



You Have My Heart

by Barbara Anderson

She found Vincent there, with a little help from the children, sitting near the middle of the bridge in the Whispering Gallery, looking down into the darkness. His back was bent as if he was carrying a heavy burden, and his hair was hiding most of his face.

He looks utterly desolate, she thought.

Just then, he turned toward her. The pain in his eyes, pierced her heart. *Why is he so sad?* she wondered. *Who has hurt him so?*

He had been too caught up in his own thoughts to sense her nearness. How he hated this holiday. While most other holidays were inclusive and a joy for nearly everyone, this holiday was very exclusionary, and especially difficult for him.

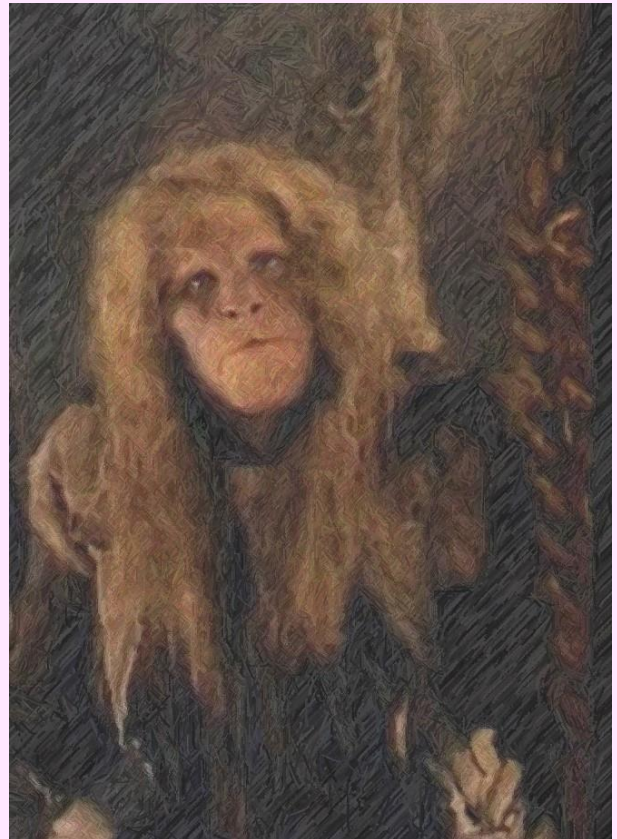
It's a day for lovers, he thought... *something I will never be. Something I can never have.*

He felt it was better to separate himself from the festivities, rather than spoil the fun for everyone else. At least he had done so ... until now.

Catching a glimpse of her from the corner of his eye, Vincent turned to watch her as she approached him on the rickety old bridge. He sighed deeply. She was the last person he wanted to see, especially today. And yet, at the same time, she was also the *only* person he wanted to see.

Does she know how beautiful she is? he wondered as he gazed upon her. Even dressed in blue jeans and a plain cream-colored turtle neck sweater, she looked like an angel to him.

She had unknowingly captured his heart with her beauty. And then her kindness and generosity of spirit had only bound his heart more hopelessly to hers than she could ever know. He hungered to be near her, but her nearness, though sweet, brought him the most



exquisite pain he'd ever known. He had never felt like this before, and he found these feelings confusing. *How is it that my heart can be both breaking and rejoicing at the same time?* he often wondered.

He looked at her but could find no words. He could hardly even breathe.

She walked slowly and circumspectly on the old wood slats to the spot where he was sitting and sat down next to him, letting her legs dangle over the side. She gripped the worn ropes to control the vertigo that washed over her as she looked into the Abyss.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "I seem to be having a little trouble with the height."

"But, Catherine, you live on the eighteenth floor of your apartment building."

She laughed at the seeming contradiction. "This is New York City, Vincent. What choice do I have?" She laughed again. "But *this* ... this is different. I can't see the bottom. I find it disorienting. It feels like it's a lot higher than eighteen floors." Then, seeing his look of concern. "Don't worry, Vincent, I'll be fine in a minute," she assured him.

He watched her for a few minutes as he felt her slowly begin to relax.

"Why are you here, Catherine?" he finally asked.

Not fully understanding his question, she answered. "The children showed me where to find you."

"No ... I didn't mean ... I meant ... *it's* Valentine's Day. Shouldn't you be celebrating it with someone ... special?"

She was taken aback by his question. *Who does he expect me to be spending this day with? Elliot Burch?* she wondered. *Vincent can't possibly be that dense ... CAN HE???* *I've been practically throwing myself at him for months.*

Vincent felt the pain in her as soon as he said the words.

Embarrassed, she looked off into the darkness, and said, "I suddenly feel very ... foolish. I... I'm sorry, Vincent, I ... I'll leave you alone." She began to pull herself up and he reached out to her.

"Catherine ... no... *please* ... please stay ... I'm ... I'm sorry ... it's just that I..." He sighed and admitted the truth. "It's just that ... I find this a... *difficult* ... holiday. I usually prefer to spend it alone."

She sat back down and looked off into the abyss. "Me too!" she declared.

"You do?" Shocked at her words, he asked, "Why?"

She smiled wistfully, as she stared into the darkness. "Valentine's day ... Ugh! ... It's a day for lovers." She paused for a moment. "It's great ... if you have someone ... you know ...

someone *special* in your life. But what if ... what if you don't?" Then turning to him, she asked. "What if ... I never do?"

He looked at her in amazement. *How could she know?* It was as if she had reached into his soul and given voice to his most private heartaches. For the first time he noticed a bulging bag hanging from her shoulder "What have you got in the bag?"



Looking down, she laughed and reached into the bag, producing a large, velvet covered, heart-shaped box. "This was delivered today. I decided to bring it down here and share it, rather than sit in my apartment and eat it all myself."

A pang of jealousy shot through him. "So, you *do* ... have someone ... special?"

"Yes, I guess I do," she said, her smile returning. "They're from Daddy. He always sends my favorite Belgian chocolates on Valentine's day." She laughed.

Vincent was relieved.

"He's done it ever since I was a child," she continued. "I suppose, in his eyes, I will always be his 'little girl.' As long as Daddy's alive, I'll always have chocolates for Valentine's Day."

She lifted the lid of the box, and Vincent laughed. "Catherine, the box is nearly empty."

She smiled, reaching for one of the two remaining sweets. "Yes, well ... I was waylaid by the children on my way down. They wanted me to help them make valentines. I had to share with them too, didn't I?" She placed the chocolate in her mouth, closed her eyes for a moment, and sighed.

"Yes." He smiled softly, and nodded. "I suppose you did." She held the box out to him, and he popped the last chocolate into his mouth. He closed his eyes and savored the rich, decadent flavor.

She watched him, with pleasure. "It's like a little taste of Heaven, isn't it?" she asked.

He smiled. "That's a perfect description. I've never tasted anything quite like it. I understand why it's your favorite." He noticed she had a small spot of chocolate melting on her lip and suddenly had an almost irresistible urge to kiss it off for her. As soon as the desire manifested itself, he was filled with an overwhelming sense of fear, as their eyes locked.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Catherine said, breaking the spell that had momentarily bound them.

Vincent breathed deeply. *I must maintain control of myself*, he inwardly warned.

Reaching into the bag, she held out a stack of handmade valentines. "The children asked me to give these to you. They said they wanted to cheer you up."

Vincent smiled as he accepted them. *Maybe I am not as alone as I think I am*, he mused. He laughed as he looked at each valentine one by one. Most of them were wonky, lovingly cut out hearts with candy conversation hearts glued on, saying things like ‘You’re Great,’ and ‘Let’s Talk,’ and ‘My Hero.’ One was a caterpillar made of paper hearts, from Elly and Eric. From Samantha, there was a butterfly that had heart-shaped wings. And then a dog with a heart-shaped head and small hearts for ears from Geoffrey.

Vincent chuckled. “It’s amazing how many things you can make with a heart, isn’t it?”



Near the bottom of the stack he spied one with no name on it. It was a heart with a hand saying, ‘I love you,’ in sign language.

Vincent looked up, surprised. “Laura’s here?”

“Yes, she came down to help Mary with the children’s party. Oh ... and the children wanted me to be sure to tell you, they glued those hearts on with frosting, so you can eat them if you want to.”

He laughed at that. “Yes, they know I have a weakness for sweets.”

“Is that so?” Catherine asked. “I didn’t know. I will have to keep that in mind for future reference.”

She held her breath as he looked at the last valentine in his hand. It was similar to Laura’s, only the fingers were curled into a fist, as if holding something in its grasp.

“Who is this one from?” he asked.

“That one is from ... me,” she whispered. “Open it.” She could feel her heart pounding out of her chest.

He opened the fingers one by one, revealing a candy heart that said simply, “You have my heart.”

Vincent felt his face flush with heat as he turned to look at her. No matter how hard he tried to speak, the words would not come out.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Vincent,” she said, her words barely audible.

He could feel the love flowing from her. He could see it clearly, shining in her eyes. *How many times has she looked at me like this?* he asked himself. But no matter how many times it had been, he could still scarcely believe it was true. Yet, Vincent knew Catherine well enough to know she would never toy with his emotions.



Finally, he spoke. "Open your hand, Catherine."

Confused, she obediently held out her hand, fearing he might reject her gesture and return the valentine.



He reached into his vest pocket and pulled something out, placing it in her upturned hand. She felt the weight of it in her palm and looked. It was a small rock, still warm from being held so close to him, and roughly shaped like a heart.

"I found it a long time ago," he explained. "...in a river that runs deep below us. I don't know why, but I've carried it with me ever since. It isn't worth much ... in fact, it isn't worth anything, really ... but if you want it ... it's yours."

"Oh, Vincent!" she exclaimed. "Of course, I want it! *I love it!*" She was overwhelmed by the sweetness of his gift.

He breathed an audible sigh of relief.

Catherine closed her hand tightly around the stone. She had no intention of ever letting it go. She leaned against him as he reached around her shoulders to pull her close, and they looked into the Abyss, together.

"It doesn't frighten you anymore?" he asked.

She shook her head and looked up into his eyes. "Not as long as I'm with you, Vincent."

He felt as if his heart might burst, and held her a little closer.

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Later as they reached her threshold, Vincent turned to face her. "Thank you, Catherine, for making this the best Valentine's Day I've ever had.

Reluctant to say good night, she searched for something to say. She lifted the hand that held his gift and opened it. "You should know, Vincent, that you're not the only man who has ever given me a rock." Then smiling widely, she added, "But *this* one ... I will cherish ... *Always...*"



*Never give up on the possibility of Love. You never know where you might find it.*