

Catching Cassandra

by Odyne *La Fée*

“There is in every one of us, even those who seem to be most moderate, a type of desire that is terrible, wild, and lawless.” Plato, *The Republic*

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Intended for Adult Audiences Only:

*Sexual Violence

*Adult Content

*Language

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Mason looked at the doctor and then at the one-way mirror. “I could really use that smoke.”

“This is a non-smoking facility,” Dr. Veda replied dryly.

“Then how about a tin of Copenhagen?” It wasn’t his first choice, but he’d picked up the habit a couple of years before while filming a movie in Iceland, and it served in a pinch.

“I’ll have some brought in,” the psychiatrist said, though she just sat there. And yet miraculously a tin of chewing tabaco appeared, along with the same small middle-aged woman as before. Had Mason needed or wanted further proof that there was at least one silent witness behind the one-way mirror, this was surely it.

With a simulated-air of nonchalance, he picked up the tin that was set before him and stared at it. It was a tin of Copenhagen Long Cut Mint, the seal still in place.

“It’s not my cut,” he told the psychiatrist.

“But it’ll do,” he said a bit more mockingly than he’d intended to.

Then, with a sudden flirtatiousness Mason turned to the silent witness and said, “Thanks love,” as she slipped soundlessly through the door.

“So, how would you describe your feelings for Cassandra? By all accounts you were smitten with her from the get-go, would you say it was love at first sight?” The doctor sounded patronizing, and judgmental. In fact she sounded down-right bitchy, and it made Mason wonder once again, where the warm-hearted woman he’d first met had gone.

“You can’t make such sweeping statements and have them mean anything,” he told her. “Terms like love and beauty are generic, and don’t mean the same thing to everyone. What is love? I certainly didn’t know until I met Cassandra.”

That took the doctor by surprise. Mason could see by the look on her face that she must be flashing back to all of the magazine covers that had speculated Mason’s every romantic endeavor. His last being a two-year relationship with Nicci Tucci, one of Australia’s biggest pop icons. Six years older than him, she had been very vocal in the press about wanting to settle down and ‘do the family thing’.

Mason, on the other hand, had been pretty tight-lipped through the whole affair. But that hadn’t stopped the speculators from mapping out their entire future in the tabloids and entertainment rags. According to them, the two would eventually get married and have a truck-load of kids. But truth be told, in private Nicci had been very adamant about not wanting to have children. She swore it would wreck her body. And, as her body was her real meal ticket, and not her voice, the last thing she wanted was a kid to ruin it.

Mason himself had been more than happy to let the world go on thinking the two were destined for marriage and family, so long as that had never really been an option. He’d only hooked up with the less-than-brilliant pop singer because his career had been flagging, and he

needed the boost her notoriety would provide. If he couldn't get into the tabloids all by himself he'd been more than willing to sleep his way there.

It wasn't one of the prettier sides to his personality, but hell... there weren't many 'pretty' things about Mason Harlow. And for him – it had been a practical decision. A decision his manager, and he, had both agreed upon.

Mason, after all, was all about his career and making money. And his long term plans never included children, or even a woman for that matter. All he really wanted was to be able to retire in comfort so that he could pursue his other dreams, like surfing and maybe getting a band together.

Nicci Tucci had been a vehicle for his career and that was about it. And even as gorgeous as she was, she'd hardly been anything to write home about. Even in the sack the woman had failed to impress. Hell, a dead fish had more to offer between the sheets than Nicci Tucci had. But he didn't very-well think he could explain that to the woman sitting opposite from him. No, she probably even bought into the whole tabloid-created 'love triangle' that had supposedly broken up the two-year relationship.

The fact that Mason had been more than happy to see Nicci stepping out on him, with the boy-wonder from the US no less, well that probably wouldn't make him too sympathetic in her eyes either. So, in typical Mason fashion, he just blew over the topic by saying, "I cared about her, but no, I didn't love her." And that was that.

"But you loved... love Cassandra?"

Mason tucked a pinch of chew into his lower lip and sucked for a second, then spat the dark juice into his empty Coke can. Then, in a half-smiling, half-irritated gesture, he lifted the can and shook it at the mirror, indicating that a replacement was needed. There had to be some perks to the silent witness in the other room.

"Before Cassandra I was asleep, living my entire life in a half-dream. Every moment was spent regretting the past or anticipating the future. But from the moment I saw her it was like I was present for the very first time in my life. I could feel the ground beneath my feet, and the air between the hairs on my head. Why, with Cassandra every breath was experienced fully. How many people can say that?"

"You say she tortured me, that she brutalized me and held me captive. But what if I was to tell you that she saved me instead? That she pulled me back from the brink of extinction, from oblivion, and that she gave me the keys to my own life and then taught me how to drive it." Mason sat up a bit more in his seat, but his face was an empty.

"More than that... she showed me life's not some goddamn dress-rehearsal where there's always time for more; more takes, more tries, more time to get it right. Why, every moment is slipping away, dying, disappearing to never be seen again. And Cassandra? Well, she taught me that in order to live life you have to be fearless, utterly and truly fearless; you have to drive it like it's stolen, full-throttle, foot to the floor, hand off the brake."

"So tell me then, how did she do this? How did Cassandra wake up Mason Harlow up?"



“After seeing her that day, I made a point of finding my way back to Mac’s every chance I got. Unfortunately I wasn’t able to slip away again until the following Sunday. But she wasn’t there. I waited though, hoping to catch her arriving for her shift, but after almost four hours, and five twenty-ounce beers, I gave up and stumbled home. Determined though to see her, I faked being sick the next day, just so I could go back to Mac’s, just so I could see if she was there.

Luckily she was already working when I arrived. Unfortunately for me though her section was full-up, so took a seat in the corner, where I could put my back up against a wall. And from there I watched and studied.

My waitress though eyed me suspiciously.

“What will it be love?” she asked in a thick Irish accent.

“A Guinness,” I said smiling a bit uncomfortably. The truth is the little redhead intimidated me, and right away I thought it was probably best to get on her good side. Of course her old-man being the giant pullin beers behind the bar might have had something to do with that.

Six-feet-six at least, bald and covered in tattoos, that fella can scare a bit of sense into you right quick. But for all of that, he seemed like a jolly bugger – most of the time; always smiling, always barking out his unusual laugh. Once, in all-friendliness, he patted a fella on the back so hard the bloke nearly choked to death on his beer.

Watching them though, I knew the redheaded Irish woman and the giant were a couple, and based on the claddagh ring on her finger, I assumed were actually husband and wife. Cassandra, on the other hand, well she looked nothing like either of them, and from the coolness of their conversations, she seemed to be a new addition to the bar, but at one point I did hear the Irish woman say something about Cassandra living upstairs.

So, I spent the first hour trying to work that out. Was she the man’s sister? The woman’s? I just couldn’t put it together.

“When ya gonna work up the nerve to go and speak to her?” the woman asked, as she was dropping off my third pint. I was working through them faster than I’d planned, and having not eaten much that day, was already getting my head up a bit.

“What’s that?”

“When ya gonna work up the nerve to speak to our little Cassy? I’ve seen ya watching her.” She bent in close and looked me dead-in-the-eyes. “It’s like this, we don’ like stalkers around here, so your either gonna go and speak to her, or else me husband over there,” she waved at the giant, who smiled and waved back in a rather less-than-friendly manner. “Or else me husband over there is going to ask ya to leave. Ya got that?”

“So those are my only two options?”

“Yup,” she said setting the drink down so hard it sloshed over the rim and soaked the napkin.

“And what do you suggest I open with?”

“Well you’re the actor you figure it out.” She smiled broadly.

“You don’t have any suggestions at all?” I asked, making my voice sound as pathetic as I felt.

“Nah, but she don’t know who ya are, I asked her the last time you was in, so I wouldn’t try to impress her by bragging about being in the movies. You see, Cassy’s a different kinda lass, she’s been living up at the monastery for the better part of thirteen years, and dating’s a new one on her. So if you’re serious, and you decide to ask her out, ya better be on your best behavior, cuz Conor over there, well this is his bar, and he won’t take too kindly to ya hurting our little Cassy. Ya hear?”

“I hear.” I said, nodding towards the man eyeing me from behind the bar. He smiled slowly and then turned his attention back to the beer he was pouring.

The waitress sauntered away then, and left me to my thoughts, which I’ll admit were totally blown to bits, as I tried to chew through the part about the convent. But when I thought about it it did seem to explain some of Cassandra’s rather unusual traits, like her childlike dress and her ability to stay still for so long. *It might even explain her constant state of irritation*, I thought.

When I looked up from my silent contemplation I saw the tiny Irish woman gesturing to me from across the room. Then she nodded towards Cassandra with her head, so I took a big swig of my beer and got to my feet. But before I could make my way over to her, you see, the room was thick with late afternoon revelers... I saw something I’ll never forget.

A bloke in a red-plaid shirt grabbed hold of Cassandra’s backside. She’d been taking his order when out of nowhere he’d taken it upon himself to get frisky. He was sitting with a bunch of his friends, and they all laughed when she squeaked and backed away. But by the look on her face, which had gone the most ghastly shade of white, and by the look in her eyes, you could see Cassandra was terrified.

And when I saw that frozen look on her face, the one mixed with shock and outright terror, something in my head snapped, like a switch had been flipped, and suddenly I was murderously mad. And it was all I could do not to jump on top of the nearest table, and make my way over to her that way instead.

But trying to contain myself, I pushed my slow way through the crowded room, knocking into people, making them spill their beers, putting one bugger onto the floor by accident.

But it was all for nothing as the giant, who had apparently witnessed the whole damn thing himself, had beaten me to the punch. And even as I hustled to get to the offender, I watched as the big man cleared the bar in one swift motion, and in two more bounding steps was suddenly standing behind the man-in-plaid.

“You will not lay your filthy hands on the ladies, you hear me?” he bellowed as his big hands closed around the man’s neck, lifting him clear of his chair.

“You will not disrespect women in me bar!”

His booming voice nearly shattered my eardrums, as I had finally made my way over to them, and was now standing just behind Conor. Just then the giant gave the wanker a good shake, and then another, for good measure. And I could tell he wanted to do more, but was instead thinking it through, in a slow and methodical fashion.

After a short pause he dumped the man onto the floor, where he fell into a heap, gasping for breath. The man-in-plaid rubbed at his neck but showed a bit of prudence when he chose to remain where he was, instead of trying to get to his feet. I thought that was the smartest thing he could have done really, given that the giant was still fuming above him; plumes of steam practically rising from the man's ears.

“Now clear your tab and get the fuck outta me bar! And anyone else that's thinking about layin' hands on the girls - clear your tab and get the fuck out! We don't serve perverts here!”

If I hadn't been intimidated of the big man before, I can honestly say I was then. As big as a house, and meaner than a stuck pig, he was clearly someone to be reckoned with. Clearly the man-in-plaid must have thought so too, since rather than standing up where he was, he crawled his way to the door. Then, lickety split, him and his mates, who had tossed a heap of cash onto the table, were suddenly sprinting out the door.

“You okay there love? You need to go upstairs and have a lay down for a bit?” Conor asked Cassandra, who was standing motionless nearby. She shook her head and smiled weakly at the man. And that's where I was, just a few feet away, looking into her eyes, when I saw it. A glint, a shimmer, of silent satisfaction, and something else, something I couldn't quite put my finger on, but it gave rise to the hairs on my arms, and sent a shiver coursing up my spine. And it left me with the very real impression that Cassandra had taken a great deal of pleasure in the scene that had just played out in front of her, that she had enjoyed it in a visceral, almost carnal way.

But the thought was quickly forgotten, as I saw the little redheaded waitress looking at me, with a satisfied smile of her own. Then, she nodded once approvingly, then jerked her head back towards the table I had just left; as if to say, ‘now's probably not the right time’.

I did as she suggested, and made my way back to my table, even stopping to assist the bloke I'd knocked on his ass. I even offered him and his mates a drink. But he just told me to ‘never mind’ and ‘he'd have done the same thing, if he'd have seen it’.

As the night wore on a few others patted me on the back, as if to say, ‘good on ya’ as they passed by on their way to the toilet.

“This one's on the house,” the little redhead said as she dropped a thirty-six ounce Guinness off at my table. “My name's Shay, and me husband over there is Conor. And a'course you already know our Cassy, though, truth is, she hates the name Cassy. Her real name is Cassandra and she works again tomorrow from six till closing.