

Love Inspired

- by Angie

*The lunatic, the lover and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact*
-William Shakespeare

What am I? Vincent wondered, for probably the thousandth time. How had he come to be born the way he was? Would he ever know?

Valentine's Day was near and he knew he shouldn't be brooding, but the thought of Catherine on this special day always made him introspective.

How different his life would have been without her! He would still be a lonely bachelor and probably a virgin as well. The latter was not because of lack of opportunity or interest from tunnel women, but because both he and Father had feared the consequences. He had hurt Lisa just by trying to get physically closer to her. He could not have put Catherine at risk that way, not even if she left him forever. But she hadn't and they had crossed their Rubicon, triumphing over all his doubts and fears. The dark days were behind them. Catherine had shown him the truth. Their love was enduring, wonderful, safe - and satisfying in every regard.

He sighed. What could he possibly offer Catherine this year? Their usual candlelit dinner and quiet evening of love would certainly be fine, but he wanted to could give her something special, on this their fifth Valentine's Day together.

He wished, not for the first time, that he was a poet. He couldn't seem to find the words to use where Catherine was concerned. He felt her in his heart, along their bond, in every cell of his being - but describing that was impossible. The English language seemed to lack suitable words.

Not surprising, he though ruefully. There was no one else like him, and he and Catherine were a unique couple. That gave him an idea. Perhaps there was something ...

He looked at the bookcase beside him and smiled to himself. He bent over and ran his finger down the spines, remembering what was in each book. Yes, this one had what he wanted. He leafed through it, found what he sought, then sat down and went to work.

Catherine sat in the office in the brownstone, staring outside at the rain. At least it wasn't snowing. Her thoughts turned to Vincent, as they often did when she was daydreaming. She knew he was below, probably reading. Did he daydream too? She knew he didn't like to disturb her work, although she'd dearly love his kind of distraction.

It would be Valentine's Day soon and she wanted to celebrate in a special way. Not that she didn't enjoy a candlelit dinner and an evening of lovemaking, but surely she could think of something more ... original ... for their fifth one together.

She was sure Vincent would have ideas, but she could sense something akin to gloom along their bond and thought she knew the reason. Their intimacy had made it possible for her to feel some of his emotions too. His love was like a warm hand over her heart.

Even now, after so long, he always seemed a little stunned as Valentine's Day drew near, as if he could hardly believe he wasn't living in a dream. She supposed that he would always feel somewhat apart, on that day of all days, dedicated to lovers.

He was her world, her inspiration, her reason for doing what she did. She cherished him - and he knew it. She wished she could put it into words, but her writing skills did not stretch to the poetic - and where he was concerned, failed utterly. Their wordless communication left nothing to be desired, but she wished she could voice something ... anything ... poetically.

Oh, that gave her an idea! She turned to look at the bookcase behind her, where she kept a few special volumes given to her as gifts, or which she had found browsing in old bookstores.

She rummaged around until she found what she wanted, then quickly paged through it. Yes, there it was. She could do something with that! And perhaps they should go to their favourite place this year and read to each other - with wine and food.

Catherine suggested this to Vincent when they walked to the dining hall later that day. To her surprise, he grinned and agreed immediately. He was planning something too, she realized, and smiled up at him. Thank goodness there was not long to wait. She knew his surprise would please her, whatever it was. He knew her so well!

Valentine's Day arrived with both Catherine and Vincent sleeping late. William's kitchen had been a hive of activity the day before, as he organized some special, though simple food for the following day. This year, it had been decided to make cream puffs, petit fours and vegetable and cheese platters. Each couple who wanted some of these treats had to help - and did so in shifts, since the kitchen could not hold everyone. Names were pulled from a hat and a schedule drawn up by William.

William himself worked on the menu for the children and unattached members of the community. It was a day when meals would be casual and he too would relax in his own way.

Vincent and Catherine were last on the schedule. They did not finish until quite late, and both they and William were exhausted. Naturally, the kitchen had become more chaotic as the evening progressed and preparations had expanded into the dining hall. At that point, almost everyone was either preparing, cooking, assembling - or working on the never-ending mountain of washing up. When the last dish was put away and the last vegetable scrap consigned to the compost bin, the three of them had sighed in relief.

"Darn good thing I don't offer something really complicated," William growled. He hated having other people in his kitchen, but there were several times a year when it couldn't be avoided.

Vincent and Catherine returned home and put their food in the fridge and a wicker hamper close by already loaded with all the necessary equipment. It would be only a minute's work to add the food and wine when they were ready to leave.

The next morning, William laid out the planned casual buffet breakfast for anyone who wanted it. Many filled a tray and took it back to their chambers.

Vincent and Catherine arrived late, but managed to eat their breakfast before the cleaning crew reached them. They had no work of their own and had planned to watch a romantic movie or two at home later, until it was time to go to their favourite spot with their picnic basket.

They had decided not to eat lunch, but they stayed to help with the children's celebration. The children had made Valentines and Father passed them out at random, thereby ensuring that everyone got one, and almost always not one they had made. Small pouches of cinnamon hearts and coloured mints were also handed out to them by Mary.

Vincent, the designated guest speaker, read "The Children's Hour" by Longfellow - something he had re-discovered just recently.

*"The Children's Hour
- by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

*Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the Children's Hour.*

*I hear in the chamber above me
The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
And voices soft and sweet.*

*From my study I see in the lamplight,
Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair.*

*A whisper, and then a silence:
Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
To take me by surprise.*

*A sudden rush from the stairway,
A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
They enter my castle wall!*

*They climb up into my turret
O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.*

*They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!*

*Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old mustache as I am
Is not a match for you all!*

*I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.*

*And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!"*

The children laughed and clapped in delight at this, and rose obediently as Father introduced their designated hosts. They chatted merrily as they left the dining hall, and there were not a few sighs of relief. The children would all sleep in the dormitory for this special night - and no doubt new children would be added to the community roster in nine months time.

Still somewhat tired, Vincent and Catherine decided to just snuggle in front of the fireplace in the brownstone. They wordlessly gave up the idea of watching movies. Neither wanted to be distracted from the other on this day, of all days.

Each thought happily of their surprise and that happiness was transmitted along their bond. Their smiles to each other needed no explanation. They even managed to nap a little, so relaxed were they. In the late afternoon, they trekked back into the tunnels with their hamper. They passed almost no one on their way and arrived at their ledge overlooking the waterfall as the sun was setting. The reddish-gold light made them both catch their breath.

"Catherine, the waterfall has never looked so beautiful!"

Vincent put his arms around her front and pulled her to him. She looked up at him, thinking how glorious he looked, his hair a red gold mane around his unique face. Her planned reading seemed more appropriate than ever. She sighed.

Vincent kissed the top of Catherine's head and then her lips as she tilted her head up to him. After a long while they parted and he sighed in turn.

"Shall we sit?" he asked quietly, at last.

"Yes."

Vincent spread a blanket and his cloak on the rock and gave his hand to Catherine to help her sit down. She leaned against him, cradled in the "V" of his legs, and turned her head to look up at him.

"Who goes first?"

"You must, Catherine. Ladies first."

She smiled and unfolded the paper she had put in her pocket that morning.

Catherine's reading:

(with apologies to William Blake)

*"Vincent! Vincent! burning bright
In the tunnel's candlelight
Whom above, with hand or eye
Could guess what secrets makes you shy?"*

*In what night-time deeps or skies
Burns the fire of your eyes?
By what means could men aspire
To know your soul or heart entire?*

*On your shoulder, I am part
And in your joy I feel your heart
And when your pulse roars to my beat
What can I dread? What perils meet?*

*The pipes speak of you. Their refrain
Lets me know you're home again
Soon I'll hear your velvet rasp
And run into your welcome grasp"*

Catherine looked up at Vincent and saw tears roll down his cheek. She said nothing for a long while. Finally, he got his voice back.

"You knew," he accused her gently.

"Yes. Vincent, you will always be different, but I love those differences, just as I love everything that makes you human. That will never change. You know that."

“Yes. Loving you is no such challenge. I will love you, with all that I am, until I am dust.”
Catherine said nothing for a long while, just snuggled up to him and sent her love along the bond.
Finally, he curiosity getting the better of her, she whispered, “Your turn.”

Vincent’s reading:
(with apologies to Ernest Dawson)

*“Last night, ah each night, betwixt your lips and mine
I felt no shadow, Catherine. Your breath was shed
With love between the kisses and the wine
And I knew I could but love you in my fashion
Yes, and did so, always, as I bowed my head
I am faithful to you, my angel, my passion*

*All night, upon my heart, I felt your warm heart beat
Night long, within my arms in love, in sleep you lay
Surely the kisses I stole could be but sweet
Without them I would be desolate in my fashion
When I awaken, the day is never grey
For you are faithfully there, my passion*

*We forget nothing. Love is carried on the wind
Like flung roses, we join the happy throng
Dancing, your eyes are never out of mind
Although I was once desolate, I now have passion
Always you dance in me, the days are long
We are lovers nowhere else, in our fashion*

*I shared music with you, nor wanted wine
Yet when the feast is finished and the lamps expire
Then our shadows are one and the night is thine
And I cannot be desolate, always in new passion
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire
I will be faithful always Catherine, in my fashion.”*

Catherine felt her eyes burn with tears as she looked up at him.

“Oh Vincent, that was beautiful! We each took a poem and crafted it to our own needs. Do you think the poets would mind?”

“Catherine, I begin to think that we could do anything, and no one we know would begrudge us it.”

“Perhaps that’s the true measure of our love, Vincent. That we can inspire such ...”

“Acceptance?”

“No, something deeper. I think there are people who look at us and think, ‘if they can love, then there is yet hope in this world for me.’”

“There is always hope, Catherine - for everyone. Love can find anyone. I believe that. I live it.”

“We both do, Vincent. And now I hope that we can manage to eat the lovely treats we brought before I am unable to resist your love and passion.”

“We need not resist, Catherine. Passion should not be denied! The food can wait.”

And so Valentine’s Day ended much as they had anticipated, fueled by their unexpected talents as poets - with a little help - and always as an avowal of their enduring love.

END