

Series 21 - Hearts

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by Angie

# Heart of Hearts

*“That not impossible she  
Shall command my heart and me”*

- Richard Crashaw

Catherine and Vincent were reading in the brownstone's den. It was a cool evening, so the fireplace was lit. The children were upstairs, fast asleep.

Catherine was trying to concentrate on a book about Elizabethan life, but kept getting distracted by the sight of Vincent's hair gleaming and shimmering in the firelight. She loved his hair, loved to play with it, brush it, wash it, feel it against her. And not just his head hair. His hirsute body was soft with fur-like hair. He was better than a teddy bear to snuggle up to. And that special part of him – well, there was simply nothing else to compare it to.

Reluctantly, Catherine returned to her book. She was trying to find some inspiration for the upcoming "Secret Valentine" party Below - and Shakespeare's time seemed a likely place to find it.

Vincent caught Catherine's distraction and knew himself the cause. It embarrassed him, even as it made him warm. He was grateful she didn't say anything. Compliments made him uncomfortable and he had always let silence respond for him. What could he say? He forced himself to concentrate on the book of Goya paintings he was enjoying, since he sensed that Catherine was trying not to be distracted. He was sure they'd make up the time later – and that thought made him a shade warmer yet.

Catherine's eyes caught a word beneath a line drawing and she almost blushed. It was a full frontal picture of an actor in Shakespeare's time. They wore gaiters and short jackets, clearly revealing what most men thought of as their best asset. But it did more than reveal – it emphasized. Why on earth, she wondered? Did men back then actually like to draw attention to that part? She read a little further and discovered that the so-called "codpiece" had come into being because men's clothing, whether pants or gaiters, did not join in the middle, at least in the front – presumably to allow fast access and egress. The codpiece filled that requirement. That got her thinking.

She knew the tunnel men wore drawstring pants and seldom wore underwear, preferring a gauze panel that Annabelle, the tunnel seamstress, had devised. It kept their nether regions cool while they did the heavy work the community always had in abundance. However, a codpiece might be of interest for the more romantic men in the community. Tied on with strings, it would be comfortable and practical - and sexy too. It might be good for swimming, even – although everyone seemed to bathe nude.

She had bought Vincent a g-string once, but he had not yet modeled it. He seemed embarrassed by such sexual devices. Maybe this would be a way to ease him into them. Of course, he would need a rather larger-than-normal one, but she was sure she and Annabelle could create something. She wanted to make a number of them for the men, as gifts to hand out at the light-hearted supper celebration in the Great Hall. Everyone had a holiday to enjoy treats of various kinds. Even the children took part, decorating a cake that they would eat at lunch time. Later, one of the older children would watch over them in the dormitory for that one night, so their parents could have their chambers to themselves.

Catherine smiled and glanced at Vincent. He shifted, so she knew he had caught some of her excitement. But he couldn't read her mind, so he would have to remain in ignorance for a while longer. She would go and see Annabelle in the morning.

The next day, while Vincent was in the work party cleaning up the Great Hall. Catherine went into Annabelle's sewing sanctum to discuss codpieces. The dwarf got a huge smile on her face when the topic was broached and Catherine grinned.

"Do you have any suitable fabric?" she asked.

"Well, almost all the fabric in that box over there is much-washed and all cotton. It would be perfect," Annabelle stated, pointing at a large bin. "All we need is a template - and I guess we'd better make them all the same size or there'll be comments."

Catherine realized she hadn't considered that aspect and frowned.

"Oh, don't worry," Annabelle told her, reading her mind. "There are always ways to allow stretch. Your Vincent will not be short-changed. Anyway, you can make him a special one as your personal gift."

The tiny woman let out her maniacal hoot and Catherine had to sit down before her legs gave out as she joined in. When they both had themselves back under control, they got to work designing the new underwear, then cut out about three dozen of them, enough for every adult male in the community. Catherine found a piece of scrap red silk, which she purloined for herself, not without a friendly smirk from Annabelle. They cut the fabric pieces across the bias, to allow plenty of stretch. Annabelle made up yards of ties and attached them to the hemmed pieces at a speed that amazed Catherine, particularly as the sewing machine was a manual one with a foot treadle. As a final touch, they cut out little shapes of contrasting fabric to decorate the front – hearts, lightning bolts, sunbursts, swirls, stars, arrows and crescents. Catherine had gained enough experience by the end to do a special one for Vincent in a few minutes.

The neat little pile of finished codpieces was very satisfying. Since it was unlikely anyone would guess what they were, they did not need to be wrapped. The fabric triangles were rolled carefully and tied with the ties. Catherine carried her “gifts” back to the brownstone in a covered basket and stored them away out of sight, keeping her own on top. Then she went down to the dining room for lunch. She was a little late by that time and Vincent was already seated. Their children were being watched over by the day’s dorm mother and were noisily consuming sandwiches at the other end of the hall. Vincent had saved a place for her, and she sat down gratefully after she had captured a sandwich and a bowl of fruit salad. Vincent had a pot of tea and a cup already waiting for her.

She leaned over to plant a kiss on his cheek before she sat down. He had washed his face, but his clothes and hair looked as if he had been caught in a dust devil. She wondered whether he was finished with the work and if a joint bath might be in their future. She felt a bit grubby too.

Vincent grinned at her and then gave his full attention to his food. Not much could distract him from that, she reflected. Come to think of it, she was a bit obsessive about William’s fare herself. She never missed a meal anymore. No more plastic sandwiches at a desk piled with file folders. She didn’t miss that aspect of her old job at all – or anything else, come to think of it. Her work for the Foundation she had set up was very satisfying – and she was able to help many people, without the danger and long hours and criminal activity.

As they sat sipping their tea, Catherine sighed.

“Are you finished cleaning the Hall?” she asked, hopefully.

Vincent caught the implication behind the question.

“Yes, Catherine. I didn’t want to miss lunch, so I didn’t wash properly, but a bath is my next priority. You?”

“As if you didn’t know,” she challenged him, and was rewarded with a grin and a look that made her crotch throb.

“I sensed you were enjoying yourself this morning – and wasn’t sure I could compete with that.”

“Vincent, the day that you can’t compete with anything I could dream up, will be the day we are both in our coffins.”

He snorted and coughed, and several people close by chuckled. Catherine enjoyed the banter that livened the atmosphere in the dining hall – and Vincent contributed his share of it. He and William had a ongoing quip contest.

Their children were safely in classes for the rest of the day, so there was nothing more demanded of their parents for a few hours. They strolled leisurely to Vincent’s chamber, undressed, grabbed their robes and a pile of towels and went down the stairs to the bathing chamber behind the stained glass window. It’s glow through the steam always made Catherine feel as if she was in a mystical place, perhaps a bath in old Atlantis.

They let themselves relax a while, floating above the stone ramp, then Catherine slid down a little to stroke what was floating above the water at attention. Vincent groaned and reached over to probe for her secret place with a long-nailed finger. She gasped as he found it. Without further ado, she rolled herself on top of him, forcing him to hold onto the sides of the ramp to prevent them sliding into deeper water. It was a position she loved to see him in – head back and arms wide apart – almost wanton, she thought. She maneuvered herself onto his hardened organ and he raised his hips to meet her with a massive sigh.

They lay like that for some minutes, each enjoying the warmth of the other and merged heart and soul. Finally, Vincent slid himself higher so that he could let go of the stone and hug Catherine to him. He cupped her bottom and felt her quiver in delight. She moved to suck a nipple and fire ran along his veins. He wound his legs around hers and lifted her closer to him. They were soon creating sensuous waves in the pool until their joint orgasm

rolled over them and they let it carry them into a serene place that was theirs alone.

Catherine didn't want to move. Vincent's juices were warm inside her and now he was purring. He hugged her to him and planted a soft kiss on her lips. No words were necessary.

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Valentine's Day was in full swing and the lunch party for the children had produced a cake decorated to distraction. Catherine took one look at it and decided only a child could eat something so horribly-coloured. They certainly felt no such qualms and left nothing but crumbs – even after a bowl of special alphabet soup that had spawned a spelling contest, and the miniature cheese scones William had made for the occasion.

Afterwards, the children had drawn names and every one had received a hand-made paper valentine. Jamie had kept the teens busy for the past week making them. They were all pinned to a big cork board for everyone to admire. This was followed by an afternoon of games and singing. By early evening, the children had fallen into an exhausted sleep, exactly as planned.

When the adults began their celebration in the Great Hall, it soon became raucous. Everyone had to open one of the two gifts they had been given. One was "secret", the name chosen by lot from one of two baskets on the table. The other gift was from a lover or friend. Father and Catherine teamed up to officially sort and hand out the gifts. Her cod pieces had been distributed as "secret" gifts and several men had opened them and cheekily tied them on outside their pants. The others soon followed and the hall was loud with laughter.

Vincent hadn't been given one of the codpiece packages, to his great relief, but a rather heavy "secret" gift. There were gales of laughter when he opened it and he looked around ruefully. It was an oversized ceramic representation of a cream puff with two huge eyes, but so real-looking, it made his mouth water. He wondered who had made it but when he raised his eyebrows and looked around, no one would admit to it. His love of William's special dessert was renowned. He suspected the gift had been the result of a conspiracy – with William at the head. The big cook was watching him and his smile nearly reached his ears.

"I'm glad this has eyes on it, or I might try to eat it – with dire results," he remarked loudly. "I'd be forced to eat much softer food afterwards." There were hoots of laughter, William's booming voice loudest of all.

"Vincent, you don't need any excuses," William then yelled from across the room.

The eyes on the thing were the plastic type that Catherine called "googly". It would make an excellent paperweight, he thought. He was considering how to rebut this joke, when William's secret gift made the hall ring with guffaws. It was an oversized purple codpiece decorated with an irregular green patch which had "OOPS" embroidered on it in big letters. Vincent didn't have to think too hard to know who had made that. He looked at Annabelle and heard her hoots of laughter ring around the hall.

The other gift he decided to open in his chamber. It would be personal from Catherine and he preferred privacy for such things. Anything she dreamed up always aroused him.

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Later, he looked at the little package as he sat in his chair. Catherine was helping William gather and rinse the dishes and pots for the official detail in the morning – they had decided that no work would be done that evening. She would be back soon. He had to open it before she returned.

He slit the brown paper tie with a fingernail and opened the package. It was a small folded piece of fabric and he grabbed one corner of it and held it up. A handkerchief! That gave him a moment's puzzlement. He never used a handkerchief, although many in the community did, including Catherine. He didn't get colds or sniffles – although, he had to admit, his nose ran when he got emotional and cried. That hadn't happened often, though. Had she noticed?

It was a very pale blue, the edge carefully overstitched. In a semi-circle near the middle, between a tiny red rose and a white, she had carefully embroidered '*Here is no time for tears*'.

Vincent looked up. Milton – from *Samson*, he guessed. Well that answered his question. He put the handkerchief to his nose and nuzzled it. It was lovely and soft and had her scent. What to do with it? It was such fine fabric it folded up to almost nothing. There was only one place he could put it and have it available if he needed it, and that seemed singularly appropriate now. He took off the pouch containing his rose and extracted it, gave it a

kiss, then wrapped it carefully in the handkerchief. It was a tight fit in the pouch now, but he felt better knowing the rose was protected against bumps. He never took it off and if anything should happen to it, he would never forgive himself.

Catherine came in then and he got up to embrace her. She had opened his gift at the party and put them on - a pair of quartz crystal earrings to match her necklace. Her secret gift had not yet been opened. It lay on his table, and she picked it up after they exchanged a deep kiss.

She unwrapped the tiny paper package and giggled. It was a sewing kit in a small leather case, complete with miniature scissors, several colours of thread on a wooden spool and a tiny wooden holder with two needles inside. A needle threader was pushed into a special loop. On the outside had been burned '*a stitch in time, saves nine*'.

"It's lovely – and appropriate," she murmured. "I should carry it around with me. I'm always finding loose buttons and tiny holes in things. Maybe I should make a pouch for it. I know how."

She touched his rose pouch and then did it again, pushing on it a little, then looking at him questioningly. Vincent nodded.

"I thought it the best place to keep the handkerchief, Catherine. Then it will be with me always. Thank you. It's beautiful."

"Well, you never seem to use a handkerchief, Vincent, but you should have one. Oh, I have one more gift for you."

She gave him his secret package. He opened it and found a codpiece of generous proportions, in bright red silk with little white hearts all over it. He was immediately grateful she hadn't given it to him in public. He felt his face flush.

"Catherine, I think you have over-estimated the size of my ... um ... equipment."

"Oh, I don't think so, Vincent. I've seen it often enough, after all. You don't see it from my perspective. But there's only one way to be sure."

Catherine ran to the chamber door and let down the privacy rug, then began stripping off her clothes. The sight made Vincent warm and he put the codpiece on the table and obligingly began removing his own clothing. Catherine picked up the triangle, and giving him a significant look, deftly tied it onto him, stroking his inner thighs as she ran the centre tie underneath. He groaned. The codpiece filled and she looked at him triumphantly.

"See, Vincent? I knew you wouldn't be able to keep calm while I put it on. I'd say it's just about perfect."

Vincent ground himself against her and groaned again.

"Catherine, you are a genius, but I cannot thank you properly while wearing this."

The codpiece was quickly untied and Vincent scooped her up and carried her to his big bed.

Later, Catherine reflected that the codpiece would have limited use, but Vincent would no doubt be willing to model it as often as she liked, if this was to be the outcome. She hadn't missed his blush at the gift either. Although she would never deliberately try to embarrass him about matters of love – and she knew he was uncomfortable with compliments - his reaction aroused her like nothing else could, except perhaps his own arousal at such times.

She smiled. Vincent caught her sense of mischief and covered her lips with his own. In a very short time, they were beyond embarrassment and fully committed to enjoying each other in as many positions as possible – and that was a great many.

"Oh, my heart," Vincent whispered as she trapped his penis between her breasts and he struggled to hold onto his juices a moment longer.

"My love," Catherine whispered back, shuddering as a long finger found her secret place and she felt suddenly unable to hold back her response.

They soared into bliss and then lay pressed together under the bedclothes, their breath soft and their dreams as entwined as their limbs. Two hearts beat as one.

END

# Perfectionist

*How many things by season seasoned are  
To their right praise and true perfection!*

- William Shakespeare

Catherine awakened in contentment. It was her natural state after a night of lovemaking. Marriage and three children had done nothing to diminish it. In fact, she decided languorously, she and Vincent fit like a foot in an old slipper – molded to each other, comfortable and just a little soft.

She looked over at her lover, laying on his back, the sheet draped decorously over his hips. It didn't hide the impressive bulge there, but he was quiescent.

Vincent felt Catherine awaken and waited. He was testing himself, seeing if he could do something which had been in the back of his mind for some time.

Catherine reached along their bond, knowing that Vincent was awake, but sensing something out of the ordinary. He seemed a bit tense, as if he was trying to hide something from her. She wondered what that was, and when she realized it, felt herself stiffen in shock. He wasn't purring!

She had become so used to feeling the vibration of his purr when she awoke – in the bed, against her hand, along her body, anywhere - and knowing that his reaction was in response to the love she felt for him. But it wasn't there this morning. All was quiet. It was as he had suddenly stopped breathing, although she knew he hadn't. She didn't like the absence at all. Was he sick? No, she would have felt that. He must be deliberately preventing himself from purring! Why? Well, she would not allow it!

Catherine reached across to him and ran her hand along his ribs, then touched his nipple. She saw the bulge quiver - but still no purr. She reached her hand up to his face then and pulled herself over to plant a sideways kiss on his lips. She felt his joy at the touch, but nothing more. He kept his eyes closed.

Well, enough of that! She wanted an answer. Catherine moved to drape herself on top of Vincent's body, pulling the sheet over them both. Then she rested her head on his shoulder and spoke quietly.

"What's the matter, Vincent?"

There was a grunt and a sigh. Catherine moved to look Vincent in the face and kissed his lips. Then she moved to his cleft, running her tongue along it, up to the warm, smooth tip of his nose and then began a slow journey with her lips up its soft furry length. She had not traveled very far when Vincent opened his eyes, regarding her with that azure passion she loved. The bulge under her thighs was now pulsing insistently, but there wasn't a hint of that wonderful vibration she loved.

"Tell me," she demanded, now really concerned. "Why aren't you purring, my love?"

Vincent put his arms around her and sighed again. How to explain? He'd better start at the beginning.

"Catherine, I was remembering my childhood. When I was very young, Father thought I had asthma, because of my odd breathing pattern. He banned all feather-stuffed bedding from the chamber I shared with Devin, and wouldn't let me read in his library, because of the dust. My raspy breathing only happened occasionally, usually when I was alone and relaxed. I guess Father either didn't identify the sound, or didn't want to. He always tried to ensure my differences did not keep me separate from other children.

"So, I learned to suppress that vibration in my chest. I didn't know what it was, but I didn't want Father fussing over me. It became automatic, at least during the day. I simply thought about something else, distracted myself and it stopped. Father was pleased and reasoned that his tactics had worked.

"At night, I was less successful - at first. Devin used to kid me about it and complained that it kept him awake. He called me a dynamo – not quite accurately. I think he knew what I was doing, but he never told Father or me. That was his way. He liked to have something to use as ammunition for his pranks on me. As a result, I got very good at suppressing it at night as well. I simply read something boring before I went to sleep and that did it. Devin moved on to other jokes – and then he left us."

"So Vincent, you're saying that you never realized that you were purring?"

"No. I was very naive in those days. I led a sheltered life, you know, and I believed everything Father told me. We never had pets below. I knew about cats, of course, but how would I know what a purr was? Even if I had, I would not have associated it with myself. I was sometimes teased about my appearance, but it wasn't malicious. We used to call Pascal 'Pip' because he was so small. I kept my hair long because I thought if I had to look feline, I should be lion-like. Besides, I could hide inside my hair. Very useful sometimes,"

"When did you discover you were purring?"

"I didn't, Catherine. I never thought about it at all. Suppressing it had become second nature to me. I didn't purr again until we made love for the first time. It happened without my thinking about it. I was so happy, so contented, so replete – there had been nothing to match that feeling in my life up to that point. The vibration was not as I remembered it, anyway. It's much stronger now and louder – and more even. But after we became lovers I did get curious.

"I did some research and discovered that scientists still don't know why the members of the feline species purr – or how they do it. The bigger cats only purr on the exhale, but they all do it. Other animals can purr too, under special circumstances – hamsters, raccoons – even elephants."

"So, why aren't you purring now, Vincent? I don't think I'm going to like the answer," Catherine whispered, stroking his face.

"I was just seeing whether I could still suppress it. I knew you would notice and I wanted to see if I could resist you when you made the obvious overtures."

"Oh, obvious, am I?" Catherine was a little miffed now.

"Catherine, after so many years, I think we know each other better than any other couple on the planet. We fit together like yin and yang."

"And to think I was comparing us to an old slipper. I like your allusion better. But I want that purr back, Vincent – or I don't know what I'll do to you. Why did you think this experiment necessary, anyway?"

Vincent looked at her, his eyes mischievous, but his bond sent her something akin to fear.

"Catherine, I have another characteristic of the feline species – I'm curious. But I'm not suppressing my purr anymore, at least not consciously. I seem to have been too successful. It's gone."

Catherine looked at him in disbelief. Her voice was rough.

"No Vincent, it is not. I won't have it! Your purr is the most wonderful thing about you – well after these," she twisted a little to get her hand under those furry globes between his legs. "And this," she slid her hand upwards along her favourite appendage.

Vincent growled and cupped Catherine's bottom, felt her passion soar with his. He flung her off his chest onto the bed and felt her heat rise. Then, his hands cupping and massaging her breasts, he moved down to kiss and caress her special place, taking his time and enjoying the desire he felt burning in her, matching his own.

Finally, as she gasped and spasmed, Vincent slid his manhood into her moist and warm passage and sighed with delight at the sensation. He gathered Catherine to him and lay down sideways, wrapping his legs around her and stroking her back and neck. She raised her head and they indulged in a deep kiss that left them both gasping for air.

A wave of passion washed over them both, magnified by their bond, and they let themselves ride it, surfing breakers until they were cast together into that place that was theirs alone.

Catherine waited – and it came. Vincent's purr vibrated along her length like a massage – far stronger than before. She felt it to her bones and behind her eyes. His manhood, still within her, seemed to be transmitting an electrical charge that demanded more. She looked at him and saw his canines showing. He was gasping and she felt something akin to pain along their bond.

Vincent discovered he was not finished yet. Their orgasm seemed more of a pre-amble. His organ was still swollen inside her and it felt ready to explode. It actually hurt! And his purr ran like fire around his groin.

Catherine sensed that Vincent was not finished yet and felt her own desire rise again. She pushed on Vincent's shoulders to signal him to lay on his back and then followed him over. He felt enormous inside her, hot almost. She drew herself up and down his column, felt the tingling purr bring her quickly close to climax and realized Vincent was very nearly there too. She closed her eyes, put her arms around his neck and arched her back in pleasure. Vincent put his hands on her buttocks again and raised his hips. His organ was huge and throbbing inside her.

She let go, let Vincent's fire flare over her and transform them both into an inferno. They sagged at last, but their lips met to kiss and Vincent's arms held Catherine in a tight cuddle.

Vincent felt uncomfortable, so lifted his left hip to slid Catherine into the crook of his arm. He let himself slide out

of her with unaccustomed relief and caught his breath. The relative cool of the room felt wonderful on his organ. He kept his eyes closed, afraid to look at it.

When she could find enough breath to talk, Catherine whispered in of his ear.

“I think your experiment had an interesting result, Vincent. But ...

“But?” Vincent rasped, sure he knew what was coming.

“Don’t you ever deny your purr its natural outlet again! Next time it might not return. Promise me.”

Vincent was disinclined to deny Catherine anything, anytime, but he didn’t hesitate. The elevated purr after their first lovemaking had verged on the painful. His penis had felt as if it was being electrocuted. Unable to resist, he moved his head a fraction to take a look. It was bright red. He closed his eyes again, felt his face flush. His voice was a tense rasp.

“Catherine, I will never do that again, I promise. My ... organ ... feels ... peculiar.”

Catherine felt his embarrassment and was immediately concerned. She moved to take a look between his legs. His penis did look inflamed. His purr had diminished to a slight vibration.

“Does it hurt,” she asked him.

“It stings a little,” he confessed, unwilling to admit more than that. In truth, it now felt as if it has been barbecued.

“Well, I have just the cure for that.” Catherine rose and went to the bathroom.

Vincent could hear her rummaging around and she emerged with a small plastic bottle and a handful of cotton balls. She straddled his legs and took a good look, gently supporting his penis from underneath. He closed his eyes. Her hand was cold. He felt something chilly touch his penis and looked down to see her wielding a cotton ball and running a trail of coolness up it. He sighed. It felt wonderful.

“What is that, Catherine?” he asked after a few moments, feeling better already.

“Witch Hazel, Vincent. The best thing for ... um ... swellings.”

He felt her lift his organ and apply the cool cotton ball under it. Then she moved around it in circles, as if painting it. The relief was incredible. He sighed again and his purr grew to its usual comfortable level. He felt Catherine’s happiness that it was back.

He looked down finally when she stopped her ministrations, and saw that his penis looked almost normal again. He pulled her down to him. She put the bottle and the cotton balls on the table as she moved to lay on top of him. He lifted her chin and looked in her eyes.

“Thank you, Catherine. You may do that any time you wish.”

“Vincent, I don’t think you’ll need that treatment again. Not if you keep your promise. There’s nothing more precious than your purr – your particular purr, that is. It’s purr-fection personified.”

Vincent groaned at all the puns and alliteration, put his arms about her and stroked her back. Truly, he was a lucky man. His penis now felt as it should. His purr mirrored his contentment and that of Catherine’s. All was right with their world.

Catherine lay along Vincent’s chest, experiencing a sense of déjà vu. Hadn’t she been here before, just recently? This time it felt right. Vincent’s purr was vibrating along her length and his wonderfully soft and firm hirsute body was where she loved it best – against her. She let herself match her breathing to his purr, found it fit perfectly and drifted into a nap.

Vincent realized Catherine was breathing in time with his purr and wondered anew. Had she done that before? So his purr had another use, besides arousing them and broadcasting his contentment. He smiled as he let himself drift into a nap. Now it all made purr-fect sense!

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