



What Remains Of Angelica

A tale by Vanessa Longo



Acrylic, copper foil. Pastels, glass on panel
130 x 61 cm (51.2 x 24 in.)

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"Come in; the door is open!". She dodged it well, with a strong tone, even if with an imperceptibly trembling voice. Will it be them? She thought to herself...but when the two foreigners announced timidly, she no longer had any doubt: they were the cousins Ibraima and Vassilia.

Here we are. The time has come for which I have prepared so much. I am ready to face them. I will succeed!.... Will I succeed?

I don't remember anything; in my head, a thick gray blanket.

"Angelica dear, how long! Even if the circumstances are not the best, the important thing is that we meet again! Twenty years have passed, but for us, it is as if it were yesterday; the three of us who played on the beach at "un - do' - tre - campanò!"

There follows a long, embarrassing silence. Angelica speaks to her grey matter: "Damn, concentrate, remember! " Who will be this, who spoke? Ibraima or Vassilia?.... yet it all seemed much simpler before..." Honey, how is it? Does it hurt so much?" The voice is similar (necessarily, they are sisters!) but more kneaded. More insecure.

"Of course, this must be the greatest, Ibraima, the one who first had to face the world, paving the way for the younger sister who goes 'around showing irreverent her number." The memories come out, finally, and the reasoning begins to spin.

Angelica, until then, remained silent, barely rises from the armchair highlighting idle movements and a weak physical. She stretched out her long arms in search of support offered without any hesitation by the sisters.

"My beloved cousins, what an immense joy to have you here," the young woman begins. Silence.

Again.

And then sobs, tears (maybe), it is difficult to distinguish them from under the bandages.

"You must forgive us for not being close to you these years..."

While listening to the harrowing complaints of visiting relatives, Angelica also focused on

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confirming the identities attached to the two women. This HAD to be Vassilia, and the author of this courageous and saving intervention was definitely her. Ibraima had no strength or ability. And again, Vassilia, "The news of your illness has shaken us a lot, you can not imagine how much, and then this dramatic and unimaginable epilogue..."

Dear Vassilia, Angelica still dialogues between the bandages and herself. You're the one who can't imagine how much I actually know exactly why you're so upset, why you're here.

The two women are sincerely distressed and destroyed by pain. Angelica remains to listen to them, trying to speak as little as possible, which she considers the most appropriate choice.

"You know Angelica" when we learned that you had fallen ill with that horrible evil, we wanted so much to come and visit you," continues the strong link encouraged by a large movement of the head, from bottom to top, performed by the weak link. "We couldn't find the words to explain what was happening to us, we're very sorry". But when we learned that you had lost even the parents of heart attack (poor dear) we decided to come. To come and explain".

Although Angelica well knew the grief of the relatives, let her go on.

"You must know," continues the second child, "that our games by the sea, in the summer, were not so carefree... practically no one is aware of what we are about to tell you because this fact still represents for us, as it was for our deceased parents, cause of enormous distress.

This same suffering, my dear, led to the early extinguishing of the vital flame before Mom, followed shortly after by Dad.

We had a sister, Timonia, who had been ill for years. She, like you, was diagnosed with cerebral meningioma, but the tumor mass was so large and vascularized that it was inoperable.

Timonia died at the age of eight. The moment my parents decided to sell the beach house and segregate themselves in the city until their death a few years later.

Neither then nor ever did we speak of our sister, respecting the will of our beloved father and mother. And we haven't seen each other since, Angelica."

In an unexpected rush of audacity, Ibraima intervenes.

"Now, do you understand why we have disappeared? We are aware of the pain we have caused you and regret it every day of our lives. But what happened to you was too much of a push, and we had to come here to see how you got through the surgery, dear cousin."

At that point, the three tightened in a long but yielding embrace.

"I'm fine; I don't even need assistance anymore. Every now and then, the nurse comes to check on me, but as you can see, I came back to live alone; good sign, no?" She sealed the only stretch of face left uncovered by the bandages. "I feel a bit weak, but I am relieved of a thought as heavy as a huge pile of asphalt." She said, convalescing.

Angelica awaits. She awaits THOSE words.

"You know that our parents were wealthy. Or perhaps it is more congruent to say rich,"

exclaimed the youngest of the sisters again. "Those two extraordinary people had earmarked a large sum of money for a surgical operation that could have saved Timonia. We were all ready to leave for the USA. Think, Prof. Alessandro Olivi himself would have operated on her!

But life has once again chosen a bitter fate for our beloved Timonia, who left us six days before departure. We have preserved that heritage intact until now because we have not found a sufficiently good reason to spend it."

There follows another inconsumable pause.

Vassilia turns a complicit look towards her sister, who loves her back.

"That good reason is you, Angelica."

The generous sisters could only glimpse the features of that young woman who had once been a



beautiful little girl with long light brown hair always left free to flutter by wind and sauce. They were very curious to find out what woman she had become and compare her to their memories of Angelica.

Moved by a genuine desire to know and discover the woman to whom they were donating money and heart, the irreverent Vassilia, in looking around, laid the careful look on a shrine that evidently held important memories of the life of her cousin. Vassilia almost overturned the chair on the ground in the sudden rise bringing her hands in front of that big hollow oval from which she could not get out even a vowel. The emotion was so strong that the tears gushed in gushes. This time Angelica saw them clearly.

"My God, you still have it! You have kept it for twenty years; then you too have never forgotten, dear Angelica! After all, I always knew. Please let us take a picture with our present in our hands, and it would be a great gift for us. Go, Angelica, please do it for us".

The shrine contained thirty-seven relics arranged on three levels.

Angelica, pretending to be motivated by idle movements, rose from the family station to immerse herself in the oblivion of non-existent memories. She was overcrowded to remember, but the more she tried to make it, the more she sank into a condition of punitive anguish. Then she forced herself to conjecture.

The objects were divided into three sections, was there a reason? If what? The sick woman forced herself to observe the casket of non-memories with more attention and realized that order, after all, seemed to be there. The lower ones seemed newer, less ruined by the sun that, day by day, attacks the surface, fading the colors. But she wasn't sure. It could be the unfortunate consequence of a more favorable position to atmospheric aggression. Then she noticed that even the style seemed more contemporary, as did the materials. And there it was. That symbol of salvation and rebirth would also be her safe-conduct—the Freedom Tower. I don't remember the exact year of construction, but certainly after the tragic 2001. We all remember this better than our birthday!

So this shelf would appear to be dedicated to the latest souvenirs.

If Vassilia said that the precious was kept for as long as two decades, it probably means that it is located in the upper part of the shrine. Angelica, strong with this precious deduction, moves other steps towards the goal. But there are 13 objects housed in the first shelf, and under the bandages, the gears work incessantly to remember, to infer. Russian dolls, Chinese crickets, a windmill, Uncle Sam (maybe the missed trip to America?), horrible ducks with bright colors. Empty, absolute emptiness in mind.

You have to think, Angelica, make one last, pantagruelic effort.

Where are the twins from? Since the memory of the past did not assist her, the immemorial girl retraced the entire conversation with her cousins in the silence of her unstable moods..." we three who played on the beach to "un - do' – tre - campanòn!". Of course, mute Angelica rejoiced. They are from Veneto! Then she began to inspect the trinkets again. Angelica's watchful eye subsided from wandering when she saw a pair of gondolas with a rower complete with hat and shirt and stripes, immortalized in the act of singing at the helm of his gondola. As Angelica approached the moment of triumph with her chest of jubilation, at that very moment, she focused on the people in that room with her. Vassilia and Ibraima. One graduated in art history, the other archaeologist, daughters of esteemed professors of astronomy. No, Angelica, this cannot be their gift. Too predictable, too little chic. And, pretending understandable dizziness, the woman stopped her run, carefully scanning the remaining objects. Huge spiders and hairy (that bad taste) of sure origin exotic hooves whose derivation was not only obvious as perfectly cataloged, a kind



of tower of Pisa but straight (?) A pair of Cossacks and various other things so unrefined that they're not even considered. But it's here; it's definitely among them!! Maybe I misunderstood something; perhaps I didn't understand! The eye again rests on that unusual building that looks very much like the Tower of Pisa, but it is not. Have I seen it elsewhere, or am I confused? More uncertain, painful steps of Angelica.

Nobility, history of art....astronomy... Venice! But as I did not remember before (cursed head), it is the Scala Contarini del Bovolo, a spectacular Venetian building away from the huge squares teeming with tourists that surprises the incredulous visitor at the exit of that dark and little elegant alley. Palace was commissioned by Pietro Contarini and used by the German astronomer Tempel to conduct his observations with the telescope.

Having abandoned the uncertainties, Angelica grasped the statuette weakly but equally resolute and, in doing so, turned a victorious gaze towards the eagerly awaited sisters. Maybe it's a good thing they can't see it. Perhaps they'd understand.

When the trio calms down its noisy festivities, you can clearly hear a thud coming from somewhere, in some room until then unsuccessful.

"What was it, Angelica?" And again, "Didn't you say you live alone?"

It was truly fortunate that one could not see that expression of disbelief mixed with anger under the bandages of the interrogated. If it had been, perhaps she would have argued that she could not believe it; she could not even imagine that SHE had risen. It was not a contemptible situation. In other words, it was not possible. Yet SHE, in some way, had risen. And now she's definitely going to get her in trouble.

"You must excuse me, my beloved cousins, if I concealed the truth from you, but my sole intent was not to hurt you any further. Knowing that in the other room, a young woman finds shelter whose same evil (my evil) was eradicated with no less richness by doctors, but not with as many lucky outcomes, I am sure, would have upset even more your delicate and sensitive minds".

"Cassandra, this is her name, suffered severe brain damage following the operation. The use of the word was forbidden, and the movements seemed to be prohibited as well.

Until today. Apparently.

We met at the hospital, operated on the same day. Cassandra is alone and, since her condition did not allow her an autonomous and dignified life, I took charge of it".

The cousins moved, insisted to such an extent to see her that Angelica could do nothing but comply.

She led them to the room where the complaints came from. The poor girl poured to the ground on her side in the obvious attempt to drag herself towards the living room where the trio celebrated the reunion.

A wide bandage, similar to that of Angelica, was placed on the young woman's head, leaving uncovered lips eager to speak but unable to do so.

Cassandra grunted and waved with how much breath she had in her body, which made the landlady terribly restless. Angelica, visibly incoherent as a spectator, therefore put an end to that unfortunate protracted sounds and indecipherable movements accompanying relatives outside the room, outside the house, following the proper protocol of dismissals, trying not to show off the actual impatience.

"What were you thinking?". Angelica to the mummy.

"You're so naive, Cassandra!". The mummy gets nervous.

"Did you really believe that those two blessed souls would understand?". No reply.

"Did you really think that YOU would make a difference, change the course of our destiny?"



"And how could you do that if there was nothing left of you, Cassandra?!". The mummy is no longer in the bandages.

"Cassandra, Cassandra, Cassandra", Angelica shouts at the top of her throat while the interlocutors if you can call her that, is in spasms.

"Cassandra, *nomen omen*." You see, Cassandra, the only reason you're here, Cassandra, is that by sharing that room in the hospital, I was immediately sickened, indeed disgusted by your purity. Your family's stories bore me to death; your rectitude bore me. I hated everything about you because you represented everything I could never have, I never could be. I earned my tumor, I grew up, I fed on drugs and self-harm, and you, Cassandra, you led a perfect life, and yet it affected you. What a bummer.

But you were sure that you would come out with your legs from that hospital and that this experience would make you stronger, you would accept it, and you would, in the end, benefit from it".

Never conviction was so distant from reality.

Angelica talks, and meanwhile, she wanders idly around the room. And then she says, "After a life literally wasted, I thought maybe our meeting was a sign of destiny and that, for once, I should listen to him, take an example from you. I might have saved my soul.

And so I did".

"I studied you; I looked for your past. I came to know more about Angelica than Angelica knew about herself. I followed in your footsteps sla-vish-ly! I went so deep into you that I became you, Cassandra! *Nomen omen!*"

The mummy is exhausted—only tears between the bandages, only bitterness in the mouth.

"You see, Cassandra, fate has paid for my efforts, and now I have the life I wanted, now I am you.

And you're me, Cassandra".

"So Cassandra, who will mourn the death of a drug addict, liar, thief like you (*nomen omen*)? But don't worry, your generous friend Angelica, the angel Angelica, will take care of everything. She will think of a dignified funeral ceremony that NO ONE will attend".

While Angelica (Cassandra) injected the dose of eternal sleep to her friend Cassandra (Angelica), Vassilia politely conversed with her sister on the way back, pointing out how much her cousin resembled the poor one, a calamitous, vaguely familiar-looking maiden.