

Remembrance Always

by Angie

*"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.*

- Alfred Lord Tennyson "Idylls of the King"

Remembrance Day below was always marked by a community gathering around the Mirror Pool. Father considered it essential that everyone recognize the two World Wars fought above, and reflect on the madness that had gripped the world. Some of the residents below were veterans. Father himself was not unconcerned about what had resulted from the post-war nuclear program, since it had affected him directly, and lost him Margaret. So the gathering was solemn, each person thinking their own thoughts in two minutes of silence. Then the chamber echoed with lines of war poetry, read by Father. Everyone lit a reclaimed wax candle and left it on the edge of the pool to burn down, until the chamber returned to darkness, lit only by the reflected sky from the opening far above.

Vincent participated, but felt removed from it. It fell at a particularly bad time of the year for him, one where, years ago, he had all but lost himself and almost Catherine. Now, it was a different reminder of her, a poignant and beautiful one, but one ultimately imbued with sorrow and immense loss.

However, to disassociate that terrible loss from the birthday of his son, Jacob, and festivities later in the year, Vincent had decided to hold his own remembrance ceremony in late November, after Thanksgiving and the official Remembrance Day ceremony, which he did not wish to overshadow. In truth, he had a lot to be thankful for, and it was appropriate to recognize that as well.

He marked his remembrance, as he always had, alone, beginning with that very first one, the anniversary of her death. As it happened, Peter had helped to make it, and those which followed, special.

Some weeks after Vincent had rescued baby Jacob and brought him to the tunnels, and life had become somewhat less anxious and despairing for him, Peter had paid him a visit and handed him an ornate metal box.

Peter had merely looked at Vincent as he held the box, as if it was hot, tentatively. He sensed it had been Catherine's. He looked askance at Peter, his brows knitted in pain.

Peter then made a soft declaration. "Vincent, this was Catherine's, as you surmise. It was in a chest of personal effects I received when the DA's investigation of her apartment was complete. Diana arranged for it to be delivered to me, as a person close to Catherine. She didn't know of you or the tunnels then. On this anniversary I thought you should have it. I think Catherine would have wanted you to."

Vincent had thanked him and Peter had left to visit Father - and beat him at chess ... again.

Vincent had put the box on his table, then in the quiet hours of the night, he had examined it, as he could not while he might be interrupted. The box had a beautiful pattern of carved

roses and opened to reveal three sectioned trays, each holding many pairs of earrings.

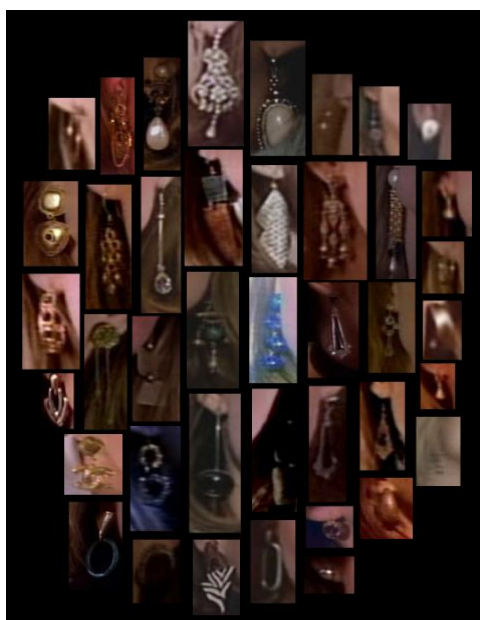


Tears rolled down his cheeks unheeded. They evoked her as nothing else could.

He had always noticed Catherine's earrings, for they were unique to her. She had not usually worn them below, but had on special occasions, or if she visited him straight from work. He recognized several pairs, and each brought back a poignant memory.

With his sharp nailed index finger, Vincent touched the earrings Catherine had been wearing that night, the night that changed his life forever. Long, jewelled and filigreed, they were uniquely beautiful. She had not worn them when she left the tunnels to return home, but they were wrapped in one of his handkerchiefs in the pocket of her repaired coat. She had thanked him, later, for saving them for her. He wondered if she had ever worn them again. He suspected not.

There were several other pairs he recognized. He touched another, a pair with a long rectangular, chain-like filigree and a pearl top and bottom. She had worn them that wonderful evening when they had listened to classical music in his secret place beneath the bandshell. She had been so happy then, standing under the rain from the grate, as people ran away above them and the lightning flashed. He had never seen her so ... uninhibited ... and she had flung herself on him in joy. He had lived a lifetime in those few precious moments, loving her with all that he was.



He had to stifle a sob as the memories flooded him and the hollow place in his chest, where their bond had been, ached anew. What could he do with these? They were bittersweet to look upon, but precious all the same. He thought about this for some while, then reached a decision. There was only one thing he could do – and he would do it for Catherine ... and himself.

On the following anniversary, the first remembrance, Vincent visited Catherine's grave, and stood there, head bowed, silently affirming his love for her. He carried a pair of her earrings in his pocket, the pair she had worn that wonderful first Halloween, just small pearls.

Vincent examined her grave and found a small, loose piece of concrete. He shifted it and found a small slit, which he enlarged slightly. Then he dropped the earrings into that small imperfection, and heard them drop softly into the space below, where her casket rested. Then he replaced the concrete piece, filled in the gap with rock chips, then covered it with dirt.

That first remembrance he had read excerpts of Emily Dickinson poems. The poet seemed to know exactly how he felt; her poetry was often concerned with love ... or death. He remembered those lines still.

*“We grow accustomed to the Dark -
When Light is put away -*

*And so of larger – Darknesses -
Those Evenings of the Brain -
When not a Moon disclose a sign -
Or Star – come out – within -*

*Either the Darkness alters -
Or something in the sight -
Adjusts itself to Midnight -
And Life steps almost straight -”*

Indeed, life had gone on, but never the same, never as simple as it had been before her death. Always Catherine was with him, in memory, in their son, in the places she had loved below, and where they had met above at night. He had become accustomed to talking to her, alone, always alone. It gave him solace.

Over the years he had taken many earrings to that repository ... the delicate dangling ones she had worn to that memorable concert below, where Brian had found them, the large pearl drops she had worn at Winterfest, the large rings when his brother Devin had returned to them, the gemstone cushions worn when he had read to her in the Chamber of the Falls ... so many others. He had also deposited many pairs he did not recognize, that she had undoubtedly worn to functions above, or to work. Some she might have worn on dates with Elliot. It was all in the past, so he felt no jealousy now. He would gladly have had her marry another, if it would have meant that she lived.

Last year, he had deposited the long pearl and filigree pair she had worn to the music chamber. Almost he had wanted to keep them, but at last decided that they too should be sent to their final resting place. He would never forget them, or her, or that evening.

Vincent had decided not to part with the pair she had worn the night he had found her in the park. He kept them in the jewelry box, which now held other mementos too – her crystal and the rose in its leather pouch which she had given him.

This year, he looked at the penultimate pair of earrings, uncertain as to why he had left them until last. Perhaps because they were associated in his mind with a certain interfering ghost, and with the gift she had made to him at the time, Tennyson's '*Idylls of the King*'. They were three squares of metal linked together. He remembered them catching the light as she handed him the book. It was a memory he treasured, but these earrings he could bury with the others. It was their time now.

Vincent arrived at her grave in deepest night, as always. It was silent around him, a thin moon was lightening up a small sliver of sky behind wispy clouds. He stood there for several minutes, thinking. Yes, he decided, he must recite something from '*Idylls*' this time.

*"Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight."*

Another voice spoke softly beside him.

"And in the moon athwart the place of tombs ..."

Vincent looked around, shocked, and Kristopher smiled at him. He was still wearing the baseball cap, but he looked older, grey-haired. Did ghosts grow old too? He had never considered the question before.

"Yes, we can grow old too, Vincent, although we never die," Kristopher informed him, as if he read his mind. He regarded the earrings Vincent held and spoke musingly.

"I remember those earrings. She was very angry with me after I interrupted you two, and I followed her, trying to talk her into letting me sketch her. She looked even more wonderful angry. Those earrings shook like shields before a battle. She did eventually let me sketch her, in a coffee shop. I didn't need that sketch to do the portrait. I have a very good memory. But I needed her to find my paintings in that warehouse and see that they were sold. I owe you both a great deal for that."

"Why can you be seen and not Catherine?" Vincent asked, an obvious question now.

"Why don't you ask her?" Kristopher replied, and looked over at the grave. Vincent turned his head to look ... and there, on the grass over her grave, Catherine stood, ethereal, with long grey hair and the soft lines of age making her face even more beautiful. She wore a long dress, something silky, soft and flowing, the colour of moonlit clouds ... somewhat like the nightwear she had often worn on her balcony with him.

Vincent caught his breath. "Catherine." It was all he could say.

"Vincent," she replied. "How I have missed you."

"Why did you not come to me before?" Vincent asked, sadly. How much she could have relieved his pain if she had, especially on this day.

As if she read his mind, Catherine shook her head.

"I couldn't, Vincent. I wanted you to be whole, to have a happy life, to perhaps find another love."

"That cannot be," he told her bluntly.

"I know that now," she replied sadly. "I failed you, Vincent. I'm sorry."

"You did not fail me," he replied. "I did not find you in time."

"Vincent ... there is no blame. It happened. I died. You found Jacob. That's all that matters."

"And our love, Catherine? Am I to forget that? I cannot. I do not wish to."

Catherine smiled at him and quoted from '*Idylls*'.

*"Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;
Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure,
Remembering all the beauty of that star
Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made
One light together, but has past and leaves
The Crown a lonely splendour."*

Vincent bowed his head and felt the tears roll down his cheeks.

Kristopher, still beside him spoke. "*The sequel of to-day unsolders all*"

Vincent looked at him and then at Catherine.

She smiled.

"Vincent, I am always with you, in that place where you remember our bond. It is filled with memories; joy, pain, love, anger ... everything that makes life real. I am not real. I cannot touch you, any more than those memories can, but still I will never leave you. I have never left you. I have watched you and Jacob over the years ... and I have heard you here, my love, gifting all those self-indulgent earrings of mine to the earth. ... I dared not disturb you more."

Vincent, drawing again from '*Idylls*', made a plea.

*"To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."*

Catherine looked at him sadly. "Vincent you and I will be together one day, never fear. Please don't try to hurry that day. You have so much to live for. You are loved below, needed and wanted. Death offers nothing. I know this. Please believe me."

"It offers you," he replied sadly.

"And I will always be here, waiting. I am sorry to have left you alone so long. Kristopher tried to tell me. But you have lived well, Vincent, and our son has thrived. I did not want to disrupt the little peace you had managed to find."

"Peace," repeated Vincent. He supposed Catherine was correct. He did have peace now, but it had been hard won, a struggle over many years, over many days like today. The earrings had brought back bittersweet memories, but consigning them to the earth had given him

some closure from a specific pain, that associated with each offering.
Softly, he held up the earrings he had brought, and spoke.

*"Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men."*

"They mean nothing to anyone but you, Vincent," Catherine replied softly. "Thank you for returning them to me, for keeping them safe ... for being you."

Vincent moved to shift the rock and carefully forced the earrings into the slot. Then he replaced the rocks and dirt and stood back. Catherine and Kristopher were now standing on either side of him. Vincent spoke the words of Elaine's *Song of Love and Death*;

*"Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die."*

And Catherine replied:

*"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I."*

Vincent bowed his head and spoke to the gravestone. He could not look at Catherine.

"Those were the last earrings, except the ones you wore the night I found you. I cannot part with those. I do not wish to."

"I understand," Catherine's ghost whispered.

"You always understand me," he replied, a little wryly.

"You and I are one. We will always be one," she told him.

He looked at her then, and saw that her face was infused with love for him. He wanted to hold her to him, to never let her go, but he knew he could not. So much of ghosts he knew.

"Remember our hugs," she told him. "I can feel them, love them, as I love you. You can do the same."

To his surprise, Vincent did. He could feel her in his arms, just then, as if he was on her balcony again, hugging her to him, keeping her warm, warming him. And then it passed.

"Thank-you," he whispered to her, and she smiled at him. Kristopher had disappeared. They were alone now.

"I must leave," Catherine whispered. "It will soon be morning."

"I love you," Vincent managed to say, through a throat that wanted to close up.

"And I you. Be well, Vincent," she whispered as she faded away, leaving him alone before her grave.

And then:

*As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice ...*

Vincent, his angst having found a vocal outlet, turned away from Catherine's grave and made his way home. He heard Kristopher's voice as he walked.

*"A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls, "*

"Yes," Vincent said to the air beside him. Indeed, it was so. She would always be with him, just as she said. He was not alone. For the first time in the long years, he felt truly blessed, and almost content. The deep sorrow had retreated to that place Catherine had said, inside him where their bond had resided. It would not dominate him again.

Kristopher was not visible, but Vincent felt his ghostly presence. "Thank you," he said.

"My pleasure," Kristopher replied and was gone.

And so ended a remembrance day, one better than any. He couldn't speculate what it meant, whether Catherine would appear to him now, occasionally. He could merely hope, as Emily Dickinson said.

*"'Hope' is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -"*

END