

Resignation

by Angie

"There is no Death! What seems so is transition"

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

How long would it take, Vincent wondered, until he no longer thought of Catherine every day, often several times a day? When did grief become obsession? Was there a time limit? Would there be a time when he could remember her without pain?

As often happened, his train of thought led him to poetry, and he thought of Longfellow, a man who had lost his beloved wife to a freak accident. Eighteen years after her death, he had written a poem, trying to give solace to himself and others. He opened the poem and began to read it softly to himself.

*"THERE is no flock however watched and tended
But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside howsoe'er defended
But has one vacant chair!"*

Vincent looked across his chamber at the chair Catherine often sat in, a smaller version of his own, more comfortable, a lady's chair.

*"Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.*

*We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;
Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us but sad funereal tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps."*

It was true. He had seen so many candles lit in her memory that they had all taken on an air of grief. He could barely stand to have any in his chamber, and would not have, but for Jacob as a baby. Since Jacob left to study and work Above, there were few candles, and those thick white ones, quite unlike the 'funereal tapers'.

*There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian
Whose portal we call Death.*

Vincent had a difficult time believing in any heaven or deity, so he passed over the next stanzas. The next, though, spoke to him.

*“Day after day we think what she is doing
In those bright realms of air;
Year after year her tender steps pursuing
Behold her grown more fair.*

Of course she would never grow old, unlike himself. She would always be beautiful in his memories too.

*Thus do we walk with her and keep unbroken
The bond which nature gives
Thinking that our remembrance though unspoken
May reach her where she lives.*

How often had he addressed her, even knowing she couldn't hear him? Nevertheless, he derived some comfort from doing so, and he often wrote to her in his journal. He wanted to remember the times he'd thought of her. It gave him solace to have her in his life, even at that remove.

*And though at times impetuous with emotion
And anguish long suppressed
The swelling heart heaves moaning like the ocean
That cannot be at rest*

Yes, he had known anguish, such pain as he thought he could not endure. It had lessened with the years, but it never left completely and sometimes it swelled over him.

*We will be patient and assuage the feeling
We may not wholly stay;
By silence sanctifying not concealing
The grief that must have way. **

Indeed, he could not conceal it and Father had told him from the beginning to let it out, to let it flow over him. It had been good advice then, and just as good as the years went by. Longfellow too knew grief was a thing of itself, that could not be concealed.

How strange that he had not read this poem before. Perhaps he had reached that enviable state recognized by Longfellow, at last, and now the poem spoke to him. It did console him that someone else understood. Grief was a very personal state, but it need not be borne alone.

Vincent thought of Father, who had also known grief. It was made more poignant, as Catherine had observed at the time, by the fact that he and Margaret had been separated for so many years. At least he and Catherine had had a few beautiful years, and made memories .. and they had a son.

He looked up at his fan window, at the image of a woman in the middle of it, and let the tears fall. She lived in him – she always would. But if he could imagine her anywhere, it was there, in the golden light of his window.

END

* Resignation - by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow