

O Death, Where Is Your Sting?

By: Anna Delamerced

Inspired by C.S. Lewis's *The Problem of Pain, A Grief Observed*

Palm Sunday

A young woman is sitting in her room, staring at the ceiling. She does not want to look at the photos on her wall.

She is not sure what to do, what life means to her. How do you live when you know that someone died for you?

The sun rises still, but to the Girl, everything around her tastes of evil. She thinks she hears the morning birds taunting her, for they can fly, and she cannot. She sees a butterfly, the same black and yellow ones she used to see in the garden of her home, and she only thinks of the fleeting nature of its wings, how one day it, too, will die.

When a loved one dies, the Girl realizes, you do not lose him all at once. Rather, you lose him in pieces over a long time. The way her questions go unanswered, the way the music stops, the way his smell fades into a distant memory... Every moment she finds herself thinking about him. She tries to picture his face, to imprint it on her memory, to cling onto his strong arms and find comfort in his gentle eyes.

Most of all, she does not want to forget his words, worth more to her than gold or jewels, or her violin.

The violin, she thinks to herself. Remembering the songs her father taught her, the music crescendoing in her mind, she nearly ekes out a smile but presses it down. The day her father was killed, the day she was so angry at life that she intentionally smashed her violin against the wall,

it was as if a piece of her heart had died, a piece lost perhaps forever, perhaps irretrievable. Her innocence and wonder of the world and its people. More than one thing was shattered that day.

Some things you must let go and start anew.

At long last, she leaves her bed and heads downstairs, passing through the living room and into the kitchen. She reminds herself not to expect him to be standing there.

Papa. Papa, the Girl mouths over and over again, as if locking a memory of him with each word.

Another voice, though, admonishes the Girl for even thinking of her father.

No, no! she mouths, influenced by this other voice, chastising herself for letting her heart run away with images of him.

She wants to remember her father, but at the same time, she thinks it is not good to remember. She is not sure which is more painful, remembering her father, or forgetting him.

He is dead, he is gone, he is dead, he is gone snakes into her brain, becoming like a chant that she repeats wordlessly.

Stop! Stop remembering! she commands herself but her brain disobeys. It pulls up memories of bad things. The car speeding at them. Her father pushing her out of the street, out of the way, out of death. He died in her place. Papa dead. Papa gone.

She leaves the kitchen and exits into the back garden. She thought the fresh air would give her new life, but the air seems to suffocate her. She runs wherever her feet take her, until she trips on an unseen rock and falls. Wincing in pain, she brushes the dirt off her scraped knee, but she feels more pain inside, as if her heart has been bruised.

Grief is like a bomber circling around and around, dropping its bombs each time it flies overhead. She wants her father back, not someone who resembled him.

Anger fills her heart. She wants revenge against the killer. She is filled with hate for him. She even thinks she is filled with hate at life, at other people around her, at God. Suddenly, she is afraid of her own self. Never before did she think she could feel so evil within her own heart. She wants to forgive, but finds it so hard to.

One week earlier, a conversation between the father and the child

“When we hate our enemy, we become the very people we hate,” he said.

The Girl repeated the words in her head. “We become,” she had responded, “an enemy, too?”

Her father nodded. “There is already too much hate in this world,” he confessed, taking off his glasses and massaging the bridge of his nose. “I don’t want to be a part of it.”

“But Papa, there are people out there with evil in their hearts.”

Her father tried to assure his daughter. “My child, I know. Forgiving them does not mean tolerating the evil things they have done. We can stand up to them, we can stand for what is right, we can stand for good. But at the end of the day, do you want to go to bed, angry and vengeful and hating another person?”

The Girl thought about it. Her eyes furrowed, and she put her hands on her hips, looking out into the distance, as if distancing herself from her own father.

The father could see confusion veiling her face, and even anger, too. But he wanted to cultivate a righteous kind of anger in her. The good kind of anger. He gestured for her to come sit on his lap.

“What are we supposed to do, then?” she asks, nestling her head onto her father’s chest.

Her father wraps his arms around her. “It is hard, it is perhaps even unnatural for humans, but we are called to forgive, seventy times seven, because it is the right thing to do.”

“But why?” the Girl questioned. “Why is it the right thing to do?”

Her father lifted her chin and looked into her eyes, the same eyes everyone called his own. “Because we, ourselves, have been forgiven by God. He who has forgiven us calls us to forgive others.”

Resurrection Sunday

A breeze blows through the garden again and the wind chimes dance and something strange grows inside her. The truth registers in her mind, and for the first time, she understands. She understands him, her father, better. She understands herself more. A single lamp finally lit by oil in the darkness. But it seems as though the longest journey for the Girl is from her head to her heart.

“Papa,” she shakes her head, “It is too hard to forgive.” His words encourage her one last time as she remembers.

Even if, and when, we are apart...trust that one day, we will see each other again, on the other side.

The fear of the unknown, of the other side, flees. An inexplicable peace comes upon her, and she feels as though she has been born again.

She is able to see like her father once did. The Girl understands, now, that this world is not perfect. There is a lot of suffering, dying, hurt, and pain, but her father’s words echo in her mind as she comes to believe that she can hold onto the hope that one day, the old world will

pass and the new one will come. A world in which there will be no more crying, no more death,
no more pain. No more feeling like a stranger in a strange land.

It may not be now, it may not be tomorrow, it may not even seem like it will ever come.

But she trusts and hopes and knows that it will.

O Death, Where Is Your Sting?