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*Two tales of strategy*

by Angie

# Chess Moves

*In life, as in chess, forethought wins.*

- Charles Buxton

Catherine was puzzled by Vincent. Not for the first time, and probably not for the last, she reminded herself ruefully.

It was late afternoon on a Saturday. She sat on her couch, her knees drawn up, a lined legal pad resting against them and a pencil at the ready. She had no intention of writing, but the yellow paper seemed to focus her mind.

She was missing something in relation to Vincent. A large piece. His key, so to speak, eluded her. She had to find it. She let herself reminisce.

That first hug at the entrance to her threshold, for instance. That had been remarkable, wonderful. It might have gone on forever, had they not been distracted by voices from above. Even now, when she hugged him and felt his arms around her, rubbing her back, especially here on her balcony, she felt that same magic. They had since graduated to kisses, rare but beautiful – and not chaste, although not what they could be. She didn't know why. Again, that missing piece.

Catherine reflected on what Vincent had told her about his life before he met her. There was a great deal he had not told her, she was sure. She knew some of the tunnel women were not immune to his attractions. That being the case, some must have made overtures, sometime over his life. Perhaps they had given up when they didn't get the response they sought.

What would they have wanted, besides the obvious? Vincent was empathic. He would have known. Perhaps he sensed curiosity, rather than affection. He was protective of his differences around women, although they must all have seen his body at some time. The tunnel community lived closely together, bathed and swam together, nursed each other. Vincent could not have isolated himself completely. It would have been almost impossible – and she felt no sense of alienation in him. He seemed reasonably comfortable in his skin – as much as anyone was. Anyway, hadn't he told her that he hadn't been ashamed of his differences until he met her? That implied that he was not only accepted, but loved – and she knew that was so. He was an affectionate man, a sensitive one – and a gentleman to a fault. He could not have developed into the man he was, had he not received the same respect and consideration from his tunnel family.

Of course, there had been Lisa. That was a story of manipulation that even Vincent had recognized, at last. Lisa had tempted him as a teen, been scratched in a moment of carelessness, then sent away. There were no marks on those beautiful shoulders now, so the trauma had been all on Vincent's side.

When she had come back to New York, she had contacted Vincent first, asking him to meet her in their secret place – then stood him up. When she had escaped her protector, she had run to the tunnels for sanctuary. She could have entered through any number of secret entrances, but she had chosen the Park culvert, a long run from her hotel.

Why? It was obvious now. She had not wanted to be stopped by a sentry and taken to Father. She had wanted to meet the one man who would support her, help her. Vincent. His feelings were so confused when he had seen Catherine later, even she could sense them. He had needed to sort through those feelings, get Lisa's forgiveness for hurting her. But Lisa had been too self-absorbed to care about Vincent's repressed fears from so long ago.

Only later, after Catherine had done some research, did he really question why she had returned. By then, it was too late. Catherine had been put in danger by the loose ends Lisa had left in the world above, and Vincent had had to rescue her from a killer.

But Lisa had perhaps known something about Vincent Catherine herself did not. Unfortunately, they had had no time to talk.

Maybe Lena was the clue. Lena had fallen in love with Vincent, easily and completely. She had even propositioned him, but been turned down – twice. Catherine was certain that only her own love and his fear had restrained him, and that it hadn't been easy, even so. If Lena had met Vincent before Catherine had come into his life, the outcome might have been very different. Vincent had been torn. Was this the clue she was looking for?

She looked at her pad, still blank, and tried to find a common thread in her thoughts. There was one, she was sure of it. Then she started to get an inkling.

All her life she had been taught to let men take the initiative. When she was around nine years old, she'd had a crush on a boy, the son of a friend. She had written his name in her diary in fancy letters in many colours, written love letters she never mailed, tried to put herself in his way at school, and mooned around the house like a lost sheep for weeks. She had been on the verge of calling him, to invite him to come over so she could confess her love, when her mother had intervened.

"Catherine," she had said softly, "you mustn't continue like this. If this boy feels anything for you, he'll let you know. If you pursue him, and he's not interested, you'll not only make yourself look silly, but you'll scare him away. Wait. Be patient."

She had, and with newly-opened eyes, had realized that the boy was following a redhead around, a cousin – who seemed indifferent. It had hurt, but she had learned a valuable lesson. She never let her heart run away with her head again. She wanted to love – but it had to be two-way.

Vincent was different from other men – and not just because of his physical differences. It was his empathic talent which really set him apart, Catherine concluded. He was shy too. He couldn't bring himself to initiate anything with women. No doubt it would have been very painful to be shunned. He waited for them to make the first move – and knew immediately what their motives were. Whether he knew it or not, he was considered an alpha male. He would have felt any lack of sincerity like a blow.

Had that happened often? Catherine wondered anew. Probably not. Even with Lisa, he must have known what lay under her interest in him - a desire for attention, for a worshipper. By his own admission, he had been infatuated. Such feelings would have been new to him, then. No wonder he was devastated when she was sent away. It was too bad that Devin had already left by that time. An older brother would have been able to help Vincent through that difficult time, if only by making fun of the incident.

Father had probably taken it more seriously than was really called for. She was sure Vincent's sickness had been the result of thwarted hormones, as much as lost love.

Now, in their own relationship, as she thought about it, she had always initiated contact. She moved to hug him and he responded. He was a very tactile man and loved to be touched and to give in full measure. She found him incredibly comforting – as did so many children and even other men. He was more cautious with adult women, except for Mary, who was almost a mother to him. Perhaps he was afraid of being misinterpreted.

Catherine had held his hands, told him she loved him, several times. She had managed to kiss him once or twice, and not chastely. She knew he had enjoyed that greater intimacy.

He knew the truth about her feelings for him, but he never took advantage of them, never pushed further. He loved to nuzzle her hair, to run his hands up and down her back as they stood on her balcony, and hug her close. She was often in night attire at those times, and the feel of his large, warm hands on her was erotic in the extreme.

He must have felt that too, but had never taken the next logical step.

Had he been waiting for her to do so? Obviously, he would do nothing unless he was sure she wanted it. Perhaps her emotions were too confused. Perhaps she needed to be more forthright. Why had she not realized this before? Then she answered her own question. Because her training and experience had not prepared her for a man like Vincent. Men pursued her, not she them.

Lena, of all people, had realized the truth that set Vincent apart, Catherine mused. She knew she would have to make the initial overtures.

When Vincent had told her, after her father's death, that they were something that had never been, that they had to understand how great the sacrifices were, how great the fear – he had been speaking mostly of himself. She had known that, even then. She had told him she wasn't afraid. Her single greatest fear was losing him – and he would have known that too.

Then and now, it was *his* fears that were holding them back. All this time, she had assumed he meant there was some danger because of his physical differences. Now she guessed he had been speaking of something else entirely. He must have been saying, in his quiet, careful, somewhat obscure way, that *he* was cautious - that she would have to help him, that his nature would not let him presume anything.

She loved him desperately already, as she had told her father. Vincent surely knew that, but he wouldn't want to risk her love with haste. He would want to move forward only gradually, with cues from her at every step. Well, he would get them.

Vincent was a chess player – a very good one by all accounts. He would know when she was making the next move - and what it could lead to. He could counter it or play along. Which would he choose to do? He had never refused her anything yet. But she must go with courage and with care, just as he had said.

Patience was needed. Her mother was right about that. She would have to learn to read the signs, learn the moves all over again. But Vincent was worth the effort.

Catherine looked out the window. It was getting dark. Would Vincent come to her tonight? She tried to sense him along the bond and did feel something that might be his impatience, a slight eagerness. That boded well.

She realized suddenly that her legs were cramped. She had been sitting on the couch for far too long. She stretched out her legs. She had removed the coffee table. The space in the middle was welcome, to do her exercises or curl up in front of the fireplace. She hoped to entice Vincent there some day. He would need the room.

She should put on something comfortable and attractive. She dropped the still virgin pad and pencil onto the pile of ignored homework and padded into her bedroom. What to wear? She wanted to feel Vincent's hands on her, as close to her skin as possible. It was cool outside, so maybe she could entice him inside on that pretext, if she wore something to encourage him. A chess feint, Chandler, she told herself.

She rooted through her closet until she found what she wanted, a pale jade, one-piece evening culotte outfit she had found while out with Jenny, months ago. She slid into it and watched it sway and shimmer as she moved. It had almost-sheer lace v-inserts front and back that reached from her collarbone to her waist. She let her crystal hang under it. It would draw Vincent's eyes. Granted her assets in the front were not remarkable, but he knew that, if he had been observant – and she was sure he had been.

She put on the short matching vest that had come with the outfit. It closed at the front with two silk roses, just enough to hide the lace panels. A good chess player kept her opponent guessing.

Finally, she dabbed a little 4711 behind her ears. He seemed to like the old-fashioned cologne and this one had been a favourite of her mother's.

She went back into the living room and picked up a book of Emily Dickinson's poems, turning the table lamp to its lowest setting, barely enough to read by. She put the book down again. She was too excited to read anyhow.

When his tap came on the window, she almost jumped. She gathered her wits about her, went to the door and opened it, and saw his large silhouette against the city's lights. The cold air made her shiver and she moved into his embrace with joy, slid her arms around his waist. He sensed she was chilly and enclosed her in his cloak.

"Catherine," he rasped, as his head dipped to scent her, a move that always excited her.

She could feel the evidence of his arousal, but he didn't pull away. She snuggled into his chest and he immediately hugged her closer. They stood thus for long, delicious moments, until Catherine realized her feet were freezing and tried to put one on top of the other. She was barefoot! What had she been thinking? A very poor chess strategy, she thought. Or was it?

With a sudden movement that surprised her, Vincent scooped her into his arms and carried her into the living room, turning her quickly so he could grasp the handle of the door and close it. He padded to the couch and laid her down, immediately kneeling at her feet and enclosing them in his hands. The sensation was electric and delightfully warm. She closed her eyes and let herself enjoy the intimate touch.

When his hands were withdrawn, she opened her eyes and found that his eyes were traveling her length. Their eyes met and held. He was panting a little, she realized, his mouth slightly open and his canines glinting in the dim light.

It was her move. She swiftly swung around and joined him on the floor, kneeling in front of him. His eyes had

followed hers and she reached up to touch his face, bring it down to hers, and gave him a soft kiss on the lips. She felt him quiver and pushed his cloak off his shoulders. Dare she? Nothing ventured, nothing gained, she told herself.

She lifted a knee to one side and used the leverage from the other to push him a little, a signal, if he chose to take it. He sighed and fell onto the soft rug between the two couches, his hands falling beside him, as if he needed the solid reminder of the floor.

She was now straddling him and he shifted himself to a more comfortable position so he could stretch out his legs, carrying her with him.

Catherine found herself suddenly too warm and almost ripped the rose closures apart so she could fling the vest away. Then she lay down on top of him, far enough up that she could snuggle under his hair and kiss his neck, then move around to his lips again. She felt his hands spread over her back, at last, and then move cautiously down to cup her bottom. His expression was one of absolute bliss and his eyes were closed.

She rested on his chest, noticing his clothing for the first time. He was wearing a long greyish tunic over his white sweater. A fringed belt around his middle was closed with a large, golden, double lark's-head buckle. She was not going to get any closer to his skin without difficulty. She sighed and decided that she could do no more. The next move must be his.

He seemed to sense her thoughts and tilted his hips up a little, so he could push her up and reach her lips. He gave her a slow, deep kiss which thrilled her to her bones. He bent his legs, cradling her between them, then ran his hands lightly up her ribs to the outer curve of her breasts. She moaned with delight and he pulled her down to cover her lips with his own again.

She felt at a distinct disadvantage. She could feel almost nothing of him through his layers of clothes. His moves had been far more effective, she thought. He was indeed a superb chess player. She would have to make a daring move to gain some advantage. Vincent, if he had qualms, was showing no signs of them now. Well, there was only one move she could think of.

She tilted a hip a little so she could reach between their legs, then slowly slid her hand down until she could feel his arousal. She thrilled to the warmth she on her hand, even through his pants – and the immediate reaction of his manhood to her touch. Fire ran up her skin and she felt Vincent shudder. He lifted her closer to him, grinding just a little against her hand. A groan escaped him.

That move had definitely gone to her, she decided. What would he do now?

Then he made a strategic move, as she might have known he would. He sat up, bringing her with him. Her legs now straddled his hips. She was sitting on his thighs, just below that now very impressive bulge.

A glance at his face told her he was feeling strained and his eyes were dark and soft with passion. Then Vincent glanced out the window and she felt a slight shiver run along his length. When he looked down at her, she sensed something else – was it fear? Fear of what?

He spoke at last, in the low silken rasp she loved best of all, deep with emotion.

“Catherine, you have thrilled me more tonight than I could ever dream. I know you are impatient, that you love me, that you want more from me. Now you sense my fear - but not what I’m afraid of.”

He sighed deeply and held her hands in his as he looked into her eyes. He looked a bit embarrassed.

“This is hard to admit. As you know, my life has been spent in the tunnels or in large, irregular chambers without doors. I’ve rarely been in a room above, and then only for a short time, to aid a helper or pick up something from one of them. I’m not used to low ceilings and right angles or light-coloured walls.

“Catherine, I feel claustrophobic inside this apartment. I can see through the door, to the outside, and I know there is no danger, but my brain is telling me to run, to leave. The walls seem too close. My heart, though, wants to stay. I had to try tonight, to see if I could stand it. Your love has made it easier. I can feel your desire and it has enclosed me, made me feel safe, wanted, loved. But it won’t last. Already, I can feel the panic rising in me.”

Catherine was stunned. Vincent afraid of regular, enclosed spaces? No wonder he liked the Chamber of the Falls and the Whispering Gallery – or even being above at night. It explained why he had preferred to stay on her balcony all these years. She had always thought it was shyness, an unwillingness to go the next logical step and enter her world. Why had she never thought of this possibility?

As if he sensed her disgust at herself, Vincent gathered her to him.

"Love, how could you have known? It's something that I've never told anyone, not even Father. Devin found out, as he did most things about me. The how of it doesn't matter. But he kidded me about it only in private. He pitied me, I think. It was just one more thing that set me apart from others.

"That night I came into your apartment after you were attacked, and carried you to your bed, you wanted me to stay. I had to stand near the balcony door. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. Once you were asleep, I had to go outside until the fear subsided."

"But, with your help, Catherine, I'm going to overcome this fear. I want to be able to come into your apartment without having panic attacks. Tonight you have shown me it's possible, at least for a time. Will you help me? Can you be patient a while longer?"

She looked into his eyes and leaned over to kiss him. She felt him quiver and spoke quietly.

"Vincent, you are worth all the patience I have at my disposal. I won't pressure you, my love, I promise. But this," she lightly touched the bulge in his pants and heard his intake of breath, "tells me your fears may become secondary to ... um ... other considerations. I dare you to think of running away when I'm making love to you – anywhere."

"I don't think I'd have the strength to run away from you – ever," Vincent whispered in her ear.

She could feel him shaking, though, and knew she would have to let him go. She could feel him fighting down his fear. She rose from his lap, reluctantly, and pulled his hand with her. He stood up with a fluid grace that made her sigh and he hugged her until she was breathless. Then he looked down at her. He was panting again, but this time she knew it wasn't arousal.

"Go, my love," she said, knowing that he needed her permission. "Next time, I'll come to you."

Vincent smiled. "Yes, please, Catherine."

He dipped his head to kiss the crystal under its lace, and then planted another soft kiss on her lips.

"Good night, my love."

Then he moved swiftly, gathered his cloak about him and was out the door. He closed it behind him and was gone like a shadow before she had time to sigh.

Well, so much for theories, she thought to herself. She had got it only half right. She was not a good chess player. She had not taken all the possibilities into account. He had surprised her.

"Check, Vincent," she whispered into the room.

But checkmate was inevitable now. It was just a matter of time. There would be no stalemate in this particular game of chess.

END

# Check and Mate

*Chess is the gymnasium of the mind*

- Vladimir Illich Ulyanov Lenin

Catherine entered Vincent's chamber and caught her breath. He was standing, waiting for her, dressed in a long white sweater and soft white pants. For a wonder, none of his clothing seemed to either have patches or been cobbled together. He looked delicious and her chess game with Father, a few days before, gave her the perfect metaphor.

Vincent was her white and always virgin King – in some senses, she thought. She was his Queen, much more free to move around the chessboard of life, but tied to him with all she was, all she ever wanted to be.

Catherine dropped her overnight bag onto a nearby chair and moved slowly to him. His sweater, which laced up at the neck, was undone and she could see a tantalizing hint of long golden hair near the bottom of the "V". He wasn't wearing his thermal shirt – and maybe no underwear at all, she thought, her heat rising. Neither was she. She wanted nothing to slow down their night of love. She would have arrived naked, if that had been practical. Instead, she had worn a long orange sweater, loose pants and desert boots without socks.

She stood in front of him and looked up into his eyes. A shiver of erotic delight, along with love and desire, ran through her and she knew it was not entirely her own. Suddenly she was in his arms, without knowing - or caring - who had moved first. Well, didn't White get the first move? She'd give him credit, then.

"Catherine," he whispered hoarsely, as he bent to capture her mouth and hugged her as close as he could. That was very close. She could feel the bulge of his aroused manhood against her stomach, warm and full of promise. Tonight there would be no feints in their chess game. The chessboard was empty, but for themselves.

They stood thus for long moments, until Catherine's impatience got the better of her. She'd never be a great chess player, but she didn't hesitate when opportunities presented themselves. She looked up at him and pushed him firmly, wordlessly, to his bed, until it caught him behind the knees and made him sit down. He took one of her hands and kissed her palm, sending a shiver down her bones that made her weak in the knees. He knew how his kisses affected her. Good move, Vincent, she thought, and smiled at him.

Now it was her turn. She bent to take off his felt boots, noticed he wore no socks, and took a moment to hold and stroke first one foot, then the other. His feet were as beautiful as his hands – strong and powerful. She looked up at his face as she sat back on her heels. He was watching her, his eyes shadowed and his mouth slightly open, showing just the tips of his fangs – a sight that made her core ache with desire.

That this man should love her as he did was incredible. That they had found each other, against all odds, made her humble. But the next move was his.

He sighed, moved his legs apart and drew her up until she stood between them. His manhood was throbbing against her thighs now and he dipped his head, his hair brushing her face, to nuzzle under her sweater and lick her belly button. It was a classic move that distracted her completely for long moments.

She gathered her wits, reached to grab the bottom of his sweater, and lifted it. He obediently lifted his arms and she slid it off and tossed it behind her onto his big chair. Then she pulled off her own and added it to his. Suddenly, his hands lifted her and she found herself sitting in his lap, her knees on either side of him on the bed, her breasts pushed against the long, soft hair and tense muscles of his chest. He moved apart a little, then sat back and with a glint in his eyes, moved his lips to first one nipple, then the other. She canted her head and arched her back towards him, then gave a deep sigh that was almost a growl.

Was it her move now? She had lost track. No matter, they kissed again and the look in his eyes was enough permission for her to push him again. He obediently lay back on the bed, then shifted to lie along it, bringing her with him. She carefully loosened the drawstring waist of his pants and slid down the bed to ease it carefully over

his eager organ. Then he canted his hips, making his penis rise to even greater heights. Again, she almost forgot what she was about. She quickly grabbed the bottom of each pant leg and pulled off his pants, tossing them to join the sweaters. Her breath now coming in gasps and she sat, her back to him, to remove her boots and peel off her pants, flinging them in the right general direction, but no longer caring where they landed. His hands were sliding along her back, making her shiver with arousal.

She turned and pounced on him, not too hard, felt a whoosh as he let out some air, and then felt his arms around her once more, warm and softly-haired. His hands stroked her bottom and she closed her eyes to savour the joy. She could feel his arousal flaring along their bond.

She snuggled under his chin, planting kisses on anything she could reach, shifted a little so she could tease one of his nipples with her free hand. The other was under his hair, stroking an ear. He was quivering now and the pressure of his hard organ against her belly was sending waves of heat along her skin. His hands had moved up along her ribs to cup under her breasts and she had to move, fast. She abandoned his nipple and slid her hand down until she could slide it over his penis and then further to cup his soft, furry sac. He was fever hot in her hand and she sighed as she stroked him. She felt his growl rumble under her ribs, then his groan of delight.

She looked up at him then and suddenly she was on her back and he was on top, most of his weight on his knees, both of his hands on her breasts now, massaging lightly. She looked down between their bodies and reached to stroke his pulsing organ, felt the muscles of his legs tense against her, his growl – so soft, it was like the brush of velvet against her palm on his neck.

She hadn't completed her move, she decided on reflection, could legally do more since she hadn't removed her hand from the "piece". She angled his penis down lightly, closer to her core. He looked at her, his eyes deep pools of passion, and bent to kiss her and get their bodies just a little closer.

She felt him warm between her thighs and closed her eyes in expectation. His lower lip was hot and she ran her tongue along his cleft, felt him shudder. He spread her lips with his own and wound his slightly rough tongue around hers. The sensation nearly sent her over the edge and she knew he had sensed it.

He stilled, then moved his mouth to kiss her eyes and nose. She licked him under his chin and marveled at his smooth neck. Her hands, of their own accord, moved to stroke his hips and she slid them behind him. She was able to touch the top of the cleft between his buttocks and she stroked that smooth-skinned spot in sensuous circles. She wrapped her legs around his, delighting in the soft hair that slid along her skin like silk.

She felt a hand move between them as he shifted a little. One long-nailed finger eased, feather-light, into the warm wetness of her womanhood and she ground herself against him.

"Now," she whispered, so softly, she wasn't sure he heard. But he had. He put one hand under her bottom and lifted her closer, then slowly began to slide his hot, engorged organ into her waiting passage. She arched her back, wanting him inside her, all of him, immediately, but he took his time, rushing nothing, like the superb chess player he was. Then he was almost in position, and her skin felt like it was on fire. Her core ached and fed a raging inferno, and she could feel his desire running over her, matching it. She clasped him to her and he finally relaxed and let himself down on top of her, his penis now fully inside her and the feel of his warm testicles making her thighs quiver.

Then she felt him swell inside her and pulled him closer, closer, until there was no separation and their heat merged.

Slowly, Vincent began to slide out a little, then eased in again. Then his chest muscles tensed and she sensed he'd suddenly lost his grip on the patient plan he had been pursuing. He groaned and pumped, first slowly, then quickly, until Catherine found her mouth open as she tried to get enough air. She lifted her hips to meet his and linked her hands behind his back, wanting him closer, closer. Suddenly they were bound in a net of fire and their joint climax exploded like a nova. Wave upon wave of hot winds ran over them, searing them into white, red, and finally, serene blue warmth.

Vincent sagged on top of her and she held him as the last of the shudders ran over them.

"Oh, my love, my King," she breathed into an ear.

He shifted to look in her eyes then.

"What?" he whispered, planting a kiss on her lips.



“Checkmate,” she said, putting her arms around her neck.

“My white Queen,” he rasped in his deep silken voice. “We are bound by laws no man can change.”

“Not unlike chess,” she replied.

Vincent chuckled and slid down beside her, gathering her in his arms. With a twitch he flung blankets over them both and relaxed, closing his eyes. She felt his purr grow into a soft susurrus that massaged her down to her bones. And that, thought Catherine, was something the chess laws would forbid, if they knew of its existence. Handshakes, perhaps a bow, that was all that was allowed at the end of a good game. So much for chess!

She sighed in contentment. This King and Queen made their own rules – and they were so much more satisfying!

END