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What motivated *The Beautifull Cassandra*?

A Fan-Fiction's Answer

Introduction:

Jane Austen's early piece *The Beautifull Cassandra* has stuck in my mind ever since we read it at the semester's beginning. Something about her youthful, rambunctious yet charming character appealed to me as a reader. This became especially true as I read her novels, as I felt such a carefree spirit to be lacking in her novels. Her novels largely matured as Jane Austen herself matured as a writer, yet I could not help but find some traces of the fun Austen had with Cassandra reflected in Charlotte as I read the brief excerpt of *Sanditon*. It is such a shame that she did not live to write more.

Whist thinking of possibly incorporating *The Beautifull Cassandra* into my fan-fiction assignment, I wondered two things: why did Cassandra go on such a wild goose-chase through London to find a "Fortune," and, out of all the Jane Austen couples, who would make interesting parents of such a wild yet charming girl? I first decided that Henry and Catherine Tilney could make an interesting parenting pair for Cassandra, especially since Catherine once lived adventures in her youth and likely no longer does as a mother, and that Catherine as a caring and humble mother would provide a contrast from the Cassandra I wanted to depict. As I wrote, however, I found it harder to shape the "why" to Cassandra's London adventures, especially as I reached the assignment page limit. The "dare" from a seemingly refined Mr. Williams came to

me, and while it sounded childish, it felt like a fun way to lead Cassandra into her adventures and demonstrate a different side to her and their relationship that laid hidden before. I made small changes to the original *Cassandra*, some on purpose to create more interest and allow Henry and Catherine to better fit into the story, and some, like Cassandra having a sister, were done accidentally.

Chapter 1

Henry and Catherine Tilney's parsonage sat on a flat but manicured lawn beside a quaint church, complete with pews and a steeple. The parsonage itself was humbler than Henry was accustomed to after all his years spent in his father's extravagant abbey, while Catherine found it to be quite fine from the moment she visited so many years ago. Its stone walls had been laid down not long after Henry's father had decided that his son would become Woodston's subsequent clergyman. This profession was never envisioned by General Tilney to be his son's sole source of income, for Henry's inheritance would be considerable, yet it was a respectable profession to keep his son occupied and out of any dishonorable business dealings. And thus, Henry and Catherine moved into the Woodston parsonage soon after their marriage on a cool summer's day seventeen years ago.

The squeals of young children could be heard from the window Catherine Tilney sat by as she sketched her husband's church and touched her growing belly. A half-finished bonnet leaned against her chair, a responsibility forgotten. The clouds were growing ominous, as they do in an English summer, and Catherine contemplated when would be a good time to tell the children to return to the indoors. Their smiles and laughter, though, were too irresistible to put an end to just yet. Cassandra, however, was nowhere to be seen. Where did that girl run off to now?

A few yards out from her mother's view sat Cassandra, sitting up in a tree with a novel in hand. Her hair laid matted against the tree's trunk, wild and uncombed, and her eyes quickly moved across the book's pages. A mysterious chest unlocked by a beautiful heroine, and out from it came an ancient document that professed that...

"Cassandra! Thomas! Philip! Adeline! Come inside; a storm is on its way!"

The spell was broken. Cassandra looked up startled from her mother's favorite book, eyes blinking and confused. What was that? Her mother? The clouds overhead did look rather ominous, Cassandra thought, as she jumped down from the tree branch and ran towards her mother's voice. A crack of thunder echoed from the other side of the village just as Cassandra entered through the front door and into her home.

"Why were you not looking after your younger siblings, Cassandra?" scolded her mother as she helped the servant cut carrots for their soup later in the evening. "Reading could have waited until after supper, and it would be good for you to learn how to take care of children before you have some of your own."

"Reading can occur all hours of the day, mother, not just after supper. And why must you always speak of motherhood to me? I am not like those girls we meet in town who marry the first man of acceptable looks and fortune they meet and consequently produce a herd of dependents before the age of twenty."

"Very well, very well. I take it you will meet with the governess tomorrow as we agreed to in the very least? Your father be unhappy if he came home and found that you did not."

To that, Cassandra half-heartedly groaned mumbled a meek yes, for she knew from pervious encounters that she could not express her true interest in her education without inciting her mother to obsess over how eligible men prefer to marry empty minds they can fill to ones

more knowledgeable than their own. Her mother's behavior often perplexed and irritated Catherine, but she was also loving and generous, and Cassandra knew that all her mother did was done with good intentions.

Chapter 2

Cassandra looked up at her bedroom ceiling, watching the specks of dust as they floated overhead. Her bed frame creaked as she sat up and stretched, listening to her mother and siblings walk across the floorboards on their ways to a hot breakfast. Her father would not be home until the end of that week, causing the house to be in mild disarray. Not that Mrs. Tilney did not make a suitable wife who could corral young children and maintain a home, but her husband's prolonged absence always brought down her spirits. Mrs. Tilney could often be found, in place of playing with her children, staring absentmindedly into the distance, and nothing could be perceived from her countenance but wishful melancholy.

Cassandra, thus, knew she had many responsibilities ahead of her, shuffled out of her room and descended the flight of stairs to Mrs. Tilney placing plates in front of her children's eager mouths.

"Come help me serve your brothers and sister, Cassandra. Ms. Thomas and I cannot do this all on our own, especially in my state."

"Yes, of course mother."

She could not wait to leave this place.

Why did they live so humbly like this? Her father was the heir to a large fortune, yet no number of visits to Northanger Abbey, her grandfather's estate, could convince General Tilney that Henry and Catherine could indeed take on that responsibility. The family had grown

accustomed to this way of life, and clergymen typically do not live in extravagant abbeys, yet the Tilneys secretly hoped that eventually at least some of what was due to Henry would be rightfully given to him.

General Tilney had disapproved of her parents' marriage, this much she knew, but as Cassandra looked across the table at her mother, she could not help but find his reasoning that Mrs. Tilney came from a far too humble family to be associated so intimately with his, to be quite ludicrous.

She felt a tug on her arm and looked down to find Thomas, not yet five years old, peering up at her with big brown eyes and a frown.

"Cassy, your eggs will get cold if you don't eat them. Don't let them get cold! I got them from the chickens for you."

"Typical Cassy, always somewhere else. I bet she doesn't even like spending time with us." Chimed in Adeline with her eleven-year-old smirk. Teasing their older sister was always a favorite pastime of her's.

"Adeline, leave your sister be. She has more on her mind to think about than you do." Said Mrs. Tilney with a knowing look. Cassandra shook her head and went back to her eggs, chewing them carefully and slowly.

Why must she keep pestering her about this?

"Thomas," said Cassandra mid-chew, "these are some of the best and freshest eggs I have ever tasted. Thank you so much for getting them for me." She affectionately squeezed his arm, and he looked up at her with the smile she so loved.

Chapter 3

The meetings with their governess Ms. Fairfax that week went as well for Cassandra and Adeline as expected. Cassandra was thoroughly engaged in her French and piano lessons, excelling in both, while Adeline struggled to grasp anything. The poor girl was all looks and no brain, but Ms. Fairfax could not ever fathom telling her that.

Mr. Tilney came home that Saturday to happiness from all, even Cassandra. There was not one person in the parish who did not adore and admire Mr. Tilney. A handsome and learned man, with such a gentlemanly manner, kind countenance, and a fortune awaiting him, was bound to be liked by all who came across him. Mrs. Tilney could not be more delighted.

“Oh, my dear, you are showing even more than when I last saw you! How these children grow so fast.” He said as he kissed his wife on her brunette head. Mrs. Tilney beamed.

“No no no, Henry, I assure you that I look the same as when you left us! Perhaps a bit wearier, since you have been gone, but now that you have returned, all is well.”

The two looked at each other lovingly as Mr. Tilney reached down to pick up his youngest son and placed him on his shoulder. Philip, eight years old, ran around his father’s feet, begging to be let up too.

How could General Tilney not approve of this marriage? Cassandra just could not make sense of it, chiefly perhaps because she had never met the General but in brief when she was just shy of her tenth birthday.

Mr. Tilney brought his bag in and sat down at the dining table to eat what was left of their breakfast. Philip, thinking he was as small as his brother, sat on his father’s lap. Despite the joy that now surrounded him, Cassandra and Mrs. Tilney could make out the harsh lines on Mr.

Tilney's face that came from spending a week at Northanger Abbey. The General was not a warm soul, but visits to him were customary, and there was always a chance that Mr. Tilney's sister whom he loved would be visiting too and greet him with open arms. But she had not been there this time, and Mr. Tilney had been left in the cold abbey with just his equally cold father to keep him company. Walking into his own home in Woodston after Northanger Abbey was always a breath of fresh air.

"I am so glad to be home," said Mr. Tilney, buttered toast in hand, "but next Tuesday, I think we should go on a family trip to town."

"To town?!" Philip said, jump up and down ecstatically on his father's knee. Mr. Tilney winced and put him down. "Will I get to see the circus this time?"

"No, Philip, but your mother needs to make a trip to Bond Street for a dress for her sister's wedding, and to take some of her hats to the shop, but we can most certainly get you some exquisite candies that can be found nowhere else but London while we are there."

While not as exciting as the circus, this seemed to satisfy Philip's desires. He ceased his jumping and Cassandra pulled him unto her knee. Her eyes showed excitement as well. London! Such a happening city, full of varying peoples and shops and culture. And Mr. Williams.

Was that her father's real intentions behind this out-of-the-blue London visit?

Mrs. Tilney's thoughts went right to the same conclusion. Mr. Williams! He would most certainly be in town, and she would contact his mother to make sure of it. Oh, what a lovely pair her Cassandra and Mr. Williams would make!

Mr. Williams. Cassandra groaned at the thought.

Chapter 4

Mrs. Tilney had not always been consumed with the idea of her daughter marrying off, at least not until she met Mr. Williams and his family. Many young men of considerable fortunes expressed interest in her eldest daughter, yet none had made the impression he had. At least on Mrs. Tilney, as her daughter was another matter entirely. But as to why Cassandra Tilney did not look favorably upon this rich and respectful man, no one could guess.

The Tilney family entered the city appearing polished and refined, yet still feeling mildly out-of-place in this place that was not their own. The younger children looked from shop to shop with amazement and wonder. Cassandra wore the bonnet her mother had finished making for her, which she loved more than she believed she could ever love Mr. Williams.

“His home should be right around this corner, Henry. Come on now.”

They came upon a large stone home, sitting in between two equally grand and expensive ones, just around the corner of Bond Street. Philip let go of his mother’s hand, rushed to up its stairs, and knocked excitedly. A refined Mr. Williams steadfastly opened the door with his trademark coiffed hair and bright smile.

“The Tilneys! What a pleasure it is to see you all again this fine afternoon. I heard from my mother that I am charged with escorting you all to Bond Street today for some much-needed shopping?” He looked only at Cassandra as he said this.

The family of six were thus led to the fashionable street by none other than the Mr. Williams, who continued to speak exclusively to Cassandra, much to Mrs. Tilney’s approval.

“You look beautiful today, Miss Cassandra. Your bonnet really brings out the color in your eyes. Did you have it when I saw you last?”

“I’m afraid not, for my mother just finished sewing it yesterday.”

“Well, I will say that it looks perfect on you. Have you been to Bond Street before? It is quite a busy street, probably just your sort of place.”

“Only on a few occasions to help my mother take her hats to the shop there that sells them for us, but I am certain that you are right. I can only stay in Woodston for so long. It is just as small and quiet as you likely remember.”

“Small and quiet, yes, but I feel those are exactly its charms. The constant noise and movement in London can overwhelm the senses if you are like myself and stay here for far too long. Now,” Mr. William’s tone shifted to a whisper, “Do you remember what we agreed to when we spoke during my last visit to Woodston?”

“I most certainly did not, and could not, forget. Such a promise, while outrageous, must be kept.”

“Very well then, Miss Cassandra. I do not think you’ll succeed, but let us see before too many assumptions are made.”

The group made their first stop to the shop and made sure all orders were correct and the Tilney hats were restocked. Yet, just as Mrs. Tilney turned around to spy on the latest developments between Mr. Williams and Cassandra, her eldest daughter was nowhere to be seen.

“Do not worry, Mrs. Tilney,” said Mr. Williams with a laugh, “Miss Cassandra has gone off to make her Fortune, but will return soon.” Mrs. Tilney did not know what to make of this but decided to trust Mr. William’s judgement, and get back to her children and many hats.

The various activities Mr. Williams and Cassandra had dared each other to do for the past few years, since their first meeting, became dodgier as they grew in age. While the period of anticipation between the dare and the act was ridden with anxiety, the challenges, once met,

always brought much excitement to their otherwise dreary lives. Mr. Williams could see himself marrying such a daring and clever woman one day.

Her mother never knew and never realized that what she perceived to be a dislike for Mr. Williams was actually her just an anxiety over seeing him again and proving herself more daring than he.

Cassandra returned nearly seven hours later, exhausted but joyful, with much to tell Mr. Williams, and her mother, that worthy woman, welcomed her back with open arms, a quizzical look given but no questions asked. Cassandra thus whispered to herself, "This is a day well spent." And rested in her mother's embrace.

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Works Cited

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