

Rare

The Cass Chronicles, Book Four

By

Susannah Shannon

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Chapter 1 - The Maraschino Maven Lexanography

CassCooks Blog post

Moving from Chicago to Alaska is not for the faint of heart. The first time I did it, I sort of up and ran and even though I returned to closeout my lease, it was still a sort of “grab and scurry” operation. This time, I have boxed up the unopened pantry items and delivered them to my local food pantry. Some condiments I have taken over to friends and some others I have just tossed. How on earth did I end up with six different but nearly empty jars of Dijon mustard in six months? Honestly, we are using these last few days to snarf our way through our favorite restaurants here in the windy city. Slick Trench has much to commend it as a hometown but its only restaurant is named, you guessed it “Slick Trench Pizza” and if that moniker doesn't get your gastronomic juices curdled—nothing will. While I pack up the stuff that I never seem to use and yet cannot bring myself to jettison, I leave you with some ideas of make ahead for your Holiday entertaining and gift giving.

When I was a kid, my Gram was in a cult. It was a pervasive group, its tentacles weaving their way through kith and kin and heartland and city. Some charters had fancy erudite names, like the “Parthenogenesis circle.” Being Midwestern folk, Madge Harper’s chapter was simply called “bridge club.” It met weekly, although it’s sanctuary was the tastefully appointed living rooms of its adherents. It was a cut throat group—prove yourself a lousy player and it didn't matter how many committees you had volunteered for or even if you had single handedly invented the PTA—you were out on your Pappagallo flats... Housekeepers guided silently emptying ashtrays and refilling cut glass tumblers. The importance of this is not to be understated. Once when propriety demanded that my Gram say something kind about a woman we all knew she loathed, she finished checking her “berries in the snow lipstick” and clicked her compact shut with a snap that would have done an actual alligator proud and said, “Young lady, that is not true. You ask anyone; I am always the first to defend her. Say what you will about Helen—I always say, but the woman knows how to keep help. That is simply a cold hard fact.” as if that was all the benediction anyone could need. The sacrament that seemed to be served at

their weekly dark masses was called “an old fashioned.” I cannot be the only child of the suburban mid 80s who experienced their first buzz after slurping down the artificially red cherries from a plethora of empty glasses, under the guise of “helping pick up”—which anyone who has ever met me should have known was out of the question anyway. Oh, don't be so finicky—the alcohol killed any germs! Which brings me to the recipe. I still don't understand the rules of bridge, but the lure of a smoky sweet bourbon based cocktail is not to be sneezed at. It's perfect for a thanksgiving cocktail, as well as a perfect hostess gift. Which brings us to our first “food gift that doesn't suck” of the year.

Bourbon cherries

Now, fresh is always best—and yet—pitting cherries is for the birds. Instead, we are going to use several bags of frozen cherries. If you are a masochist, go ahead and use the fresh ones. Who am I to judge how any of us gets our kicks? Do not for one minute, however, think that it makes you a martyr for your art since in this case, it does not.

INGREDIENTS:

3 bags of frozen cherries 1 lb each

1 cup light brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar

- A vanilla pod

3 cinnamon sticks broken in half

3 strips of orange peel-peel shallow- we don't want the white stuff

3 cups rye whiskey don't hesitate to use good stuff for this since it won't be wasted—After steeping our ruby gems it can then be drunk.

6 1/2 pint jars with lids—you can reuse the jars—but you must use fresh metal lids and rings each time.

Dump the cherries into a colander set inside a non reactive pot (that means no cast iron or copper) let them sit for several hours and when they seem thawed put a bowl on them to force

as much of the juice out as possible. If you're so inclined feel free to do this in your fridge. I am not so inclined. That would involve putting a plate or something under them and that just sounds too much like work. After they have drained (save the juice), squeeze with your hands and then arrange the cherries in your jars—you want them to be about 2/3 full. You might not need all six jars. My powers of prognostication are not infallible. Add the honey, cinnamon and bourbon to the juice and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Do not try to hurry this along. We don't have to have met for me to know that you look better with eyebrows. Whiskey is more than a wee bit flammable. Once everything is dissolved and syrupy, remove from heat and stir in the scrapings from the vanilla pod. Cut the pod into as many pieces as you have jars and distribute among them. Use a skewer to push the orange peel down deep into the cherries and pour your boozy syrup over all. Make sure each jar has a piece of cinnamon stick. Leave about 1/2 inch headspace. Run a damp paper towel over the rim and quick as a wink apply the lids and screw the rims on. The heat from the fruit will seal it all up. Between the sugar and the alcohol you don't really need to worry about botulism with these babies, but should you see anything that looks like mold, don't be a hero—toss it forthwith.

And now for the fisticuffs:

The only likelier way to pick a fistfight with another foodie would be to say “Real chili has no beans or tomatoes.” Precisely the best way to enjoy an old fashioned is up for fierce debate. I would skirt the entire issue by attaching a cute label that says “bourbon cherries—perfect on ice cream or in cocktails.” And that’s IT—they are on their own—no one has time for that much conflict. Now, for myself, I prefer to fill a short glass with some ice—squeeze an orange slice over the ice and then drop the slices into the glass. Add two fingers of rye and then top up with another two fingers of our cherry bourbon (I have skinny fingers, your mileage may vary). Garnish with at least one of our succulent rubenesque cherries. Delicious. In fact, I think one may be just what I need to finish this awful packing...

Make it delicious, Cass

She closed her laptop and set it aside. Killian had suggested, many times that she load up blog posts and predate them so that they could be automatically published each day while they were busy with their move. She had assured him that she would do so, had even watched his tutorials on how to do it with fake enthusiasm and had promptly not bothered. Baby Oliver was napping and precious little Sadie was home with her daddy, so Cass had the help of her best friend Jen. They shoved things in garbage bags and set aside a few things to be carefully packed up. This move meant that once again they would be separated by hundreds of miles. The time difference alone was enough to give Cass anxiety just thinking about it.

She rubbed yet another garbage bag between her fingers trying to finesse the opening. “This sucks,” she whispered glumly.

Jen took it from her, instantly found the open seam and, with a flourish, pumped the bag open. “Totally. Like sucks donkey dicks.”

Her hands busy tossing things she didn't know why she had even bought let alone hung on to, Cass elaborated, “Donkey dicks with gonorrhea.”

Her friend pulled a face. “That's disgusting.”

“Yup—I can't think of a single thing that would be worse to suck.”

Jen pivoted to face her friend and they shrieked in unison, “Mr. Koppel!” Poor unfortunate Mr. Koppel had been the girls' math teacher throughout high school. Slightly built, and stoop shouldered, he had a wardrobe quirk that they had found endlessly fascinating. Somehow, his Dockers (always khaki, too short and worn with white socks and black shoes) seemed to tent over his groin area. Many a slumber party had avoided sleep, speculating endlessly as to what could possibly be the cause—gravitational flux? A magnetic reaction? It didn't look like an erection, not that they had had any idea of what such a thing would resemble, more a moribund pouf in the general area below his belt. Jen had coined the name “puddin pants” and her whispering it now, caused both women to shriek with laughter. Avoiding the rest of the packing, Cass held her hands at her laughter wrenched sides and said, “I wonder whatever became of him.”

“He married Dana Martin.”

“Wait? Dana Martin from the class behind us?”

“Yup. Not till she was like twenty-one though. They drank the Duggar type Kool-Aid. I think they have like thirty-six kids.”

“Thirty-six?”

“Well, no, but a crazy lot—at least five.”

They picked up some speed then, but still, it was a far from productive afternoon. Cass felt a frisson of anxiety when she heard Killian’s key in the lock. She’d sworn she’d have a lot of this done. Probably every bit of it and some planning for the new show done too. She had not come even close to that. She’d frittered away time, badly underestimated how long things would take and failed to account for the simple fact that she didn't want to do it. Damn.

Baby Oliver began to fuss from the bedroom and Cass couldn't blame him. The look Killian gave the place, which looked no closer to being packed up then it had when he had left twelve hours ago, didn't do much for Cass’s nerves either. Killian helped Jen get the baby and the box of condiments that Cass was sending home with her down to her car. This allowed Cass to notice the shopping bag he had laid on the table. It was a plain black plastic bag, no label that would make a normal person suspicious. Killian had made it pretty clear that he doubted she would get much done today and he had made it even clearer that she would be a very sorry girl if his predictions were correct. She sidled over to the bag, not entirely wanting to touch it, but needing to know what was in there—like in a horror movie when the audience yells at the pretty girl who will clearly be the first to get decapitated “don't go into the empty graveyard!”

She jumped out of her skin when the door slammed. Killian was leaning against the door, arms crossed over his handsome self.

“You're gonna see it soon enough.”

Ahem. “Look, this is hard.”

“I know. But it's not optional. It has to be done. You’ve had weeks. You need to know that I am not kidding about this.”

“I know that,” she answered quickly. He chuckled, a warm deep sound that set her innards on fire and usually meant he was about to set certain of her “outers” on fire as well.

He turned on the stereo. He reached for her phone and she handed it over. He took his own out of his pocket and stacked them both on the coffee table. This was not a good sign, this meant he was limiting distractions. “Come with me. We don't have time for procrastinating girls.”

There was always this moment of dreadful anticipation. A split second where she considered saying, “I've changed my mind. I seriously don't want to do this,” as opposed to the

“Honey, please don’t,” that she would invariably say and not entirely mean. She did want this. She wanted to yield to his strength. She wanted the blissful closeness that came after a spanking that left her backside sizzling. It was the getting there that was problematic. She swallowed hard and held a hand up against the front of his shirt. “I will do it right now.”

He tucked a knuckle under her chin and lifted her eyes up to meet his. “You will do it after I have spanked you.”

Well, really, what could she say to that? She allowed him to direct her body over to the side of the bed and bend her over. Matter of factly, he rolled her yoga pants and panties down to her knees. She heard the bag crinkle and it was all she could do to not launch herself up to see what he had purchased.

The paddle felt cool against her skin. She was trying to get a mental picture of its dimensions when he drew back and it landed with a sharp splat. It took a fraction of a second for her bottom cheeks to convey their outrage to her brain. She yelped like she had been branded and tried to twist away. With his left hand between her shoulder blades, he held her still and delivered another fiery smack. “Honey, stop! Stop please. It really hurts.” It didn't feel like any spanking she'd had before. It felt like she'd been stung by a dozen bees all at once. Tears began to gather in the corners of her eyes. The sting was unbearable.

“It’s a paddling. It is supposed to hurt, that’s the point.”

She refused to lay back down quietly. “What is that? Please. No more. No more.”

He showed it to her, it looked like a paddle, but it was some sort of clear plastic. “It's made of Lexan—apparently it hurts a lot, but it doesn't leave bruises. I don't want to bruise you up like I did with the bath brush.” She couldn't believe how much her bottom hurt. Two swats, and they hadn't been all that ferocious yet both cheeks were throbbing. Killian stroked her between her shoulder blades. She sensed hesitation in his voice. It was one thing when they were in the sexy tussle of a good spanking to pin her hand in her back and carry on. Forcing a crying wife to lay back down when she was begging you to stop, and meaning it, was not really his style. “Sweetheart, I am not kidding. You agreed to get things done. You didn't. Three more.”

The thought of three more swats with that thing made her heart hammer in her chest. She tried to lay down and then almost against her will, her body anxiously yanked away. Her voice rose to a wail. “Honey, I'm sorry. I promise. I'll do it right now...”

He seemed resolved and went to press her shoulder down. Unfortunately, she was arching away from him and wrestling her into submission was not something he wanted to do—certainly not when she seemed on the verge of hysteria. He gave her a small swat, not as hard as the first two. He was torn, this wasn't pleasant for him at all. She was upset and her tear streaked face beseeching him broke his heart. She craved him holding her accountable. It usually led to scorching sex followed by peaceful bliss. The pounding in her heart continued. She was trying to calm herself down enough to submit to the final two swats. When Killian turned away from her, holding a finger to his lips. The pounding continued. Someone was at the front door. He pressed a kiss unto her temple. "I'll get it. Baby, it's all okay."

She did not feel okay. She was re thinking every decision she had made in her whole life. How could anyone want this? Did she want this? Was she nuts?

"Jesus, you nymphomaniacs! Don't either of you answer your phone?" Jen was moving through the living room with Oliver in an infant car seat over her arm. Cass leapt up, yanking her pants up over her aching tush and pushed the hateful paddle under the coverlet—this was facilitated by the unmade state of the bed. She hopped around for a second hoisting the panties that had bunched around her thighs under her yoga pants.

"Is everything okay?"

"Mimi has gone into early labor, her parents are out of town and she is trying to reach you."

Killian handed Cass her phone and she grabbed her purse. "She called you?"

Mimi was the woman who Cass's fiancé' had left her for. This had led to Cass ending up with the man of her dreams and left Mimi pregnant and broken hearted. Not becoming friends had seemed silly, after all that.

"Aislinn was trying to reach you. When she couldn't, she called Sarah who called me. I have been knocking on that door for five minutes while you two had howler monkey sex and didn't answer your phones."

"Howler monkey sex?" Killian asked, one eyebrow akimbo.

"Oh please, I have ears—no false modesty here." Jen laughed. "Come on—I'm double parked!"

Jen drove them to the hospital while Cass forced herself to sit still and not squirm in the passenger seat. Luckily Jen had a nice car with plush seats, so once she had settled in, it wasn't too horrendous. "Are you cold?" Jen asked. "Do we want me to turn on the heater in the seat?"

Cass wondered if her friend was teasing her, or if it was a coincidence. Her response was a hasty, "No thanks—I'm good." She tried to conceal her shivering for the rest of the drive and wished she had grabbed a jacket on their way out of the door. "Fucking Lexan" she thought. "I'm going to melt you in the furnace."

It was Jen's turn to raise an eyebrow, "Talking to yourself?" She turned to face Killian in the back seat. "Your wife might have gone crazy."

He laughed. "My wife has always been crazy."

Jen withdrew the key from the ignition. "True dat," she said with a laugh.

"Very funny. Just hush and hurry up," Cass said.