



Love Song

*How can I keep my soul in me, so that
it doesn't touch your soul? How can I raise
it high enough, past you, to other things?
I would like to shelter it, among remote
lost objects, in some dark and silent place
that doesn't resonate when your depths resound.
Yet everything that touches us, me and you,
takes us together like a violin's bow,
which draws one voice out of two separate strings.
Upon what instrument are we two spanned?
And what musician holds us in his hand?
Oh sweetest song...*

~ Rainier Maria Rilke



Lest I Forget...

Judith Nolan



“You can talk with someone for years, every day, and still, it won't mean as much as what you can have when you sit in front of someone, not saying a word, yet you feel that person with your heart. You feel like you have known the person for forever... Connections are made with the heart, not the tongue...”

~ C. Joybell C.



It was the myriad of compelling scents Catherine would always remember from that awful time. They underscored her memories, indelibly entwined with each and every one whenever she closed her eyes and thought back.

But she would not be without them. Despite everything, they marked a new and wonderful beginning to everything that had followed.

Three years had passed since then, three years and as many children had blessed their marriage. But those scents still lingered, as clear and compelling as the day they were first encountered...

There had been the smell of dampness and the all-pervasive cold, this far beneath the earth. She had delved deeply into the mysterious world of tunnels and caverns miles below the city. The cold had left a bitter taste on her tongue, and it had nipped spitefully at her exposed flesh. But she would have gone deeper still into that cloying darkness, if it meant she could finally save Vincent from himself. From everything that had been done to him in the name of hate and revenge.

She clearly remembered the drift of smoke rising from the fire the tunnel folk had built at the mouth of the cave, where those who loved him most, huddled against the cold and kept a constant vigil. They had been waiting and watching for their hero and good friend to return to

them, whole and sane once more. Praying, each in their own way, that he would become well again.

They had looked up eagerly the moment Catherine had appeared, and all their faces showed the same look of longing. The hope that she could bring Vincent to his senses... somehow, some way, though it was unknown to them all then...

Father had tried to stop her going into that cave, but she insisted. Catherine had bent forward and gone into the dark opening, with only her love to arm her against what she might find. Halfway in, she had glanced back, trying to pierce the smothering darkness all around her, but she could see nothing beyond the faint glow from the fire outside. She could sense what was there, just beyond her reach. The weight of the eternal stones that surrounded them, in that dark womb of a cavern where her beloved had been reborn and re-made in the blinding light of their shared passion.

She remembered the smell the dark expanse of moist, sandy earth beneath them as she lay exhausted, with Vincent held close beside her. She had stood up within the cavern not knowing what or who she might find there. He had rushed at her out of the darkness, intent on attack, clawed hand raised as he ran towards her, his roaring frightening in its intensity as it echoed all around.

She had screamed his name and somehow her fear had reached him, because at the last possible moment, he had halted his assault before

collapsing into a heap at her feet. Reaching for him, she found he was near-death and no longer appeared to breathe.

In frightened desperation, Catherine had cried he couldn't go, she wouldn't let him, not without her. She had clutched at his inert body and kissed him, trying to express all her pent-up feelings and emotions in direct action. But even her most ardent caresses had found no response in him. It was then she understood she needed to use the only language she knew that could speak directly to the heart and soul of her dying lover...

In the silence of the aftermath she had felt the heaviness of the earth pressing down from above. It was surmounted by the great city that went on unknowing, uncaring that two troubled lovers had finally found a way to speak to each other without the impediment of words. Finally bridging the seemingly impossible void that had always yawned between their matched souls and kept them apart.

What they had made in that dark place was a pact, cemented with a passion and a commitment that went beyond friendship or love. A final connection of naked skin on skin; heavy, muscular limbs entangled with soft and smooth. Words had no place in that sacred realm. Only the voiceless urging of the ultimate completion lived there.

Lying stretched out on the floor beside Vincent, pressed close to his side, tears welled in Catherine's eyes, even as she sighed with cautious relief. She breathed in all the scents she cherished, so dear to her. Candle-smoke and leather, the musky, masculine scent that was

all his own, hidden until now beneath the many layers of clothing he had used to keep out the cold. Now she clothed those parts of him she had uncovered, with her body and undying love.

Somehow, somewhere within those breathless moments of frantic connection he had come back to her. He had not shown any signs of recovery before that moment. She'd almost missed it, so intent had she been on loving him back to her. She had been compelled to hold her own breath to be sure of his. She could no longer speak, finding the right words was beyond her every capability.

Instinctively she knew she must continue to touch him intimately to keep him from slipping away from her love again. Pushing her hand beneath the hem of his dirty and torn shirt, she began this process with one fingertip, drawing a slow voyage of discovery from the base of Vincent's throat, down the middle of his great chest where it barely rose and fell with the erratic nature of his shallow breathing.

Finally her finger paused at the sudden dip of his navel just above the loosened waistband of his jeans. She lifted her hand and repeated the process, each time dipping lower and lower until she had swept the length of his body with her fingertips, ending below his thigh at the sudden flexing of his bent knee. She held her breath, but that reflex was not repeated.

So she began the slow, sensual torture again until it did. Then a miracle happened. Whenever she paused, or lifted her hand away to begin again, Vincent groaned, low and rumbling, deep in his chest, and

even though he didn't seem to be aware, raw instinct drove his body to seek out her renewed touch. He appeared incapable of speech.

Oh, Vincent... Not daring to stop caressing him, Catherine pushed her leg between his knees, drawing him closer to cradle his head into the curve of her shoulder, his face against her neck. She renewed her sensual assault, this time with the palm of her hand, pushing beneath his shirt front and across his moist skin. She used more force than before this sensual massage.

But the damp tangle of thick hair across Vincent's chest and abdomen seemed determined to entrap her fingers. Trying not to hurt him, she began to use her nails to lightly trace a new path through the strands.

Again her gentle assault ended at the apex of his thighs where she lingered, tracing a slow path from one thigh to the other, and heard his breath catch.

She felt a shiver pass through Vincent's whole body and his mouth opened against the skin of her neck. The rough silk of his tongue reaching out to taste her made Catherine jump.

Again she heard that barely audible growl of raw need. It found an echo within her. She nuzzled her cheek across the prickly texture of his, murmuring wordless endearments, finally burying her face in the tangled length of his mane. She felt his hand stir against her thigh, the barest of movements. He seemed to be trying to communicate with her.

Sitting up, Catherine knelt beside him, drawing his inert body into her lap. She quickly redressed him with shaking hands, before pulling on her jeans and tidying her sweater. She was not ashamed of loving him, but she sensed their time alone was growing short, and there would soon be probing questions she was not prepared to answer right now.

Settling him against her once more, she cradled the back of his neck in one hand, the other passing beneath his lax arm to rest against his lower chest where his shallow breathing said he still lived. She rocked him slowly, trying to keep him with her, whispering those same wordless endearments. She wished she could find his cloak to help keep him warm. It had to be in the cave somewhere.

Vincent lay silent, his eyes closed, but he was still breathing. At a loss to know what to do next, Catherine leaned closer, trying to see him in the gloom. She bent down to kiss him once more. That was when she heard the faint tapping of a determined cane, and looked up to see Father's unmistakable shape at the entrance to the cave.

"Catherine...? Is he...?" Father's voice broke on the question he dared not voice.

"He's alive..." Catherine replied, in a hushed voice that did not seem to belong to her. It seemed as if she had not spoken for an eternity. "But barely... I was so afraid. I *am* so afraid..."

“Please, let me help...” Father hurried forward and dropped awkwardly to his knees.



They brought Vincent back up to his chamber. Lying beside him in his bed, pressed close to his side above the covers, Catherine tried to keep her eyes open. But everything that had gone before had exhausted her in both body and soul.

Cleopatra, the tunnel’s resident cat, crept in, leaping soundlessly onto the end of her master’s bed. She lay down, curling into a ball, but one green eye remained open, keeping a cautious watch.

Catherine looked around, breathing everything in, deep into her lungs. “Lest I forget...anything,” she whispered. She closed her eyes.

She saw everything so clearly behind her eyelids. She never wanted to forget this place and time. Candle-smoke and leather, rough stone and the kerosene of the softly-hissing brazier. The damp, earthy smell of Vincent’s clothing and tangled hair. They could all have been so easily swept away beyond recall.

She and Father had put him to bed in his own chamber, knowing the healing power of sleep was more important than bathing him right now. But when she had moved back from tucking the covers around him, intending to rise and to leave him to rest, Vincent had snagged her hand, drawing on it wordlessly, pulling her back towards him. He had

pressed the flat of her hand against his chest, his blue eyes open and staring, seeming to beg her to stay. He moved her hand slowly from side to side, his gaze never leaving hers.

Helpless against his soundless pleading, Catherine nodded before sliding onto the bed and lying down against him. Vincent sighed, long and low. A shudder rippled through his whole body, seeming to well up from the depths of his very soul. His head rested back onto the pillows, his eyes closing.

“I will return in an hour. It is you he needs right now. Thank you, Catherine. For everything.” Father watched for a long moment before he turned away and left them alone.

Catherine tucked her head in against the side of Vincent’s neck, lying still and listening to the shallow sound of his breathing. Her hand was still pressed against his chest, held there by his slackened grip. She could feel the slow, steady pace of his heartbeat, so reassuringly normal. She moved her fingertips slowly, in circles against his hirsute chest and heard again that faint sound of rumbling approval.

Though Vincent appeared to be asleep, she dared not move away. So she pressed closer still, her leg sliding over both of his in the unconscious possession of the lover who had known the joy of complete connection with another soul.

She sighed against his moist skin, wondering how, when and where she would find the words to tell him all that had happened between them in that dark cavern far below them.

“I love you...” The words slipped out, whispered against the faint pulse that beat in Vincent’s neck. “I will always love you...always...”

She yawned, finally surrendering to the struggle to keep her eyes open and her body aware of every movement of his. A couple of hours was all she needed...Catherine’s breathing lengthened and evened out as she finally fell into an exhausted sleep.

Sensing her slender body pressed close against his, her heartbeat matched with his own, Vincent stirred. His hand tightening its grip on hers. He did not know where he was, or even who he was. He knew nothing beyond a strangely primal sense of connection to this other precious creature who lay with him, her body claiming his.

He moved away slightly so he could turn his head to stare at her. His battered mind could not recall her name, yet his soul knew hers as it knew no other. She was the woman he loved. He was aware her touch had brought him comfort and solace. Her warmth had drawn him back into the light from some vast, chilling blackness that had beckoned to him, tried to swallow him whole. He nodded. That was enough for now.

“Mine...” He sighed the word. Then something he had heard came back to him. “Lest I forget...” He puzzled at the words. *What did they mean?*

His breath caught in confusion. Try as he might, he found no answer. Still frowning over things he did not understand, he drew his sleeping companion closer still, wrapping his arms around her slender body to keep her with him. Then his eyes drifted shut once more, and the restorative power of sleep finally reclaimed them both...



Three years later, Catherine lay beside Vincent in their bed. One of her most enduring delights was watching him sleep. There had been precious little time for rest since their twin daughters had been born three months ago. Even Cleopatra the cat had abandoned her master's chamber in favour of a less noisy place to sleep.

But Catherine didn't mind. This was her world now, her husband and family. She would have it no other way. And they had come so far together.

It had begun for them all in that dark chamber far below where they now rested. It had been the beginning of the blessed time between them, when Vincent felt at peace with her always near.

She moved closer to her husband, draping one leg in total possession across both of his beneath the covers. She smiled as she lay down with her cheek over the steady beating of his great heart.

“I will not forget...” she whispered. “We truly do have a lot to be thankful for...”

~FIN~



*“Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes.
Because for those who love with heart and soul
there is no such thing as separation.”*

~ Rumi (1207 – 1273)

