

Love Pinned in Memory

by Angie

*Surely great loving kindness yet may go with a little gift:
all's dear that comes from friends*

- *Theocritus*
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Vincent looked around Winslow's chamber, noticing, as if for the first time, that it was the most sparsely-furnished space he had ever seen. He knew Winslow himself seemed to fill it more than amply, but just the same ... it was strange.

Despite it being almost three years since Winslow had died at the hands of Erlick, no one had moved into the vacant chamber. Someone would eventually, Vincent was sure, but it would probably be someone who had not known Winslow.

Winslow had always kept his own counsel, but the story about Paracelsus in the early days had been a revelation on that fateful trip. Father had never said very much about the man, preferred to talk in what Vincent considered riddles. All that was past now, but at the time Vincent had found Father's attitude incomprehensible.

The anniversary meant a great deal to Vincent. It was time to visit the resting place of his friend and pay his respects. After some discussion, the community had decided to leave him where he had died, under the cairn of rocks on the almost inaccessible ledge halfway to the lair of Paracelsus, instead of trying to carry the body to the catacombs. Paracelsus was dead now too, and his followers, if there were any left, did not trouble their community. Narcissa had called them 'the simple ones'. Perhaps they had returned above when Paracelsus did not return.

Vincent looked around the chamber. There ... that chair was one Winslow would have chosen. It was a wide wooden armchair with a solid cushion. A small patchwork quilt was neatly folded on it, as if the owner would return any minute. Uncertain exactly what he was looking for, Vincent carefully lifted the quilt, lay it over an arm, then sat down. From this vantage point, he could see Winslow's bed, covered with another patchwork quilt, a small night table with a hurricane lamp ... and almost nothing else.

But there was one more thing, something Vincent had never seen before. On a carefully chiseled out ledge in the rock wall, on one side of the chamber entrance, about the height of his chest, and therefore about Winslow's as well, there was an object. He couldn't see what it was in the light from the lantern he had brought, so he got up to look more closely.

It was a roundish thing with a flower neatly positioned in the middle. Vincent reached out to touch it and realized the thing was made of several different scraps of wool, cunningly sewn together. The flower on the top was some brownish wool with a bit of houndstooth in the centre, and a spiral of darker brown in the centre of that, like a rose.

He picked it up and turned it over. The bottom half of it had different fabric to that of the top, and it all seemed very old wool fabric – two different herringbone patterns, as if from the trousers of a kind some of the older residents wore. There was also some tweed, perhaps

from a coat, and even a dark red plaid. In the centre of the bottom was a large men's coat button, and from it, pulled tight, were eight red pieces of yarn, evenly-spaced. They pulled the shape taut and joined under the flower on the top. The two halves of the object were neatly stitched with yellow yarn, in a pattern that looked like a plant stem. There were also three green leaves embroidered onto the top under the flower petals and reaching to the edge. On what he presumed was the top, so it could be hung up, there was a string of assorted plastic beads.



But what was it? Vincent looked around once more, saw no answers, then decided to ask Mary. It looked like an object made by a woman.

Vincent made his way to the tunnel matron's chamber and found her knitting in a comfortable, well-upholstered chair. She looked up when he came in and opened her mouth to greet him, and then saw what he was holding. She slumped and was silent for long moments, looking at her hands. Vincent waited. When she looked up at him again, her voice was soft.

“Please have a seat, Vincent. I see you've found Winslow's treasure.”

Vincent, although now sad too, was also intensely curious.

“Treasure?” he asked, handing her the object.

Mary nodded as she took it and held it reverently.

“This was Sally's pincushion, Winslow's mother. She was our seamstress, you know. She was very clever with that old sewing machine we had and used every scrap of fabric for something. She made this from several old pieces, as you can see. She made us all small ones. We didn't have sewing baskets, any of us, so we kept a darning needle and some pins in them. I made sure Winslow was given this in her memory after she died – but without the pins. He was just a child, but he revered her. She was a strong, capable woman.”

Mary examined the pincushion and turned it over. “But I guess Winslow didn't use it.”

Vincent chuckled softly. “He claimed his hands could never hold a needle. When we were boys, he brought anything he'd ripped to me, and I did what I could ... secretly, of course.”

“You?” Mary asked, looking at him with surprise.

“Yes, I know it seems hard to believe that even my hands were better than his, but it was so. He claimed to have ten thumbs. He must have had this even then, but I didn't know. He always brought a needle and thread with him, but never wanted it back. I have some of them in my own pincushion ... a much more modest one than this.”

Mary nodded.

“There are probably not many of those old ones still around. We filled them with sand, or scraps of fabric too small for anything else. They got passed around, but even pincushions wear out eventually. I had one, but replaced it with a sewing basket many years ago. I used the fabric to make a needle case.

“Anna had one, I remember ... lord knows where that is now ... and Father may have. He probably put it in a drawer and forgot about it. Sally taught me everything I know. She was a remarkably talented woman.”

“I'll be visiting Winslow's grave today to pay my respects. I wanted to take something, and since he valued this, I will leave it there.”

Mary nodded. “It's a beautiful gesture, Vincent. I hate to think of him down there all alone. He was such a big part of this community.”

Vincent looked at the pincushion. “Winslow would know we could not move him without endangering ourselves. He would never want that.”

Mary rose and went to her dresser. She pulled out a fat white candle with herbs embedded in it and handed it to Vincent.

“Take this and light it for me ... It was one of the last ones Sally made ... before she became ill. She taught Rebecca candlemaking you know. I kept it in her memory, but it should be with Winslow.”

“Thank you, Mary,” Vincent said. After saying goodbye he returned to his chamber, but stopped abruptly just inside the door. On the floor, where he could not help but see it, was a wicker basket with many objects in it. He picked it and carried it to his table to look at it in better light. Attached to the handle of the basket was a note in Rebecca's handwriting.

“Vincent, many of us wanted to send something with you to leave with Winslow, as a memorial, so I collected the things for you.”

He had made no secret of he planned journey, but still the scale of the response amazed him. There were candles, a ceramic bowl, and several items obviously made by the children, even some neatly-folded and sealed letters. There was even a little stone egg, which a little note kept in place with an elastic band, indicated came from Pascal. Vincent chuckled as he remembered Winslow's words to their pipemaster. This was a gift fitting for a man who using the sledgehammer to good effect in many of their chambers.

They had held a memorial for Winslow at the Mirror Pool, as they did for all their departed, burning personal letters to rise with the smoke out the hole in the chamber roof. But these letters were obviously not to be burned, but left by the cairn.

Vincent was very touched by the collection, which reflected the love everyone felt for the big man. Although Winslow had been gruff, the children were not fooled and loved him dearly.

Vincent realized he had not thought to take anything on his own account. He looked around his chamber and his gaze fell on something. Yes, that would be appropriate. Catherine had bought some floating candles one Valentine's Day, but there was one that had been hardly used. He picked it up. It was the shape of a rose, and he was sure he could float it in the bowl someone had given.

He would need more than a satchel for all these things, he decided, and rooted for his canvas sack. It was large enough to hold the basket as well as the items in it. He added a flask of water and some extra matches and a small blanket to stop things from shifting on the journey.

There was no point delaying any longer. Throwing on his cloak, Vincent slung the sack over his shoulder and left swiftly. His long legs and stride soon ensured the home tunnels were left far behind.

A couple of hours later, Vincent arrived at Narcissa's chamber, but it was dark. She was not at home; the only time he had ever not found her in her remote cavern. He looked around, not knowing quite what to do, unused to seeing it unlit by many candles, now with weird shadows from the light of his lantern as he moved it. Well, there was nothing to do but go back and he turned away to do so - but just as he did so, he almost bumped into her. She had silently arrived from the lower entry, untroubled as always by her blindness.

"Vincent," she puffed at him, obviously out of breath. Her milky eyes stared up at him.

"Narcissa," he responded and waited.

"Too much rushing for an old woman like me," she berated him, as if it was he who had made her hurry.

He opened his mouth to protest, but she held up a hand and he remained silent.

"I have been far down, Vincent, looking at that place the Evil One called home, by old pathways I know. There are none living there now. The simple ones have gone. I wanted you to tell you. There is now no danger in what you do."

"You know where I'm going." It was a statement, not a question.

"Where else, Vincent? The man who died, did so far below. I have this for you. It will give his soul rest. No one should spend eternity as alone as he is. He should join his family."

She handed him a small fabric pouch, which seemed to be full of odd-shaped objects. Vincent asked no questions, merely nodded and took off the sack to add the pouch to it.

"Go," she admonished. "The anniversary is the soul's doorway. He must be appeased."

Vincent frowned at this. "Winslow loved all of us, Narcissa. Why would he need to be appeased?"

Narcissa chuckled. "He is restless because he failed you in your time of need. It was not his fault - or yours - but spirits do not think as we do, Vincent. Talk to him - you will know the words. Send him to rest."

She moved on past him then and began to light her candles with a taper from a small lantern that flared up when she mumbled two words Vincent didn't catch. Vincent slung the bag back on his shoulder and continued on, now worrying whether he was going to be able to help his old friend's spirit. It had never occurred to him to think about it.

The route was as he remembered, and the rope down the cliff held, despite its ragged appearance and the extra weight he was carrying. After all, he rationalized, it had held Winslow, no lightweight himself. Erlick too had been a large man, and presumably he had also used it.

He reached the ledge with the cairn not long afterwards, and remembered their campfire that night, the last night when Winslow confessed he could see that the love between Vincent and Catherine was real, even though he himself had never felt it.

Vincent regarded the cairn and placed his lantern at the foot of it. Then he carefully unpacked all the little gifts. He placed candles on any flat rock on the cairn, and placed the letters under other rocks. He filled the bowl with water from his canteen and floated the rose candle in it. He managed to wedge it between two rocks at the head of the cairn. He found a place nearby to put Pascal's stone egg. He placed Sally's pincushion where he thought Winslow's heart might be. Then he lit all the candles. He held Narcissa's pouch in his hand, wondering what to do with it. She had not given him any instructions.

With a sigh, Vincent sat on the little blanket and composed himself. He spoke to the cairn, as he would have to Winslow when he was alive - quietly, with respect.

“As you told us that night, Winslow, it's important that we stand by each other. We are family. You had as much conviction as Father. You loved all of us and were loved in return. I am sorry that you did not find a soulmate to share your life, as I have.

Walt Whitman said, *'Love is never lost. If not reciprocated, it will flow back and soften and purify the heart.'*

“Your heart was big and encompassed us all, Winslow. We all remember you and mourn you. We always will. I leave these things here for you, as proof of our love and gratitude for your time with us, which was too short.”

Tennyson ... Vincent had always loved the poet, who seemed to speak of all he dared to hope, and know what he felt. Lines from *In Memoriam* seemed appropriate now. He recited them softly into the echoing space.

*“I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.*

*But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.*

*In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold:
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more.”*

Looking down, Vincent found the leather pouch was warm. He quickly placed it on the cairn and watched. It shifted slightly, as if something inside was alive, then it began to smoke. As he watched, it was consumed by fire and quickly disintegrated to ash.

Then a great sigh filled the space and Vincent felt his heart ease, as if a load had been lifted from him. The sigh lingered only for a few moments, then it seemed to move into the mist beyond the ledge. He thought he heard a voice whisper “*Vincent*”, but it was so soft, he couldn't be sure. It might have been a trick of the wind, which seemed to blowing below the ledge.

“Good-bye and a happy journey, my friend,” he whispered. He sat there for a long time, before he sighed and began his journey home. He would not need to return again.

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