

# The Sacred Past

by Angie

*"This realm is sacred to the silent past -"*  
- Elizabeth Akers Allen

Vincent sat in his big chair and regarded his chamber. Although he had recovered from his ordeal far below, the ordeal he could barely remember, everything still seemed strange to him here. It was if he had seen it before, but through someone else's eyes, and now he had to use his own, and the perspective seemed 'wrong' somehow.

He remembered Catherine, of course, the woman he loved, but their bond was impaired somehow and he could no longer feel her in his heart, feel her reactions to her own world – or his. Was this what was wrong with his perception?

He looked around at the miscellany populating his shelves and ledges, and although some items seemed familiar, they seemed out of place, which made no sense. No one, he knew, would have re-arranged his chamber items. Had he done so before his sickness? He couldn't remember doing so. Father, when asked, insisted nothing had changed. So, the change was in himself.

Sitting there in the silence, surrounded by his possessions, in a place he had lived for a long time, a poem came to mind, one he remembered fairly well, although he had forgotten the poet's name. He recited it softly to himself, hoping for it to emerge from the haze that hid his memories.

"This realm is sacred to the silent past;  
Within its drowsy shades are treasures rare  
Of dust and dreams; the years are long since last  
A stranger's footfall pressed the creaking stair.

This room no housewife's tidy hand disturbs;  
And here, like some strange presence, ever clings  
A homesick smell of dry forgotten herbs,—  
A musty odour as of mouldering things."

Yes indeed, there were many smells here. His candles smoked and smelled of paraffin. One Catherine had lit smelled of lavender, another from Rebecca had hints of mint and rose. These did not quite remove the slightly musty smell of his bedding and carpet, something that seemed new to him. His brazier was burning and the room was gradually getting warmer. Had he been away for a time, or just neglectful? He couldn't remember that either.

Yes indeed, there were spiders weaving their webs across various places in his chamber. Dust and dreams mixed together, undoubtedly, in all the items he could see, and those he knew were in his trunk, although he could not call to mind any specifically. He just knew that was where he had kept sentimental items from his childhood.

“I turn a page like one who plans a crime,  
And lo! love’s prophecies and sweet regrets,  
A tress of chestnut hair, a love-lorn rhyme,  
And fragrant dust that once was violets.”

And books, yes, there were many books, on all topics, even some novels. Where they had come from, he had no idea, although he sensed that this was not unusual here. People gave them books, their history unknown even to the donors.

“So the lost present drops into the past;  
So the warm living heart, that loves the light,  
Faints in the unresponsive darkness vast  
Which hides time’s buried mysteries from sight.”

He loved the light, but the light was his enemy. He could only see it in special places in the tunnel world. It was not for him. Catherine came to his dark residence from that world, willingly, to see him. Time’s mysteries remained hidden, often, and more so now.

“Why rob these shadows of their sacred trust?  
Let the thick cobwebs hide the day once more;  
Leave the dead years to silence and to dust,  
And close again the long unopened door.”

Should he forget about the past, not try to delve into the mist of his memories? He couldn’t do that, because he knew instinctively that much of what he could not remember involved Catherine. He must remember all of that. How could he treat her as she deserved, if he could not place her in context with his life?

He looked over at his journal. It was a new one, that Catherine had given him. He had located his previous one, but the reading of it hurt him deeply. Something had gone wrong. He had not been himself. The scattered words and phrases of the latter part of the journal made no sense. The earlier entries seemed as if they had been written by someone else. He could not make his memory recall why he had written them.

“The faded phrases on the tattered folds  
Once kissed, perhaps, or tear-wet—who may know?” \*

Perhaps something would unlock his memory if he kept trying. He would not close that door to the past. It held all that he had been – all that he wanted to be again, everything that mattered.

END

\**In a Garrett* - Elizabeth Akers Allen