

Red Velvet  
*The Cass Chronicles – Book Five*  
By  
Susannah Shannon

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## Table of Contents:

Chapter 1 - Miss Mouthy Mouth and the Color Red .....	5
Chapter 2 - The Pinnacle of Pine .....	11
Chapter 3 - Bill Nye the Christmas Guy .....	13
Chapter 4 - The Pizza Coven and Vampira’s Eyebrows.....	14
Chapter 5 - Ben-ediction .....	16
Chapter 6 - Candlelit Cottages .....	18
Chapter 7 - The Mother-in-Law Matriculation .....	19
Chapter 8 - Life on the D String .....	24
Chapter 9 - On Frozen Pond .....	26
Chapter 10 - The Trio Transgression .....	28
Chapter 11 - The Bullwinkle Balliwick .....	37
Chapter 12 - The Fondest of Farewells .....	40
Chapter 13 - The Art of Blowing Baubles .....	41
Chapter 14 - Of Nuptials, Noels and New Beginnings.....	46
Recipe Archives .....	47
Susannah Shannon .....	57
EBook Offer.....	58
Blushing Books Newsletter.....	59
Blushing Books.....	60

# Chapter 1 - Miss Mouthy Mouth and the Color Red

*CassCooks Blog Post*

*Post nuclear dessert*

*When I was a kid, my gram made red velvet cake on most Sundays. It was my poppa's favorite. I still use her recipe today although a warning is in order. Knowing what we now know about artificial coloring, this is not a cake to undertake lightly. Looking back, it's a miracle that we didn't all end up with three eyes like a frog spawned near Chernobyl. Red velvet cake has an interesting history. Although legends about it abound, its origins are murky. It may have been invented at the Waldorf Astoria. It may have been invented by a company that made food coloring. Either way—it's a light cocoa cake with a nice texture. To get the red, you need gel coloring paste (or three vials of the grocery store stuff—which is what my gram used). People may assure you that the vinegar turns the cocoa red, and, therefore, you don't need the food coloring. They are on crack. There is a chemical in cocoa that turns red in the presence of acids like vinegar. But it is there in tiny amounts. I have read a few recipes that call for grating beets. Bitch, please. Beets are healthy and I like them. But a cake like this is enough of an undertaking without roasting, peeling and pureeing beets. The process will leave you with red counters and fingers and an oddly hued purple cake. Sorry, fake it is. The full recipe is in the index.*

*I have been thinking about cake a lot these days since I'm about to start planning the wedding of Andy and Chelsea. They want an elegant winter wedding, and they have specifically mentioned wanting a spectacular cake. The wedding will happen in mid December—when Slick Trench, Alaska, is a winter wonderland. Andy and Chelsea love the outdoors so there will be ice skating, cross country skiing and then a wedding in front of the fireplace. We can't wait to use the new reception building that we've added to the lodge. You'll be able to watch the planning and then the wedding on The White Gown Network.*

*Love is delicious—Cass*

Cass Harper-Nelson hit the send button and closed her laptop. She was out of sorts and downright tetchy. The morning had not gotten off to a good start. She was trying to figure out how to access documents that she had saved on her computer. Such things were never easy for her. It just didn't make sense. Her brain clearly didn't work that way. Killian had stopped what he was doing to try to help her. “Well, where are they?” he asked.

She jabbed an angry finger towards her laptop. “In there!” The frustration had overwhelmed her. “That's what I'm doing!” she had snapped when he suggested that she run a search for the files. As it turned out, that was not what she had been doing since, when she followed his instructions, the files suddenly appeared on the screen of her laptop. The whole thing had set her teeth on edge and she just kept racing over that cliff. “Whatever,” she snarled. “I'm such a fucking moron.”

Her husband had rested a reassuring hand on her shoulder. She shook him off. “Just go ahead and go.” Killian had to leave for the day with his brother. Her terrible mood led her to suddenly resent his trip to Homer. “I'll figure it out,” she spat. As the words left her, she knew she was being a bitch. She knew and she didn't care, she just kept going.

“Babe,” he said. “Stop. I know you are stressed about that wedding, but dial it back.”

“Of course, I’m stressed about that wedding! I need to read these notes from Tabby. The menu is complicated, and I’ve gained a ton of weight and the camera crew arrives in five days!”

Killian’s response did not calm her down. “Not a ton.” She knew that he was a trained biologist who usually spoke in very literal terms. Knowing that did not help even a little bit.

Slapping her lap top shut she stormed down the stairs. “Sweetheart, come back here. I think you are beautiful. Let’s talk about this.”

She slammed the kitchen door shut. “No,” she roared. His step on the stairs was fast and sure. His hand was around her elbow and he was propelling her up the stairs when the front door was suddenly opened. Her brother-in-law stood in the doorway, a smirk playing on his lips. “Oops, sorry to interrupt.” As always, Cass found herself wondering if anyone suspected the dynamic of her marriage. It always seemed that people assumed the issue was nymphomania and not domestic discipline. They weren't entirely wrong on that count, either. Torsten stepped back onto the porch. “Do you want me to reschedule with the pilot?”

Killian leaned over and kissed his wife. “Nope, we need to get going.” A potent mixture of relief and dread washed over her. He wasn't going to forget this. Now she was going to have to get things accomplished today while awaiting the justice she was bound to receive over his knee.

Fuckity fuck, she thought. She poured herself a cup of coffee. Might as well get busy; stewing would only make it harder to get through the next twelve hours. Tabby, the executive producer of her show had chosen the couple for the upcoming wedding. She had met with them and taken notes. Somehow the notes had become stained. Cass presumed that an intern had spilled coffee on them. They had been scanned in and emailed to Cass, but there were some illegible spots. They were a very good-looking couple. The bridal couple had sent pictures in so they were clear. Chelsea was an elegant blonde who had an Ivy League education and was an investment banker at a firm that Cass thought she might have heard of. That meant it was an incredibly famous fiduciary institution. Cass didn't exactly follow that world. The father of the bride had been the American ambassador to Switzerland, which meant the family was well travelled and multilingual. Jacko was Australian, with a cheeky grin and a lot of tattoos. He was a professional skateboarder, which was more than a little sexy. The bios were typed and she could easily read them. Tabby’s handwritten notes were a tougher nut to crack. Cass used her best judgment to fill in the blanks. (Illegible three letter word followed by a dash) and then “very detail oriented. Seems obsessed with the wedding being perfect.” (Another illegible three letter word followed by a dash) “seems really good natured and easy going. Will be really fun to work with.” Glancing through the bios and pictures, it was pretty easy to surmise that the first three-letter word had to be “Her” and the second one was “Him.” TV being TV meant that while the couple would travel to Slick Trench accompanied by a camera crew, they would meet Cass for the first time four days before the wedding. In reality, though, the planning had been done for some time. The production crew had met with Jacko and Chelsea and there had been numerous conference calls about it.

It was a small wedding, thirty-five people total. One maid of honor, one best man, both sets of parents, siblings and a handful of friends were travelling to the lodge. Cass reviewed her notes. She needed to plan meals for the entire group, the cottages needed to be “Christmased up” and outdoor activities organized. She double-checked the order she had placed with the florist in Homer. A small plane would carry in the roses, stephanotis and gardenias that had been ordered. A van pulled up to the gate and rang the bell. The wreaths she had ordered had arrived. There

were fifty of them, lush and full of assorted evergreens tied with plump, tartan bows. Hazel had briefly considered making them, but time was a premium and it was nice to give work to their friends (which in Slick Trench were family somewhere not too far back on the ol' family tree). There were limits to what she would outsource though. Cass would gather greens to decorate the fireplaces with when Killian cut the Christmas trees. They would need three of them. One for the family room of the "old lodge." This would be their "family" tree, although it would be seen by all the guests. Two would go at either end of the "new lodge." Hazel had collected spun glass ornaments in white, gold and silver to adorn these trees.

Lloyd and Hazel came to help unload the wreaths from the van. As always, Hazel's energy left Cass feeling like a limp dishrag in comparison. The woman was in her sixties and she bustled around like a spring chicken—if the spring chicken had trained for marathons all of its life and was auditioning for a part as "the flash." Lloyd was a little less zippy. The retired accountant paused to zip up his coat. Native Slick Trenchians didn't seem to even notice the cold when there was work to do outside. Cass was never going to fit in. She wasn't a big fan of physical labor and she hated the cold. They loaded most of the wreaths into a wagon and the three of them went to each cottage. While Hazel hung a wreath on each door, Cass remade the beds. Each bed was covered in soft flannel sheets, the crisp white duvets that adorned each one was covered in a bright wool blanket. Beeswax candles and locally carved woodland animals were set on each bedside table. The cottages all had wood burning stoves. Lloyd made sure each one had a full basket of firewood and a smaller basket of kindling set near by. Each cottage had either a love seat or a few stuffed chairs. The throw pillows were swapped out for fleece ones in shades of red or green. The bathrooms were already stocked with fluffy towels and rich, buttery soaps. They had decided not to put Christmas lights on the cottages, aiming for a more rustic, old-fashioned look. The set battery operated candlesticks in each window. Lloyd figured out how to set the timers on them, such a task would have been beyond Cass's reckoning. Hazel was humming to herself as they finished the final cottage. "Have I ever told you that boy of mine was convinced that there was an angel named 'Harold' at the nativity?"

"No, haven't heard that story," Cass said while she changed throw pillows.

"He was in first grade, so Bea was his teacher. He played an angel in the Christmas play. He was so cute, although he wasn't at all happy about wearing what he called a dress made out of an old shower curtain."

Cass could well imagine Killian not taking kindly to that. She liked to imagine him as a little, scrappy boy. "His dad was teasing him about it at supper one night. Killian said the angel was the most important part of the entire story."

"I'm thinking a certain baby was actually a bit more central." Cass laughed.

"True, very true," continued her mother-in-law. "Johann was teasing him about it at supper one night and Killian said that he wasn't the angel named 'arch' he was the one named 'Harold.' "

Cass giggled. "So he wasn't the archangel, but where did he get Harold?"

Hazel began to sing. "Hark, Harold the angel sings." Laughing, the women finished the song. "Glory to the newborn king..." They moved to the two cottages farthest away from the lodge. These cottages did not get the luxe treatment—although they did get candles in the windows. They would house people coming in to either film or work at the wedding. They made up camp beds. "These things are rickety. I hope no one is planning on having a good time." Hazel winked at her daughter-in-law. "On one these—we might have a lawsuit on our hands."

"Oh hush."

“I’m just sayin’ the cold weather makes people frisky—even old people like me.”

“So don’t wanna know. Hey, do we know how they want to do this?”

Hazel expertly tucked a wool blanket into the foot of the camp bed. “Do you really need a lesson?” Cass swiped at Hazel’s butt with a pillow.

“Hey, don’t break a hip! I’m elderly and frail.” There was absolutely nothing frail about Hazel.

Cass realized that she would need to ask someone else about this. They had a strings trio coming (two women and one man) as well as a sound person, camera operator and a production assistant/make up person (two men and one woman). She was unsure if these would prefer being divvied up by role or by gender. She texted Ben, the camera operator and asked him what he thought. Waiting to hear from him, she helped pull the wagon of supplies back to the “old lodge” and put it away. Her mood had improved substantially. They could do this. The cottages were perfect; she adored her mother-in-law. It was only when she allowed herself to think of the reckoning she faced upon her husband’s return home that she felt sorry for herself.

The sun set early in Slick Trench in December. Cass had thawed some salmon fillets, so she was ready when Killian and Torsten texted to say that they arrived at the airstrip. Cass started some rice and tossed some bok choy in ginger sesame oil. The salmon she glazed with soy and honey.

There was no evidence of Killian being angry with her when he swooped in and clasped her into his arms. “I’m sorry, honey,” she whispered.

“I know,” he whispered back.

Hazel interrupted them, “So did you boys do what I think you went to do?”

Torsten grinned. “Yes, ma we did. I swore Kman to secrecy since I was still deciding on the perfect timing. But,” he continued, pulling a small box from his pocket, “I’m going to ask her this weekend.”

It was a striking ring, nothing like Cass’s vintage style dainty one. It was perfect for Libby with its clean modern band and stone mounted so that it did not protrude above the band. Ideally suited for dispensing medications, gutting large game and being perfect at all the outdoorsy things that were beyond her soon to be sister-in-law. Cass kissed Torsten on the cheek. “Good for you. Too bad you don’t know anyone who plans weddings.” Laughter filled the room.

They carried plates in front of the fire. “So did you guys know before Killian proposed to me?”

Hazel set down her fork. “Honey, I knew the first time I clapped eyes on you.” She jerked her head towards her eldest, rangy son. “It took him longer. I think three days.” Cass scooted closer to her husband so that their legs pressed against each other. Cass knew that the stone in her ring had originally belonged to Hazel. Now she heard the story of how Torsten and Killian had travelled to Homer to have the stone made into a ring. She held her hand up to admire it. It looked like a family heirloom, which in a way, it truly was.

She reminded herself of that later, while she walked up the stairs with Killian. He loved her. He loved her a lot. It would be okay. As she often did, she just couldn’t wait to find out what would happen. She loved spoilers—sometimes looked them up on her phone while waiting in line to see a movie. Life was hard enough without knowing what was up ahead. It got her nowhere. “Hush,” Killian whispered. He shut the bedroom door behind them and gathered her into his arms. “I know you’re sorry.”

“I am. I really am.”

“But...” Oh crap.

“The point is to get you thinking about what you say before you say it.” She nodded. He took two steps away from her and gathered the pillows from the head of the bed. He set them on the edge of the bed and guided her over them. He hadn't taken her pants down. That could be a good sign, or a very, very bad sign. She heard him rustle in the drawer. She gasped when she saw him withdraw the Lexan paddle. Prior to being introduced to the Lexan paddle, she had firmly believed that a bath brush was the most wicked spanking implement. Five swats with the paddle that looked like glass but was some sort of space age torture material had changed her mind. She began pressing up with her arms.

“Honey, please, no, no.”

He pressed her shoulders down and reached for her left hand. He pinned it in the small of her back. A bath brush smacked you with a sort of solid thwack. It stung the skin, but you felt like it moved you forward. It whacked a small spot with a thud. The Lexan was more like being stung by bees. It made a distinctive slapping sound and set your ass on fire. Her entire body was clenched. Killian leaned over her. “Cassandra. Relax.”

“I can't,” she whined. “That thing hurts.” He was apparently not over committed to making her relax. He didn't suggest it again, instead commencing her punishment.

The swat landed across the center of both cheeks. “Ack!” she yelped.

“Stop fighting me,” he commanded quietly.

“You couldn't either! It's reflexes—survival instinct!”

The second swat landed over the first one and her eyes flooded with tears almost immediately.

“You can take this. I know you can. We both know you totally deserve it. It will be easier if you just yield.”

“Ow, ow, ow,” she wailed. “How many?”

The third swat landed where her thighs met her ass and she yelped even louder than before. His voice stayed low, “Depends on you.”

The next swat made her wrestle even harder. He easily held her still. “Stop,” he said

“No. You stop. Please, please stop,” she beseeched. He sighed and appeared to give up on the idea of getting her to cooperate. He easily held her pinned and administered three more swats. She was crying hard by the time he was finished.

“Stay there,” he said, and over her own cries she could hear him put the paddle away. He sat on the edge of the bed and maneuvered her between his legs. He paused to unbuckle her jeans and yank them down. It was then that she saw the hairbrush sitting next to him. Her enthusiastic protests fell on stubbornly deaf ears. He pulled her jeans and panties down to her feet and helped her step out of them. Without a word he pulled her over one of his legs. Her knees parted as she settled over his thigh. “You know better than to refuse to come discuss something with me.” It was not a question.

She responded anyway. “I do. Yes, I do.”

“You woke up in a bad ass mood today and all I did was try to help you.”

“I'm sorry.”

“You will be.” He lit into her with the hairbrush, paying particular attention to spots he had not smacked with the paddle. The brush landed between her thighs and over and over again across the crest of her bottom. She tensed and twisted, bucking like a wild animal. He gripped her tightly to him and forcefully kept up spanking her. He took her to the edge of her resistance and firmly insisted that she cross over it. Her sobs reached a peak and the struggle went out of her. She wilted over his leg, crying but no longer fighting. “Oh thank God,” Killian muttered. He



set the brush in the small of her back and moved his hand over her scarlet, burning bottom. He gave her a firm set of swats with his hand, the most intimate thing Cass could imagine. He reiterated what seemed to be his main point. “When I ask you to talk about something, you do not yell ‘No’ at me.”

“Okay,” she cried, grateful that he didn't insist that she answer him in sentences or call him sir.

He accepted her acquiescence. “That's my girl,” he said, his spansks turning to gentle caresses. “That's my good girl.” Cass whimpered and continued to cry for a few moments, she couldn't turn the deluge off easily. She had always wanted this. She had imagined this when she was still in grade school. Submitting to it was not easy though. He reached across her and turned on the bedside light. He helped her stand and turned her so that her back was in the light. She did not like this part, she had never liked her body and she particularly did not like her ass. She had never ever heard of a spanked wife whose husband would insist on putting ice on her spanked posterior if he thought it was in danger of bad bruising. Her husband did, though. He admired his handiwork with a low whistle of approval. “Boy that Lexan does the job—”

“I hate that fucking thing,” she said.

He laughed. “I know, and you are really, really red. But I don't think you will get bruised.” She shrugged her shoulders, it seemed to her that bruises didn't matter much compared to the pain of a hard spanking. If she had lived through it, who cared if she was bruised? But it mattered to him.

She felt a draft and shivered. Killian stood and lifted her sweatshirt over her head. He expertly unhooked her bra and yanked the covers down. “Here, baby doll, stay warm.” She snuggled in. He gathered up her dirty clothes and tossed them into the hamper along with his jeans and tee shirt. She was much warmer once he slid in beside her. He rolled on top of her and she clasped his shoulders. He slid his hands down her back and squeezed her bottom, kneading and rubbing. She parted her legs and wrapped them around his middle. With no preamble he entered her and she arched her back from the joy of it. He was slow but insistent, filling every centimeter of her with his large cock. He withdrew almost to the tip and then earned a gasp from her when he thrust deeply inside of her again. And again. And again. She came first, the ache in her bottom somehow making it even better. She had a half-baked thought that it was like Reese's peanut butter cups, the salty made the sweet even better, but she couldn't follow that train of thought because she almost immediately came again. She was grateful when she felt him come deep inside of her, she was already overwhelmed by sensation and didn't think she could take more. He pulled the comforter up around their shoulders and snuggled her close to him. “Go to sleep, princess.” For once, obeying him was easy.