

Raspberry Mousse
The Cass Chronicles – Book 6

By

Susannah Shannon

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Chapter 1 - The Gentleman Caller

Blog Post - CassCooks.com

Empanadas - delicious eats or cultural appropriation?

All right cooks and cookies, we all know that I am nothing if not a dilettante. When I discover something new, I go in—ALL in. (Remember I married a guy six weeks after meeting him—when it's right, it's right—and the recipe I am about to share is so right.) I am here to lure you in the way of the empanada. Empanadas are flaky little pastry moons that are found in Spanish and South American cooking. They are a good way to use up bits and pieces of leftovers, but I don't really care. They are delicious. I'm including recipes for savory and sweet fillings. Either way—this dough is a dream.

Cass moved away from the laptop and continued assembling the pastries she was making. Tonight's dinner dovetailed nicely with a blog post. She talked to herself as she rolled out the discs of dough, "roll into a thin circle, and..."

Sadie stood on a chair and looked down onto Cass's labors.

"Auntie Cass, that's not a circle," the three-year-old pointed out flatly.

She was not wrong. "Well, it's close enough," Cass said firmly.

"So will you change it; will you tell people to smush it into a sort of blobby?"

No, Auntie Cass would not. Cass had been delighted when her best friend Jen had called to say that she and her husband had a business conference in Anchorage. They had immediately agreed that Sadie and her one-year-old brother would stay at the lodge with Cass and her husband Killian, and then they would be joined by their parents for an early spring vacation in Slick Trench, Alaska.

It would be wonderful, Cass had said. A chance to spend time with her darling godchildren, and also a chance for her and Killian to think a bit more about Hazel's next project: Operation BABY. Cass's mother-in-law had the tact of a panzer tank. "Thank God, they are coming, something needs to jumpstart your maternal instinct. I am not going to live forever you know." This was ridiculous, Hazel Nelson was indestructible, she would totally live forever. The cook's reverie was cut short by Killian striding over with Oliver on his hip to gather Sadie into a sort of pig pile wrestling match.

When they had made plans, Jen had warned her that two toddlers were demanding, messy, and exasperating. Cass had shushed her friend's concerns entirely too quickly, she now realized. Cass Harper had expected the children to cry a bit when their parents left, and she had anticipated long nights rocking toddlers. She had even braced herself for picky eaters and potty accidents. What had befallen her was much much worse, and something that had never occurred to Cass. Both children much preferred their uncle, Killian.

Cass continued to roll and fill her pastries while her strapping husband allowed himself to be pinned by the diminutive pigtailed dominatrix whom they had invited into their home. "I got you!" Sadie yelled as she darted away from Killian's fast reach. Delighted laughter pealed through the spacious kitchen. Hazel stuck her head through the door.

“Isn’t that the best sound?” she shamelessly asked her vexed daughter-in-law.

“Sure is,” answered Cass, not meaning it at all.

“Your suitor is still outside of the gate,” Hazel laughed.

“Still?” The noisy household had made her think that he had given up and wandered away.

“Oh yes, I’ve never seen such romantic devotion. Really you should go put him out of his misery.”

“I’ll do it.” Killian stood, gently lowering the children to the ground.

Oh fuck, Cass thought. She had hoped it wouldn’t come to this. She would never get entirely used to living in Slick Trench. She moved to shepherd the children deeper into the kitchen, no point traumatizing them. Sadie and Oliver both protested vigorously. Oliver tried to squirm out of her arms, and Sadie flat out refused to budge. “I’ve got cookies over here,” the chef bribed.

“We don’t want them, even if they are chocolate chippies. We want to go with Uncle Killian.”

“Well, you can’t.”

The strong Alaskan strode back into the kitchen, gun under his arm.” Why can’t they go with me?”

Cass felt her eyes grow wide in horror. “Seriously? You need me to explain why not?”

He swung Oliver onto his shoulders and reached with his free hand for Sadie’s little hand. “Come on, Deputy Fred.”

“My name is not Fred. What’s a deputy?”

Cass followed, arguing vociferously that this was crazy, dangerous and surely illegal. Did he remember that both of these kids’ parents were high powered lawyers? He ignored her, whistling happily.

The mournful lowing was audible as soon as they opened the door. Killian sauntered down the stairs as if he was unencumbered instead of juggling two toddlers and a large gun. “What’s that?” Sadie asked.

“That is a big lug who is about to find out that you don’t follow my wife around,” he said lightly.

“No,” she pointed to a spot on the gun. “What’s that?”

“That is the safety, and you mustn’t touch that until you are a big girl and I’ve taught you what to do.”

“I promise,” the usually sassy little girl immediately acquiesced. The man had a way with stroppy females, Cass had to give him that.

They reached the edge of the property. Sadie was set upon the wide stone top of the sturdy fence. Killian turned to hand a very unwilling Oliver to his wife who tried to make light of her hurt feelings. “Oh, it’s all right, Ollie, let’s go have some fun.” Oliver wanted nothing to do with this plan, twisting and wailing in a desperate bid to return to the grasp of his beloved Uncle Killian. The plaintive moaning from over the fence suddenly was more than Cass could bear. She bent awkwardly, the protesting toddler making it nearly impossible, and grabbed up a rock. She pelted it over the fence. “Get out of here, get out!” she yelled. The stone met its target but it only resulted in a brief reprieve from the pitiable noises.

Killian laughed. “His kind only responds to one thing.”

“Honey, please.” He ignored his wife. “It’s not his fault,” she entreated.

“Sadie, covers your ears,” Cass’s husband, who had apparently lost his mind, said.

The little girl happily did as she was told. Lightning quick, Killian cocked the gun and fired it high up above the fence. The loud blast caused a frightened clamoring on the other side of the palisade. Cass couldn't see over the fence, but the sound of hastily retreating hooves told her that, at least temporarily, her swain was scared off. Oliver began to scream lustily, so Cass headed back towards the house. Sadie jumped into Killian's arms.

"What was that?" she demanded delightedly.

"That was a bull moose with very good taste in women," was his reply.

"Who?"

"Aunt Cassie," said Killian with stout loyalty.

The little girl's voice carried over her brother's wails, "Do bull moose know what a circle is? Because Aunt Cassie doesn't."