

18th August 2021

Fret

**“Fade away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret.”**

John Keats, Ode to a Nightingale

Some years ago, I worked with a man as he came to terms with the death of his wife after forty years of marriage. “The weariness, the fever, and the fret” were hard. He wished, like Keats, he could be a nightingale, never knowing such things. He yearned for them to “fade way, dissolve”, so he could forget the pain and sorrow. But he had to live with them every day.

In time, he got back to the “normality” of a daily trip at the end of the school day to collect his granddaughter whom he cared for till tea-time when her parents got home. They had a routine: chat on the walk back; milk and biscuits; some TV; homework; a game; more TV; then home. One day when he was in the kitchen preparing the after-school snack, the little one shouted: “Can I put a video on, Gramps?” (It *was* some years ago.) “Yes, of course,” he replied. “You know what to do. I’ll be through in a minute.” After a few seconds, he heard his wife’s voice, shouting, laughing, squealing. Tentatively, he put his head round the lounge door, to see his wife on the TV on a Benidorm beach, cavorting in the water, on a family holiday, three years before. “Did you put that video-tape in by mistake?” he enquired gently. “No Gramps. I just wanted to hear Nana’s laugh again.”

I gasped when he shared this with me. “What did you do?” I asked. “I went back to the kitchen,” he said, “fetched the snack, and we watched the tape together. The wee one needed that, and so did I. We can’t avoid things. It was right to share the pleasure – and the sorrow – together. And, when we were done, we got stuck into the homework.”

We are humans, and not nightingales. Sorrow *can* be lived with, because it shouldn’t be avoided. Sometimes we have to revisit it in a healthy way because it hasn’t faded and won’t dissolve completely. We must not forget. Weariness, fever, fret, when they are accepted as a normal consequence, can become precious reminders of past loves and laughter.

A prayer for today

*When I’m weary, give me rest. When I feel fever, keep me calm.
When I fret, offer me your peace. Amen*