

Reflections

a short story



by

Ginger Hanson

Reflections

A Short Story

by

Ginger Hanson

Copyright ©2022 Ginger Hanson

All Rights Reserved

Published by Saderra Publishing

Digital Edition 1.0

This PDF edition is

Not for Resale

INTRODUCTION

One of the most awe-inspiring memorials to those killed in war is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. But this war, as all wars, reaches beyond the soldiers to alter the lives of those who loved them. This is the theme of my story, “Reflections,” a story written to reflect the feelings of these living victims of war.

REFLECTIONS

Anne plucked the lone daffodil. She was stealing from a manicured government plot, but she felt no remorse because the government had stolen much more from her. Clutching the sturdy, yellow blossom tightly to her breast, she shielded it from the capricious March weather.

Above her, the early morning sun was determined to create a spring day and bravely sent forth its warm rays. But winter, fueled by its own brand of tenacity, refused to be rushed away and hustled an icy wind across the Mall. It was an energetic wind that sliced around Anne to skate across the Reflecting Pond upon whose surface was reproduced the undulating grandeur of the Washington Monument. In eloquent silence, the white triangular tip pointed visitors to the Lincoln Memorial.

It was an invitation Anne ignored.

She had another destination in mind. A journey that could only be made alone.

Her comfortable shoes crunched on the gravel walkway, faltering slightly

when she saw the recumbent figure of the homeless man. Beside his sleeping spot was a worn footpath, cut by sightseers eager to shorten their walk and leading in the direction she needed to go. Anne stopped, unsure if she could pass close to the human form stretched beneath the shabby acrylic blanket. His presence shattered her sense of propriety. People slept in beds in their houses, apartments, or even tents. They did not sleep on the sculpted lawns of Washington, D.C.

But the path beckoned and the cold wind sliced through her jacket. She skirted the sleeping form and followed the hard-packed blaze of brown. Topping a crest, she was greeted by a small lake. Her steps quickened, angling towards the lake and the paved walk.

The duck startled her with its strident demand for food. He paddled across the lake, his neck arched with pride to have caught the first tourist of the day. Behind him, an ever-widening row of ripples scored the shimmering veneer of the water.

“Not this morning, little duck.”

Too much of a veteran to be fooled by an angelic voice, the duck curved to a graceful stop. His beady gaze was glued to the bright splash of yellow that adorned the front of Anne’s jacket.

“I don’t think daffodils are part of your menu and I’m positive this one won’t be.” It was soothing to talk aloud to the bird, to take a moment and quiet the tension that vibrated through her body.

“Why don’t I come back later this morning and feed you a bag of popcorn?”

A grating honk trumpeted the duck’s disgust. With his beak pointing

skyward, he paddled away. The wind whipped Anne's skirt around her legs, reacquainting them with the bitter cold of the morning. She shut her eyes briefly, picturing the map she'd left in the hotel room. Leaving the paved walk, she climbed a rolling slope. There had not been enough time for the steady stream of tourists to cut their own path across this gentle mound.

The grove of trees at the top of the hill gave her unexpected protection from the frigid antics of the March wind, but the budding limbs did not obstruct her first view of the memorial she had traveled a lifetime to see. A black gash in the manicured lawn, the marble arms of the Vietnam War Memorial embraced the earth while reaching into the viewer's heart and demanding a response.

None of the pictures she'd seen could have prepared her for the sensual impact of the wall. It literally took her breath away. Alec would have been pleased at its beauty, its clean lines, its power.

The wind tried to steal the daffodil from her trembling grasp when she left the shelter of the trees. The flower was almost ripped from her numb fingers, but she cradled it closer. Her steps were no longer the purposeful strides that had carried her across the Mall. Now she was hesitant, unsure, afraid of finishing a journey started long ago.

Rustling pages, teased by an unmerciful wind, captured her attention. Protected by a clear plexiglass box, a thick book awaited her.

"Each of the walls is 246' 8" long."

She studied the book, trying to slow the beat of her heart and the trembling of her legs.

"The walls meet at an angle of 125° 12" and point exactly to the northeast

corners of the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.”

Turning the pages, the sheer number of names overwhelmed her. The tears shouldn't have caught her by surprise, but they did. She tried to blink them away. How would she find the one she sought, if she couldn't see the pages?

“Each of the walls is composed of seventy separate inscribed granite panels. The largest panels have 137 lines of names, the shortest have one line. There are five names on each line.”

She almost missed the familiar name because the pages were blurred. But her finger paused, waiting for her eyes to clear until she absorbed the information she needed.

She turned towards the wall. A dying rose tumbled past her feet. The cruel March wind, unwilling to leave the mementos of love alone, tried to topple a wreath, tear at beribboned medals, and tease the edges of treasured photographs. The bits and pieces of cherished memories clung to the walls with stubborn determination.

Her journey ended at “1969.” The sharply incised names bombarded her tear-blurred eyes until one reached out for her, ripping apart the curtain of time. Her right hand answered the summons, but it wasn't cold black granite meeting Anne's fingertips, it was the firm, determined jawline of the young man she loved.

With that touch, she was nineteen to his twenty-one. She was months married and deep in love with the exuberance only youth can bring to that emotion. She was the slender, nymph like “Anniebelle” who had been seduced in the back seat of a Chrysler. She was the excited, frightened, starry eyed woman-child who had slipped out of the house late one night and returned

home the next morning a married woman. She was young, she was foolish, and the world lay at her feet.

First love.

When it is tragically taken, you shelve it and live around its painful memory. But it never dies. It haunts your life, wafting gently through your present at unexpected moments. It is a precious gift to be guarded for a lifetime, because it's a love that has no conditions, sets no limits, sees no despair, and beholds only a future of bright hopes. With its passing, you are scarred by life and can never love that way again.

The "might have beens" shimmered through her mind. God, how she had loved him, would always love him. The grief hidden deep in her soul wavered on the edge of her awareness, but it was no longer the passionate grief of youth. Now, it was an older, quieter grief for a future that had never been, for the young man who loved her and for the young woman who loved him.

The wind hassled Anne, shivering around her with wicked abandon and working its way through her clothing with frosty ingenuity. When she ignored its antics because she was lost in her reverie, it dragged the daffodil from her lax grasp and blustered with delight when she snatched the flower from its earthward tumble.

The cold would not let her be, reminding her of the present and crowding out the past. Anne lifted the daffodil to her lips and softly kissed it before tucking it securely into the panel crevice. She splayed her fingertips gently across the inscription, her icy tears blurring the sight of her own reflection mingled with his name. "God be with you my darling, Alec."

She hurried along the walk and retraced her steps, but stopped when she

reached the grove of trees. She turned to steal one last glimpse. The black granite gleamed softly while its sloping arms, riddled with names and mementos, marched into infinity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I won my first writing contest with a short story about my puppy when I was 12 years old. Encouraged by winning a pen set, I decided to become a writer. Over the years I've written everything from novels to aviation handbooks.

In 2003, Kensington published my first two historical romances. Three more novels followed. When I realized I was doing all the promotion, I decided to start my own micro publishing company. Saderra Publishing was born.

If you enjoyed "Reflections" you may enjoy my other works. I've published historical and contemporary romance novels, novellas, and short stories, I also have a book of humorous essays and two writing skills books on dialogue.

Visit my website at www.gingerhanson.com, or like me at [Facebook](#), or check out the scoop on Tassanoxie at [Miss Mabel Talks Tassanoxie](#) If you're a writer, you might find my blog [Just Ginger](#) an aid on this journey we call writing.

REFLECTIONS COPYRIGHT

This e-book is licensed for your personal enjoyment. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the author. Exceptions are made for brief excerpts used in published reviews.

This short story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Published by Saderra Publishing,