

"She Sleeps..."

Judith Nolan



*"To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come..."*

William Shakespeare

Vincent sat in his chamber, frowning at his journal. He'd been sitting there for some hours. But still, the nib of his pen had not touched the open page. It lay idle, beside his hand.

Catherine's father is dead and she is with me. Even thinking the words makes them sound impossible. How can I write down my thoughts and feelings, when she is so near and so tangible? All I need do is rise and go to her. I know she would not deny the certain comfort of my embrace...

So many words clamoured in his mind, demanding to be written down. A vast range of emotions he couldn't define in prose swirled in his heart.

He recalled her impassioned plea. "*Vincent, I need to be with you. I need you. I need you!*"

Her desperate words haunted his wakefulness. He knew she had not spoken from her heart but from her place of grief. But he could not deny her the shelter of his world. He'd guided her Below, to the guest chamber.

She'd maintained a brave face while she'd wished him a sad goodnight. He'd watched her trying not to cry and it had broken his heart. He knew he could have stayed, but he did not.

He feared if he had stayed, he may never have found the courage to leave her alone again. As he sat at his table, he could feel her suffering, even as she finally succumbed to the blessed haven of sleep. He could sense the pain burning within her, demanding an outlet.

He shook his great head. *She sleeps now. I would not disturb her slumber and yet...*

He would not sleep tonight. He would sit and wait, remaining alert to any sign he was needed. Any sound, any hint that Catherine was awake and he would rise and go to her.

If all he could do was hold her while she grieved, then he would do that. He could do that.

He inhaled deep and long, expelling his breath slowly. He could feel Catherine, sense her breathing in her sleep. She was so near and yet, still so far away. Her dreams echoed into him, sending him visions of her beloved father in happier times. The man she had so recently lost still lived within her. Charles Chandler always would.

Vincent looked up from the blank page, closing his eyes and allowing everything his love was seeing and feeling to wash through him. He'd always valued this time, when his world slept, underscored by the constant tapping of the pipes. The sound soothed him, as it had always done.

He inhaled again, seeing now what he needed to set down on paper. He picked up the pen and brought the nib down to touch the page. He began to write...

'Our world sleeps and she is near. Strange and wonderful and sad, this feeling rising in me like a tide. To have all I ever dreamed of so close and yet to know that...

All I know is that she is here and that I must live for her, surround her easily, guide her out of suffering. While she is here, I must live moment by moment for her.

I know she cannot remain here, by her own choice or mine. Like a butterfly, she needs the sunshine on her wings. I would never deny her that.

Would that she could stay here, with me. But all I have to offer her is myself. Catherine has said I am enough. But she deserves so much more, as much as she denies it now, in her grief. I am painfully aware of so many things I cannot provide for her, no matter how much I could wish for it to be so.

Tonight, she said she no longer has a place in her world. That her life there was not hers anymore.

Oh, Catherine, you still have so much to offer in the world Above. Your courage, your compassion and your love. I know I can never have a place in your world. No matter how much we both may wish it to be so.

There are no bridges that can span the vast ocean that divides us, keeping us forever apart. There is only the here and now.

I must accept what cannot be and wait for her to need me. I can do that simple task. I can wait. I can do that for her, for my love. I can wait for all eternity if it needs to be so...'

“Our life is twofold; Sleep hath its own world, a boundary between the things misnamed. Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world and a wide realm of wild reality. And dreams in their development have breath and tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy...”

Lord Byron