Salisbury

He awoke to a grey dimness, chill and damp. The place was unfamiliar, although it was obviously below ground. He sensed there was no threat, no one even close by. Had he run away from somewhere, someone? Was he in hiding – and if so, why?

He became aware of his body. He could feel no hurt, no pain. He was not injured then, and felt a sense of relief. He shook his head to clear the muddiness, and felt his hair against his face. It was long – but then it always had been, hadn't it? He knew that and with that realization held his hands up to the source of the dim light. Yes, they were covered in long hair and ended in sharp nails. None of this surprised him.

Slowly, he became aware of a terrible stench emanating from the blackness of the cave behind him. He knew it was his own waste he was smelling and was appalled. What had happened to him that he had been reduced to this? His own body scent, from clothing that now felt stiff with dirt, was only slightly less disgusting. He felt suddenly thirsty and hungry. He could smell stale bread nearby. How had he come by that? Was he in a prison and being fed? He had to find out.

He rose slowly to his feet, his legs like lead, as if he had been in one position a very long time. Perhaps he had. He shuffled towards the light, almost enjoying the pain as the blood rushed into his limbs, though his knees creaked. He walked more quickly, feeling better by the moment, until he left the chamber and entered another, brighter one. There was no one and nothing to see but stone walls and a sandy floor. There were no metal bars, and somehow he knew there would have been, if he was a prisoner.

He shook his head again, as if doing so could shake loose memories. He walked into the next chamber and a delightful smell drew him to a large basket. He hunkered down and tore ravenously at the bread stuffed with meat and cheese he found there. There was a stone bottle as well, and he unstopped it and drank it without hesitation. It was apple juice, although he could not have said how he knew that. Words came to him and he let them. Questions and understanding could wait.

Obviously he had been ill. His memory was faulty, and he even knew the word for that condition – amnesia. He had read it somewhere – in a book, of course. He loved books, he could remember that passion as all-consuming at times. He remembered a place with floor-to-ceiling books.

He sat against the wall and closed his eyes. Yes, he lived below ground, of that he was certain now. But where was this place of books? He decided that he would not be able to force the answers.

Right now, he stank and badly needed a bath – something else he remembered. He lifted his head and smelled the air. Yes, there was water not far away. He let his nose lead him to a chamber where he could see a still pool of water, a light mist rising from it. He gazed at it and saw sparkles of light shimmering in its dark surface.

The Mirror Pool! He knew the name, although not how he knew. He guessed he had known it for a very long time – before whatever had happened to him.

He didn't hesitate. He stripped off all his clothes and scrubbed the worst of the dirt off them one by one in the water. He draped them over some rocky outcrops to dry. They would not dry quickly – and might need more than water to clean them. He didn't feel cold and abruptly decided he would remain naked, rather than put those clothes on again.

He jumped into the water. It was cool, but the feel of it on his body was wonderful. The water came halfway up his chest. He took up a handful of sand from the side of the pool and scrubbed himself, everywhere. He remembered something about that sand – about some leaking through his fingers from a box. A box sent by a friend from far away. His head began to ache as he strained to remember and he gave up trying to force it.

He dunked his head and massaged water into his hair. Even without soap, the feel of the clean water was a delight. He loved water, love to swim.

He stood in the pool and looked up, where a long chimney in the rock seemed to lead to the sky and stars. He ducked under the water again, coming up with his hair covering his eyes like a waterfall. The sensation was wonderful. He relaxed and opened his mind – and suddenly felt a joy not his own, and very close. He turned, just as a white form flew towards him. It landed in the pool with a splash, almost on top of him. He caught it without thinking and the familiar warmth and softness of that body gave him a name.

“Catherine.”

And with that, memories flooded over him. He leaned closer, found her lips in the dimness and kissed her hungrily. He moved his lips to her hair, to an ear, to her neck, as if to re-acquaint himself. How long had he been gone?

“Catherine ...”

“Vincent.”

Her voice was rough with emotion. She hugged him tightly as she spoke into his chest.

“We’ve been so worried. We didn’t want to frighten you, like before. I knew you were safe – but you were ... distant, as if you were a million miles away. Our son has been inconsolable. He missed you so much. So did I.”

She put her hand between his legs and gently cupped his soft testicles. He groaned as fire raced along his skin and his manhood responded. She ran her finger up his now stiff column and pressed herself closer.

The sensation of arousal thrilled him and he would gladly have gone further - but he had to ask a question.

“Catherine, what happened to me?”

“You rushed out of Father’s chamber three days ago. I felt your panic, and then nothing. Father said you looked like a stranger, confused. You came down here and we told everyone to stay away. Mouse left you food.

“We weren’t sure what happened to you, but we thought there was some relation to the date. It has been two years since Paracelsus exposed you to that terrible drug – and one year since your illness after killing him.”

“But why did I come here?” Vincent asked. “This is not where I went those times.”

He could remember everything now except why.

“No, but it has memories. We think you came here instinctively - a place where you used to come to think.”

Vincent spoke slowly. “Yes. It’s also where we burned our letters to Ellie. Mouse brought me the parcel you mailed from the West Coast to me here. I had been looking at the stars reflected, thinking of you on that distant shore.

“But what triggered this ... amnesia?”

“Father thinks he knows. You were playing chess with him when Mary walked in with a suit she had cleaned and repaired. It was the suit Father had been wearing when he went to visit Paracelsus. When Elliot and I found him, I helped him back below and we found you ... fighting Paracelsus, who had obviously been masquerading as Father.”

“And I killed him,” Vincent said, softly.

Catherine looked up at him, felt his pain like a knife in her heart.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Mary didn’t know. She never saw Paracelsus that time. You took the body and dropped it down the Abyss. You said it was too dangerous to bury, that it might attract his followers. While you did that, I took Father to Mary for medical attention and cleaned up his chamber. Mary noticed that his suit needed repair and cleaning, and took it away. Then you were ill and no one thought about that suit until a week ago, when Mary apparently found it in a forgotten pile in the sewing chamber and worked on it. When she brought it back, you were playing chess with Father. She placed it on the table and left. You suddenly saw it and it must have brought back all those terrible memories.

“It won’t happen again. Father quietly ordered the suit incinerated. Kanin did it two days ago. We haven’t said anything to Mary. She would be devastated.

“Oh, Vincent, I’ve been keeping our bond open, hoping. I didn’t know what else to do. When I felt you awaken, I knew you were returning to us. I made my way down here and waited. I knew you were getting closer, and when I felt your happiness in the water, I couldn’t wait any longer.”

“It has been too long,” Vincent whispered. “My love ...”

He held her to him and let her joy and love engulf him, cleanse the last of the cobwebs away. Then he carried her to the sand and lay down, holding her on top of him, to keep her from the rough sand. They were both wet, but that didn’t matter either.

It wasn’t long before their joint heat aroused them. When she began to kiss him, massage him, his body caught fire and he gasped with desire. When he felt her warmth sink over his manhood, he was unable to prevent his climax from overtaking them both in a hurricane rush. It transported them to that place that only lovers know and let them down gently.

Afterwards, Vincent felt reborn, re-vitalized – like a phoenix rising from the ashes, he thought. He had never felt so gloriously alive. He held Catherine to him until he sensed she might fall asleep.

“Catherine ... I want to go home, but my clothes are not wearable.”

“Vincent, give me credit for some foresight. I brought a basket of fresh clothes and towels for us both – and some soap. We both need that now.”

Vincent sighed. Truly, he was blessed. He knew once again, that no matter where he strayed, inside his mind or outside in the world, he would never lose Catherine – that as she had once told him, they could never lose each other as long as they remembered their love.

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