

When Cyrano Sticks his Nose In
by Corinne
Translated from French par J Ecris (thank you so much)

“I’ll never get it,” growled Michael, exasperated, as Vincent and Catherine came into the library. “And you’re not helping either,” he cried at Mouse and Jamie, whose eyes blazed with anger. Father, who’d been looking for something in a nearby alcove, came over to see what was going on.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“This homework I have to turn in the day after tomorrow - I’m just not getting it. I thought by coming here I’d find the answer...,” complained the young man, “but really...”

“What’s it about?” inquired Vincent, curious. He approached the frustrated student.

“An essay for French literature.”

“A new assignment?” asked Catherine, smiling.

“Yes, it’s make-up work for a Greek essay, about Sophocles, that I complete messed up. I do better with French literature, especially the contemporary stuff, but this...” Michael grinned and leaned back, sighing.

Vincent picked up the book Michael was working on, which was also the book he’d given copies of to Mouse and Jamie.

“Cyrano de Bergerac? I don’t know it,” he said, beginning to page through it. He breathed in the odor that emanated from the work while still glancing through it, thinking about other hands that had turned its pages. There were even annotations in pencil on several of them.

He began to read a passage, as Michael explained, “It’s theater. A magnificent story, about a man with a nose that was too long, in love with his cousin Roxane.”

Just then, Vincent read the passage where Cyrano confides in his friend Le Bret. He was taken by surprise by the beauty of the verse:

*Whom I love?...Think, let’s see. The dream I might be
loved even by an ugly woman’s quite denied me: it’s,
this nose of mine that precedes me by fifteen minutes.
So, then, whom do I love?...It goes without saying
I love – it’s inevitable! – the most beautiful of beings!*

Reading this line, Vincent couldn’t avoid looking at Catherine, who turned toward Jamie when she exclaimed, “But you can’t fall in love with your cousin!”

“At this time in history, you could,” retorted the young man. “Kings even married their cousins. But anyway Roxane was in love with someone else and Cyrano didn’t feel worthy of her.”

*My friend, the bitter hours I keep!
Thinking myself so ugly, sometimes, so alone...*

A shiver ran down Vincent's spine. Obviously, he should never have opened this book. He wanted to put it down, but something held him back. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the lines they feverishly followed on the page:

*No! I love Cleopatra: have I Caesar's air?
I adore Juliet? Have I Romeo's complexion.*

"Oh! That sounds awful," commented Catherine after asking Mouse to borrow his copy.

"It's worse than that!" Michael flamed. "Roxane loves a young man named Christian. But he's a complete dimwit, while Cyrano can spout poetry as easily as air. So he decides to do something completely crazy - give Christian his own intelligence and make him seem like a guy out of a novel. Cyrano writes letters passing himself off as his rival. Roxane falls under his charm and wants to meet with her beloved. The first meeting tanks. Christian, who wanted to get by on his own, can't string three words together out of his supposed genius. Roxane is disappointed, she leaves him and... then comes the scene that I have to critique. She comes out on her balcony."

"Oh yeah?" said the girl with amusement, throwing a brief look at Vincent, who felt it weigh upon him. He knew what she was thinking - of *their* balcony.

"It's a key scene of the play! That's why I chose it. The way I see it, all the tragedy of Cyrano is there. Only... I have terrible actors to portray it."

"We only suggested it to help you," Jamie cried, "and this is how you treat us!"

"Calm down, young lady," reprimanded Father, who abhorred such tones.

"Mouse thinks she's right," interrupted the other unhappy volunteer. "Plus Mouse has trouble reading rhymes. It's confusing!"

"That's because you're paying too much attention to the rhymes and not enough to the meaning of the text itself," retorted Michael. "I'm desperate," sighed the student, lifting his eyes skyward.

"Maybe we can help you?" Catherine suggested.

Michael brightened. He rushed toward her and took her hand, "You would do that? You would play Roxane for me? You're just as beautiful and intelligent as she, there's no problem there," he continued eagerly. Then, realizing he was still holding Catherine's hand, he hurriedly let it go, throwing a rapid glance at Vincent. The gesture hadn't gone unnoticed. "Vincent, will you play Cyrano?"

Everyone's glances turned to the one called out. The book suddenly seemed to burn his hands. "I... don't know."

"Oh, please!" begged Catherine, giving him her most beautiful smile. "I'm sure it will be a lot of fun. And you can't leave a friend in distress."

“You’ll need a balcony,” Father said pragmatically.

“We already found one,” Jamie put in. “I was up there, at the beginning,” she said, pointing out the railing.

“I’ll be Christian,” added Michael. Places, everyone!

Jamie took this opportunity to slip away. Mouse put out several candles to simulate night. Catherine climbed the stairs. Michael showed Vincent his place. The latter turned the pages, hands trembling. He felt like he’d been caught in a trap. This book was bewitched! Father settled in comfortably with Mouse to take in the show. He was the only one to see Jamie return with additional audience members. The three actors, for their part, had already thrown themselves into their parts. Vincent did his best to think only about the words, and not what he’d been feeling since he began reading.

I love – it’s inevitable! – the most beautiful of beings!

The verse had had him by the throat since he’d read it. He jumped upon hearing Catherine begin the scene. She looked like a delighted little girl up there. He wanted to make her happy, and resigned himself to doing the best he could.

CATHERINE
Who calls me?

MICHAEL
I!

CATHERINE
Who’s, I?

MICHAEL
Christian.

CATHERINE, disdainfully
It’s you?

Michael
I want to speak to you.

Vincent missed his first line. He was paying too much attention to what played out between the partners and especially to the way Michael was looking at Catherine. He felt an old jealousy come back to the surface. He jumped when he realized they were waiting for him.

VINCENT, under the balcony, to Michael
Good. Good. Speak soft and low.

CATHERINE
No, you speak badly! Go away!

Her pout was adorable. Vincent’s heart set itself to beating faster.

MICHAEL
Let pity flow!

CATHERINE
No! You don't love me!

Vincent forced himself back into the play and begin to whisper to Michael, who repeated.

MICHAEL
*To accuse me! Heavenly Father!
Of no longer loving... when... I love you more!*

Vincent heard Mouse burst into laughter and realized that the audience no longer consisted of only Father and Mouse, but also other members of the community whom he hadn't heard come in.

CATHERINE
Better!

MICHAEL
*Love grew within, rocked in my anxious soul...
Which that... cruel boy took for... a cradle!*

CATHERINE, coming closer to the railing
*That's better! But since he's cruel, you were mad
not to stifle that new-born Love in his bed!*

MICHAEL
*I tried that also, but unsuccessfully.
This ... new-born babe, Madame's a young... Hercules!*

CATHERINE
That's better.

MICHAEL
*So that he... strangled easily
the twin snakes of... Pride and... Doubt.*

CATHERINE, leaning over the balcony
*Well said, indeed!
But why speak then in such a faltering fashion
Have you started limping with imagination?*

As indicated in the stage directions, Vincent pulled Michael under the balcony, but did it a little abruptly. He surprised the young man, but already his reply came:

VINCENT
Shh! This is getting too difficult!

He slid into Michael's place. Catherine gave him a joyful smile. Was it for his character? Vincent let himself be dazzled by this vision. Little by little, the decor of the library disappeared, supplanted by a real balcony and Catherine... Catherine had never been so beautiful.

CATHERINE

Tonight...

Your words are hesitant. Why?

VINCENT, speaking in a low voice, like Michael

As there's no light,

they weave around in the shadows to find your ear.

Vincent's heart beat even faster. He would have preferred to know the text and not have to lower his eyes to read the lines, because this deprived him of the vision that was Catherine.

CATHERINE

For my words no such difficulties appear.

VINCENT

They find their way at once? That goes without saying!

Since, deep inside my heart, I receive their straying:

Now I, I have a great heart, you, a tiny ear.

Besides the words you speak fall swiftly here,

mine climb, Madame: that takes them quite a time!

A great heart, yes, gigantic. And all the love it felt for Catherine burned there even more at the sight of her attentiveness to his words.

CATHERINE

Yet, for a while now, they've had an easier climb.

VINCENT

From these gymnastics they've acquired the skill!

CATHERINE

In truth, I speak to you as if from some high hill!

This line made the audience laugh. Vincent allowed a moment's distraction, his regard resting on Michael, who looked entirely enthusiastic about this game.

VINCENT

True, and you kill me if, from that high part,

you let one harsh word fall upon my heart.

CATHERINE, moving

I'll come down!

VINCENT

No!

CATHERINE, pointing to an armchair under the balcony
Climb on the bench then, quickly!

For a moment, he struggled against the nascent smile inspired by the ingenuity of the woman.

VINCENT, retreating to the darkest corner of the library
No!

CATHERINE
What... No?

VINCENT
*Wait a moment so that we
can profit from this chance we're offered...for speaking
sweetly together, without seeing.*

Catherine's eyes began to shine with a strange light. She was leaning over the balcony, one hand holding her steady. Vincent nearly shook his head, trying to free himself of this strange dream. This line made him think of all the times he had observed her secretly, delighted and a little ashamed at surprising her in moments that should belong only to her, moments he stole from her without her knowledge.

CATHERINE
Without seeing?

VINCENT
*Yes, it's delightful! The eye scarce distinguishes.
You see the folds of a long cloak of darkness,
I view the whiteness of a summer dress:
I, I'm but a shadow, and you a brightness!
You don't know what these moments are to me!
If I was ever eloquent...*

CATHERINE
You are, indeed!

VINCENT
*Language has never launched itself till now
from my heart, so truly...*

Vincent felt a lump in his throat and was glad he could finish his reply without incident.

CATHERINE
Why?

VINCENT
*Because till now...
I spoke with...*

CATHERINE

What?

VINCENT

*....the dizziness where trembles
whatever haunts your eyes!... But the night resembles...
a darkened stage where, this first time, I address you.*

He drew a new smile from her. She was considering him so intensely that by advancing one step he had the impression of approaching the most brilliant of flames.

CATHERINE

You've a quite different voice, indeed, that's true.

Another step.

VINCENT

*Yes different, for protected by the night
I dare to be myself at last, I dare...*

Something extraordinary was happening to him, truly. Cyrano spoke into his mouth and it was as if they shared the same passion.

Where was I?

*I don't know! – all this – forgive my emotion –
it's so delicious....it's so new this magic potion!*

CATHERINE

So new?

Vincent didn't playact his emotions, but let them come from his heart and soul.

VINCENT

*So new...why yes...to be so sincere:
fear of being mocked, always grips my heart, here...*

He repeated this verse for himself. Tears came to his eyes.

CATHERINE

Mocked, for what?

VINCENT

*Why for...daring!...Yes, that same
heart of mine is always veiled by wit, through shame:
I reach out for a star, and I stop, instead,
for fear of ridicule, to gather a flower-let!*

He dreamed of all the times when, guided by his love for Catherine, he had wanted to advance one more step. His fears driven back. His astonishment when she welcomed his clumsy attempts with enthusiasm, all the times he wanted to tell her...

CATHERINE
A flower-let is fine.

VINCENT
Tonight, I disdain it!

CATHERINE
Never before have you spoken to me like this!

He knew she wasn't playacting either. The bond vibrated with even more force and what he perceived from his emotions told him how much the scene stripped her naked, her too.

VINCENT
*Ah! Like this, far from the quivers, arrows, torches,
you turn yourself towards things... new and fresh!
Instead of drinking fashionable waters, taken cold,
drop by drop, from a pretty thimble, of fine gold,
you find, like this, how the soul might be refreshed
drinking full, from the wide river's endless depth!*

Vincent's tone had become as fierce as Cyrano could have expressed. He let all his frustration out, all those lost moments which now seemed to reproach him for his procrastination.

CATHERINE
But the wit?...

VINCENT
*I employed it to make you stay,
at first, but to do that now would be to pay
an insult to Night, Nature, these scents, the hour:
to speak like a love-letter, written by Voiture!
With a single glance at the stars, the celestial
heavens strip us of all that's artificial:
yet I fear, lest in our exquisite alchemy,
true feeling itself might simply cease to be,
and the soul exhaust itself in empty musings,
and the ultimate be merely...the end of things!*

Of course, yes, he realized. He'd been playing with her for almost two years, when he knew, when he could no longer have any doubt about what she felt for him. And yet... books were his shield. Were their reading sessions nothing more than a means of filling the silence provoked by his fears?

CATHERINE
But your wit?...

VINCENT
*I hate it, in love! It's a crime
to prolong such fencing, endlessly, in time!*

The virulence of his voice made Catherine jump.

*Besides the moment comes, an inevitable one,
and I grieve for those to whom it never comes,
when we feel that a noble love's within us, so
that each fine word we speak saddens the soul!*

Vincent thought back to all the times when he could read the disappointment in Catherine's eyes, when he had rejected her for fear of what might happen.

CATHERINE

*Well, if that moment's come for us two, then,
what words will you give me?*

She devoured him with her eyes. If she leaned forward any farther, she'd wind up falling, but it was as if she felt a little more drawn to him with each word he spoke.

VINCENT

*All, all, all again,
that come to me, I'd throw towards you, wild
without making garlands: I love, I'm stifled,
I love you! I'm maddened! No more: I tell
you, your name in my heart's a little bell,
and as I tremble, CATHERINE, all the time, so
all the time the bell rings your name's its echo!*

Catherine had started when he'd said her name instead of Roxane's. For his part, he'd hardly been aware of having done so. He now grabbed the balustrade and declaimed with force:

VINCENT

*I remember all about you, love all of it, I say:
I know last year, one day, on the twelfth of May,
going out that morning, you altered your hair!
I'm so used to taking it for daylight, like the glare
you find when you stare too long at the sun,
seeing a red disc everywhere when it's gone,
that I, when I quit the flames that flood me, see,
a stain of dazzling gold, clothe all around me.*

CATHERINE

Yes, that's love it's true...

Her voice trembled and tears shone in her eyes. A hair's breadth from climbing the stairs, he turned away from her to continue, panting:

VINCENT

*This feeling, surely,
that fills me, that's terrible and jealous, is truly
that of Love: he always has a melancholy fury!
Of Love - and yet, he's still not selfish, purely!*

*Ah! How I'd give my happiness for yours, though,
even though you yourself might never know:
if sometime perhaps, far off, I might delight
in the happy laughter born of my sacrifice!
- Each look of yours excites a new virtue,
a new courage in me! Now at last do you,
begin to see? For you yourself, do you allow?
Can you feel my soul, at all, rise through the shadow...*

He looked at her anew, his heart pounding.

*Oh! But truly this night's too beautiful, too sweet!
I saying all this to you, you listening, you, to me!
Too sweet! In my dreams, even the least humble
I never hoped for such! There's nothing else
to do but die now! It's through words alone, I know,
that I say you tremble in the blue branches, though.
For you do tremble! Whether you wish it so, I feel
your hand's adorable trembling as it plays,
down the whole net of the jasmine sprays!*

And Catherine was trembling, indeed.

CATHERINE

*Yes I tremble, and I weep, and I love, and I am
yours! You've intoxicated me!*

VINCENT

*Then let death come!
This intoxication, I, it's I, who've created it!
I ask but one thing more*

MICHAEL

A kiss!

CATHERINE, drawing back

What?

The cry of astonishment that escaped Vincent wasn't feigned either. It was as if a mirror had broken with a crash. The look he threw at Michael made the latter pale. Vincent saw him mouth, "It's in the play."

CATHERINE

You ask?

VINCENT

Yes... I...

The words blurred beneath his eyes. All of a sudden he didn't want to continue. A kiss? That couldn't be in this story! A kiss? He thought again, distracted. He forced himself to read the next

line:

You go too quick!

MICHAEL

Since she's so moved, I must profit from it!

VINCENT, to Catherine

*Yes, I...I asked, it's true...but sweet heavens!
I understand that I was too audacious.*

Audacious? But this was more than he could hope for from Catherine. A kiss? He'd dreamed of it, but never in his wildest desires...

CATHERINE, who didn't hide her disappointment

You insist no more strongly than that?

Vincent's eyes widened when he saw what he was supposed to say next.

VINCENT

*Yes! I insisted...
without insisting!...Yes! Your modesty's affronted!
Well! Then this kiss...does not agree with my idea!*

MICHAEL, to Vincent, pulling him by his cloak

Why?

VINCENT

Hush, Michael!

This time he realized his mistake and tried to apologize, but the young man nodded and looked up at Catherine, who was leaning over.

CATHERINE

What are you whispering for?

VINCENT

*Having gone too far I scolded myself, saying
'Hush, Christian!'*

"That's good." Michael stopped them there and immediate applause was heard.

Vincent noticed everyone who was in the library. He felt confused and began to retreat when he felt Catherine's hand slip into his. He lowered his head toward her, and she stared at him with a strange look. He knew at once that what had just happened would not be without consequence. Again the book burned his hands.

"That was perfect!" Michael said jubilantly. I'm just sorry I didn't record it, both of you. Can you imagine my homework enriched by your performance? That would have been great.

“I’m not certain,” Vincent began in a voice so hoarse it was barely audible, “that our performance was the best. I made mistakes here and there.

“Are you kidding? You got the feeling that it came from the heart.”

“I thought you were perfect!” Catherine added. “Overwhelming,” she added, lowering her eyes.

“It was magnificent!” exclaimed a chorus of several voices from the audience.

“The emotion I was looking for, you brought it out,” Michael said, “and now I know how to go about writing my essay. I think it will be a lot easier to analyze the reactions of the characters.”

“Glad... to have been able to help,” Vincent said without daring to look at him.

“You know, Vincent, you would have made a marvelous actor. You use your voice exactly right and you manage to transmit such an energy...,” the student continued, without realizing that his comments troubled his listener even more. “I hope... that I can become as good as you.”

The sincerity of this compliment touched Vincent, who put his hand on the young man’s shoulder. “If you put all your heart into it, I believe you can accomplish the impossible, Michael,” he confided.

“Thanks a million. I must get back to work.” And he ran off, even forgetting to take his books. As the dinner-hour approached, the audience dispersed. Only Vincent and Catherine remained in the library.

“Forgive me,” she apologized, and he turned to her, intrigued.

“What do you mean?”

“I realize that this play ... what we read, it upset you very much.”

“It was a... strange... experience. Michael forgot his books,” Vincent remarked, trying to change the subject.

“Do you think I could borrow a copy? I’d love to know how it ends,” she said.

“I don’t think he’d mind.”

“Tell him to pick it up at my place tomorrow morning, before class.”

“Understood.” He felt her eyes on him.

She seemed about to add something, but changed her mind. “I... I’ll go, too,” she finally announced.

He felt her unhappiness again. But looking at her ... no, it was too much for him. Again, shame was overwhelming him. He merely nodded and wished her good night.

When she was gone, he dropped into a chair and looked back at the copy he had placed on the

table. Still open to the famous scene. But before his eyes, a page turned all by itself, then another and another. And then it stayed. Intrigued, Vincent reached out and picked up the book. He took a deep breath as he read the first word that came before his eyes. A kiss...

What is it, when all's said and done, a kiss?

Catherine walked very slowly in the tunnels, as if she were delaying the moment of leaving them as much as possible. She held Cyrano at the end of her swinging arm. Every step seemed so painful...

“Catherine?” Vincent’s voice seemed to bring her out of a dream. She turned and smiled at him.

*A deeper pledge, a more exacting promise,
an avowal that wishes to confirm its rights,*

“Are you all right?” he asked her, seeing her troubled expression. He continued toward her without a word. Finally, he said to her, “There's something I should do tonight... Something I've been putting off for too long.”

a rose-colored dot on the 'i' of the verb 'to like':

She stared at him, not understanding. He leaned towards her very gently. He saw her pupils dilate in surprise.

a secret for lips not ears, the infinity

Then he shuddered when their lips touched.

of a moment that makes a noise like a bee,

His whole being was electrified. He felt Catherine's hands seize him by his cloak, her body pressing closer to his.

a communion with the sweet taste of a flower

When he tasted Catherine’s breath, when he felt the taste of her on his tongue, he thought that his heart would burst. He heard her groan, thought at first he’d hurt her.

a way to let the heart breathe a little more,

But when he tried to withdraw, she restrained him with all her strength. This time she even wound her arms around his neck.

and taste the soul at the borders of the lips!

The End