

EVERYTHING I DO...

by Nan Dibble

(from HEARTSCAPES ONE)

Wednesday, very late.

I foolishly imagined I could speak to you of anything, Diana. I cannot - as I could not with Catherine. It is no fault in you, any more than it was in her, that some things cannot be spoken. Some ideas, some realizations, can be hurtful, even though - or perhaps because - they are the truth.

It is irresponsible to blurt such truths simply because they happen to come into one's mind, regardless of the hurt they do. Even though the hurt be to one who can no longer feel it. For she still lives - in me, and also in you, who threw yourself so entirely into imagining her, in the search of her killer, that you imagined your way surely, and without doubt, to the secret Catherine kept hidden in her deepest heart - the secret of me - and unerringly found me as I think now you will always find me, and I am glad, as I was not then, to be found...

I will not speak of it to you, considering the implications. But I must nevertheless face it for myself and know the truth as best I can because of those same implications for us, and what is to become of us, and what we are to become, together.

Tonight you shared with me a filmed version of the tale of Robin Hood. And I was caught quite by surprise by the seemingly unrelated song that followed the film, as accompaniment to the names of all those who had contributed to its making. In that song, a lover declares that everything he does, he does for his beloved. And that seemed true and right, and in consonance with my experience. Among the things the lover declared he would do is "Die for you." And at first, that also seemed to me natural, unremarkable, fitting and right for a lover to believe. As I believed. As I would have done, instantly and without question or regret, for Catherine.

But afterward, returning home and now here in my chamber, I began remembering.

Quite early in our relationship, I often dreamed of Catherine dead, and I, unremarked among the mourners, advancing to view her serene face as she lay in her coffin. During the dreams, I felt only a strange and complete calm. It was as though a dream had died, not Catherine and the only dreamer was myself. It was my dream of her, of us becoming one, in that coffin. Therefore, there was an inevitability about it that made resignation and acceptance easier.

Not like her death in truth. No sudden uncontrollable fits of weeping. No waves of guilt and grief that I'd failed her, though I don't know what I could have done that I did not do. Such things have no significance in true bereavement. The loss itself is the judgment that more was needed to preserve her life, and that more was not forthcoming, and so she died. And somehow, though I don't know how, I should have prevented it. Someone should have. For it was such a grievous wrong, that Catherine should die, her own dreams left unfulfilled.

But I digress. What I remembered were those dreams of mine - as though I knew from the beginning that Catherine was lost to me despite my hopes, and hers. That our love could never be anything but a bright imagining. A hope. A dream doomed to die, peacefully, in regret and inevitability.

And tonight I reflected how, although I was entirely willing to die for Catherine, what I did was kill for

her. Over and over and over. I grew, not merely numbed and inured to the prospect. I grew to enjoy it. And to enjoy it even in the doing, in the fact of it. I would not have been so shamed in the aftermath, were it not for the unavoidable awareness of how sweet it had been to give this gift to Catherine. To release the deepest part of me, which is violent and knows no limits, in Catherine's presence and on her behalf. She never understood either the sweetness or the shame. But I did.

Eros and Thanatos. Lust and bloodlust. Desire and murder. I knew what I did. And I called it love.

Later, almost at the end, I dreamed of death again, but in a different way. There was no threat to Catherine in that dream. No threat, that is, save me. She stood serenely in the park, watching me approach. Watching the forbidden suitor attempt to reach her. Watching, still serenely, as the forces of law struck me down, as they must, for I could never reach her. Not that way. It was wrongful and forbidden, and in my dreams I knew it and enacted the prohibitions of her world against our ever becoming one.

Had such a thing ever happened in truth, I know Catherine's reaction would have been far otherwise. She would not have been looking on - she would have fought for me, struggled to reach me as I struggled to reach her. There would have been no acceptance, no serenity. But dreams tell us the inner truth of things... especially of ourselves. So what those dreams betokened was my own awareness that I could never lawfully reach out to Catherine by her world's values. Nor hers. Nor, I must now confess, by mine. It would have been an abomination. The beast must be slaughtered rather than allow that desecration to happen.

This was my own awareness, my own dreaming realization of the limits I could never breach. We both conspired toward that result, Catherine and I, by accepting that despite hope or idle dreams - idle because of the difference of our natures. Of our fundamental being.

One may love a cat. A dog. A monster. One may not lawfully mate with it.

Dreams, too, tell us truths we would prefer not to know.

What that song set me to wondering, about is why my love for Catherine had always been so infused with death. With the notion of dying for her. With dreaming her death or mine. With killing for her, not merely in dream, but in living nightmare. In truth. And somehow, without question, equating that all with love. As the singer did, the lover in the song.

I think it is not love. I don't know what it is. Madness, perhaps. But I do not anymore accept it as any rightful part of love.

Were you in deadly peril, Diana, I would kill for you. You could not prevent me. I don't think I could prevent myself. But neither of us would feel anything but sadness at the necessity. It happened once, at the park threshold. But I am quite certain it will never happen again, if you have any control over the matter. You are most determined to prevent such a bloody bond being forged between us, as it was between me and Catherine. You don't want that to be what we are to one another.

You have not said this. We have never spoken of it. Nevertheless I know.

And if by dying, I could preserve your dear life, I would do so without hesitation or regret. I am as I am, and as I was.

But I no longer call it love.

Returning from Catherine's bedside, having watched beside her body until the dawn forbade I remain any longer, I came to the bridge that crosses the Whispering Gallery. The bridge over the Abyss. Then, finally alone, having left all that remained of Catherine Above, in her home and her world where she belonged, in death as in life, I wanted to die. I felt the Abyss below me - endless, mysterious, and as unplumbed as death itself - and stood swaying there, wanting to cast myself down. Not to be with Catherine. Simply not to be. Not to have to endure the prospect of life

endlessly without her. And presently I cried out because I knew I would not do that. It was not in me to choose so. I cried out with rage and grief - not because Catherine had died, but because I knew then that I would live. And it was terrible to me that I had chosen life.

No one knows of this but I myself. But I have come to know it very deeply, in being found by you and now finding you. In reclaiming and loving my son, my Jacob.

"Though lovers be lost, love shall not" - this is the meaning of that verse, and I now know it for truth, far better than when in delirium I offered it to Catherine, as solace against what I believed to be my own imminent death.

There is a special poignancy that it was you who repeated that verse, unknowing of what it had come to mean to me. For it is through you it has come at last into its full meaning, fully felt. Because I chose as I did, that terrible morning on the bridge. Or, more accurately, on that morning I learned it was not in me to choose otherwise. Not even for what I then imagined as love.

I know better now.

What is in my imaginings of you, and of us, is that I long to live for you. And in all ways to give you life, not death. Neither my own death, nor that of others, nor your death endlessly imagined. That is no part of what we are. You do not see the monster, but you see all of me, and nevertheless see a man; and the fact of Jacob persuades me that, though strange I surely am, monstrous I am not. So nothing is unlawful between us.

I long to accept and enjoy your gifts of life to me, endlessly and boundlessly offered, without limits, gifts which I still have yet to fully receive or return. But I will. With your patience and your certainty and your utter trust and acceptance of me, someday I shall.

For in my deepest heart, I believe in life, not death. And you are, Diana, what you have always been to me from that first moment at Catherine's grave - life, and more life, and abundant joy. But if I tell this to you at all, it will only be my conclusions, not the process by which I arrived at them.

I am not so foolish as to believe I am done with death. But I have finally cast it out of my longings. I will grieve when I must. I will kill when I must. But I will never again infuse the act with my passion or imagine that it is love.

Forgive me, Catherine.