

From the pages of **Cassandra: Night Shades**

JD escorted Gram to the car, and she entered the Italian restaurant on his arm. Casey walked behind the pair. Gram really seemed to enjoy herself, and it was obvious she was getting a kick out of parading around on JD's arm. Heck, why not? Casey figured it had probably been a long time since Gram had such a good looking man, one who wasn't gray, pay so much attention to her.

As for the other ogling females, Casey thought that they should get a load of him in his dress blues. That sight would have folks running for the defibrillators to restore the victims' regular heartbeats. Casey decided she was in the safest spot, behind him and temporarily out of range of his piercing blue eyes. The small parade, led by the hostess, ended at a secluded corner table, which suited Casey just fine. While JD was occupied seating Gram as if he were the reincarnation of Sir Galahad, Casey positioned herself in the corner and tried to fade into the shadows of the dimly lit room.

She wished she was able to relax and enjoy the evening, but she did not trust him. She was losing the daylong battle to subdue the tormenting ache behind her eyes as well as persistent nausea. Her order of minestrone soup and salad set both of her dinner companions on her case. Nibbling on a breadstick and sipping a warm cup of tea, she ignored them and surveyed the coming and going of diners.

Soup was served, and she felt that she had made an excellent choice: it was not disagreeing with her touchy stomach. She focused on her bowl and avoided eye contact as she listened to JD banter with Gram. Still, she could feel his eyes whenever they traveled her way and lingered. Hearing her name, she raised her eyes to meet two familiar faces.

Andy and Alice greeted Casey and her grandmother, who then introduced Jimmy. Gram insisted that the couple join them. Casey moved over to the vacant chair next to Gram, leaving two unoccupied. Andy, no fool, seated Alice next to Casey, and placed himself between JD and Alice. Casey's sense of humor kicked in at the obvious manipulation.

She was digging into the pocket on her sundress for her vibrating cell while the newcomers placed their order. Casey asked Gram if she wanted to speak with Millie.

"You know that I can't hear on those contraptions. Just ask her what she wants."

"She says that she'll pick you up at nine in the morning."

"Tell her that I will be ready." Gram waved her hand in dismissal.

Casey thought her grandmother's hearing was getting worse. In addition to her lapses in memory, and her occasional bouts of believing Casey was still a child, Gram seemed to get confused and disorientated more lately. It was worrisome to Casey that getting her grandmother to a doctor's office depended on her state of mind and mood when it was time to keep the appointment.

"Millie, she'll be ready, but there is a small snag. Gram has company from out of town. Do you have room for one more on the bus tour? Wonderful! I'll pass on the good news. Oh, don't worry, you'll like him, all the ladies do."

"Okay, Gram you're all set, and you are welcome to bring Jimmy along." A small triumphant laugh escaped before she could squelch it. She didn't look at him as she tucked her phone back into her pocket, but she could feel his blue eyes burning holes through her like two powerful lasers.

"Did you just book him a seat on a senior bus tour?" Alice whispered while covertly glancing at JD.

"Yep. Sure did," she declared, and grinned at him when Alice broke out in a fit of giggles.

Andy spoiled the whole effect by bringing up her plans for tomorrow. "I was surprised to see

you here, Casey. I thought Andi told me that you were going to the dispersal?" Andy hovered right around six foot and had the same black curls that so frustrated his sister. His dark eyes were always serious, and the direct opposite of his sister's mischievous twinkle in her like colored orbs.

Casey always wondered what possessed their mother to call her son Andrew and then name her daughter Andrea. Both were called Andy. They all grew up together and it sometimes got confusing when Casey would call for Andi. "I had some work to clean up. I'm driving down in the morning."

"I suppose that the two of you troublemakers will terrorize every male on the premises."

"Andy, I'm crushed. You know my heart belongs to you. When Alice gets tired of your sorry butt, I'll be waiting in the wings." Casey gave him an evil little grin and winked at him. Excusing herself, she strolled to the restroom with Alice hot on her heels.

Casey took her time, washed her hands, played with her hair, and applied fresh lip-stain while Alice fired a barrage of questions at her.

"Who is he?"

Casey gave her the spiel about JD being a friend of Gram's.

"He's gorgeous, and those intense blue eyes. Wow!"

She decided not to comment on Alice's critique, or mention the fact that he had affected her much the same way the first time that she'd met him.

"Where is he from? What does he do?" she prodded.

"I guess he is originally from Colorado, but he is in the Marine Corps and is stationed east somewhere. Now can we drop the subject?"

"Sure. Only explain to me why he keeps looking at you like you're dessert?"

"Alice, you're letting your imagination run amok. There's nothing between JD and me, nor will there ever be."

Evidently, JD and Gram had ordered dessert while Casey was playing twenty questions with Alice. A slice of cheesecake was plunked in front of her before she finished her salad. Casey whispered to Alice, "dessert," when cheesecake was served to Gram and apple cobbler à la mode was placed in front of JD. Andy's girlfriend went into another fit of giggles that earned Casey a round of scowls. She did serious damage to the cheesecake and shrugged off Gram's disapproving scowl.