

Cupid's Poisoned Arrow

"Happy Valentine's Day, Laura," Randy whispered in her ear.

"Thank you, sweetie." Laura rewarded him with a coquettish smile. "I should have expected that you would not treat me to anything but New Orleans' swankiest, most romantic restaurant tonight." She slipped her hand into the crook of Randy's arms and walked with him into the building.

"Monsieur Randy!" The host was ebullient. "Welcome back to Armani's!" He shook Randy's hand and then bowed gallantly to Laura. "Welcome! Welcome, Mademoiselle. I am Anthony, your humble host for this evening."

Randy pursed his lips in an effort to keep from smiling. 'Humble' was not the best word to describe the host. He was surprised that it was even in Anthony's vocabulary.

"Come! Your table is ready." Anthony led them through a maze of tables, to one adorned with a beautiful array of flowers with two tall red candles, giving off a romantic glow.

Laura gasped in surprise and awe, as Anthony held her chair for her. He winked at Randy then withdrew.

As pre-arranged by Randy, a waiter materialized with a bucket with a bottle of champagne on ice and two flutes. With expert technique, he uncorked the champagne and filled their glasses. He vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

Randy raised his toward Laura. "Happy Valentine's Day to the most beautiful girl in the world."

Laura blushed and lowered her eyes.

"Well, it's good to see our psionic officer, enjoying Valentine's Day in our city with a beautiful woman."

Randy jumped at the voice at his shoulder. A tall African-American man dressed in a tuxedo stood with an elegant woman in a sequined gown.

"Mayor Thompson." Randy stood to shake hands with the man. "Hello, Mrs. Thompson."

The mayor's wife, in heels, stood a few inches taller than Randy's five-foot-eight height but she greeted him with a beaming smile and a hug. Introductions and pleasantries were exchanged.

“I’m glad to see this place so busy tonight. They’ve had a hard time of it since Hurricane Katrina,” the mayor sighed. “It received so much damage and they’ve been struggling to survive.”

“It’s always been one of my favorite restaurants,” Randy said. “I didn’t want to see it close, so I’m doing my part to help.”

The mayor and his wife continued to their table. The waiter appeared to take Randy and Laura’s dinner order and then vanished.

Randy leaned forward on his elbows. “You know your eyes are sparkling brighter than the stars tonight?”

“You are so full of crap,” she said with a giggle. “But who cares? Tell me more about my eyes.”

Randy laughed. He reached across the table to grasp both of Laura’s hands and caressed them with his fingers.

“Randy!”

Another voice sounded in his ear. An elderly couple stood next to their table.

“Councilman Nugent,” Randy remained seated and greeted the visitor with much less enthusiasm as he had the mayor.

“I’m treating my wife to a Valentine’s Day dinner.” The councilman introduced the lady, who stepped forward beaming a huge smile like an excited schoolgirl.

“This place is so beautiful,” she breathed in excitement as she shook Randy and Laura’s hands. “The candles are so romantic! I’m already getting teary eyed, because I can see halos of light around every one of them.” She gasped as she glanced around the restaurant. “Oh, there’s Mayor and Mrs. Thompson.” She hurried off in their direction.

The councilman nodded at Randy and walked away, but did not follow his wife to the mayor’s table. Instead, he strode to another where the host was waiting.

Randy noted the snub to the mayor but also the cold look Anthony gave the councilman as he sat. There was none of the congenial exchange as there was at Randy and Laura’s arrival.

“What was that all about?” Laura asked.

“Councilman Nugent has been implicated as having voted down many proposals that would have improved and strengthened the levees before Hurricane Katrina. This restaurant suffered heavy damage when the levees failed,” Randy explained.

“So that’s why Anthony was kind of rude,” she wondered aloud.

“And that’s why Nugent ignored the mayor, too. There’s been plenty of finger-pointing in the closed chambers downtown,” Randy remarked with a voice loaded with disgust.

Eager to change the subject to something less inflammatory, Laura reminded him that he had been telling her about her eyes, batting her lashes at him. Just as eager, Randy resumed his smooth talking.

Out of the corner of his eye, Randy caught a flash of color. He turned to see a young woman in a revealing dress with an ample bosom standing at the host’s station. While Anthony scrutinized his seating chart, the woman fixed a cold glare into the restaurant. Randy turned to follow her gaze.

Councilman Nugent was staring back at her, matching the woman’s hostility. Anthony guided her to a table and pulled a chair out for her. She sat down with a show of airs, keeping her mouth fixed in a pout. Mrs. Nugent was studying her menu and did not witness the quiet exchange.

“Eyes back in your head, Randy,” Laura teased. She had seen what transpired, so she was not jealous. But there were some limits to her ideals.

“I think the live entertainment has just arrived,” Randy remarked.

The waiter showed up with the appetizer they had ordered – queso fundido. Anthony shooed the waiter away, preferring to serve them himself. He poured a shot of rum on top of the cheese and chorizo dish, but before he could light it, Randy stopped him.

“Allow me,” he said politely. He snapped his fingers and the rum ignited. Anthony had anticipated this demonstration of pyrokinesis, having witnessed it before, and stepped back to a safe distance. Impressed, Laura clapped her hands.

As Anthony stirred the flaming liquid into the tasty mixture, Mrs. Nugent passed by their table, waving to them as she did, on her way to the ladies’ room. The second she disappeared, the young voluptuous woman that had traded scowls with the councilman sashayed to his table, sitting in his wife’s vacant chair. As soon as she sat down, a whispered but heated confrontation ensued with intense glares, animated gestures and accusing fingers jabbed at each other.

“I was wondering when the floor show was going to start,” Laura said with a lilt in her voice, enjoying the scene

The woman appeared to have pre-cognitive ability, because she stalked away in a huff the second before Mrs. Nugent emerged from the ladies’ room.

“Great timing,” Randy murmured.

The appetizer was delicious and quickly disappeared. The waiter returned with their entrees. Councilman Nugent walked by, ignoring Randy and Laura. In a re-creation of the previous scene, the mayor moved to talk to Mrs. Nugent.

“Act two,” Laura smirked.

This conversation had none of the earlier dramatics as Mrs. Nugent beamed at the mayor, who showed chivalrous manners. However, the mayor lacked the buxom young woman’s timing, because the councilman returned in time to see him leave the table. The two city officials glared at each other but said nothing.

“Well, that scene was boring,” Laura said in mock disgust.

“But it did end in a cliffhanger,” Randy said.

“Good point,” Laura giggled.

They savored the delectable entrees, while giving each other flirty looks, sweet nuthins and soft caresses.

The chef rushed by their table so fast that he created a breeze that almost blew out their candles. He strode to the councilman’s table.

“Act three!” Randy nodded in that direction.

Although the men tried to keep their voices low, their heated conversation rose to a shouting match. The chef accused the councilman of corruption and blamed him for the disregard of the levees, which resulted in the near-destruction of the restaurant.

Standing to face the chef eye to eye, Councilman Nugent countered that the surveys which declared the levees unsafe were flawed so no one could have predicted they would fail. He added that he wasn’t the only one on the city council that rejected efforts to improve the levees. He turned to give the mayor a significant look.

When it appeared that the men were about to come to blows, Randy and the mayor jumped up and rushed to the table to separate them. Mrs. Nugent sat in stunned silence, with her hands over her mouth in wide-eyed horror. Randy grabbed the chef and prodded him back toward the kitchens. The mayor pulled the councilman aside, scolding him in hushed tones. Finally gathering her wits, Mrs. Nugent stood and intervened. She took her husband by the arm and guided him back to his chair. Happy to relinquish his burden, the mayor returned to his seat.

“This is the best Valentine’s Day floor show I have ever seen!” Laura hugged Randy when he came back from depositing the chef in the kitchen.

“I arranged all of this just for beautiful you,” Randy said with the casual air as if it were nothing.

“There goes that crap again,” Laura giggled. “But keep talking!” She nibbled her food demurely while Randy launched into an impressive list of her most gorgeous features.

Soon dinner was finished and the waiter cleared away the dishes. Randy winked at Anthony in another pre-arranged signal. Seconds later, the waiter appeared with a shiny ornate fondue pot with piles of fresh strawberries.

“Chocolate!” Laura gasped in a low, lusty voice. She grabbed a skewer, dunking a strawberry into the liquid heaven and savored the flavors. Randy watched with satisfaction at his date’s obvious enjoyment.

A scream pierced the romantic atmosphere. Mrs. Nugent jumped up, frantically brushing her arms as if trying to sweep something off of them.

“Get them off! Get them off!” She screamed in hysterics as her husband rose to calm her. His efforts were futile, and Randy, the mayor, Anthony, waiters and other patrons rushed to his aid. Mrs. Nugent continued to scream, brushing imaginary creatures off of her limbs, torso and her hair, messing up a perfectly coifed style. Even though strong hands tried to restrain her, she dropped to the floor and began to retch.

Convulsing in agony and throwing up, Mrs. Nugent was unaware of the group trying to help her. The stench from her vomit was overwhelming, but nobody balked. Randy heard several people calling 9-1-1.

The councilman squatted next to her and stroked his wife’s matted hair. He talked to her in soft tones, soothing her as she dry-heaved after having completely emptied the contents of her stomach.

She gave one last shudder and then laid still.

“Helen! No!” Councilman Nugent collapsed over his wife’s body, sobbing.

Randy stood up straight and pointed at the front door. With a nudge of telekinesis, it slammed shut and the deadbolt slid over locking the door with a loud pop. A couple had been leaving but their exit was abruptly halted.

Randy pointed toward the kitchen. Inside, cooks and chefs were surprised when the backdoor banged shut and locked itself as well.

“What’s going on?” Anthony asked alarmed.

“I think Mrs. Nugent was murdered,” Randy whispered so the restaurant patrons and employees could not hear.

“Murdered?” The councilman shouted, spoiling Randy’s precautions. Gasps of horror rippled through the crowd.

Randy sighed in annoyance. “Your wife showed symptoms of acute foxglove poisoning, Councilman. Seeing halos around light, hallucinations and vomiting. What did your wife eat this evening?”

Nugent, still holding his wife’s body, paused to remember the meal finished only minutes ago. “She had the shrimp and scallops, but she didn’t care for it, so she traded with me. I had the filet mignon.” A look of astonishment crept over his face. “That means someone tried to kill me and murdered Helen instead!”

His face contorted in fury as he laid eyes on the chef who had come out of the kitchens during the commotion. “YOU! You killed my wife! You poisoned her!” Dropping Helen, Nugent lunged at the chef reaching for his throat.

Randy intercepted him in mid-flight and with a thought knocked him backwards into the table, almost knocking it over.

“You blame me for the restaurant nearly getting destroyed in the hurricane, so you decided to get revenge on me!” Councilman Nugent recovered from the shove and looked around the room. “Or maybe it was you!” He pointed at the mayor.

“Get a hold of yourself, George!” The mayor snapped. “You’re just paranoid. You’re tossing around accusations without thinking properly.”

Nugent continued as though he hadn’t heard. “You thought you could get me out of the way and then make me the fall guy for all of the Hurricane Katrina corruption charges!”

Before the mayor could respond, another figure caught the councilman’s eye.

“Don’t look at me, George!” The young woman who had argued with him earlier shrieked. “If I wanted to kill you, I wouldn’t have missed.” She crossed her arms over her large bosom. “Hypothetically speaking, of course,” she glanced at Randy.

Randy nodded to indicate that he understood.

Nugent sat down on the floor and started to sob again. “Everybody hates me so much for no reason and now they’ve killed my sweet precious wife who never harmed a soul in her life.”

“Does that ‘everybody’ include you, Mr. Councilman?” Randy asked in a calm voice.

“Wh-what do you mean?” Nugent stammered and blubbered.

“Your wife was seeing halos around candle flames when you two came in tonight. That means that she had already been suffering from poison long before dinner.” Randy paused for effect. “Nobody in the restaurant could have had an opportunity to poison your wife over a period of time like that.”

The councilman slumped, speechless while everyone looked down at him in disgust. An ambulance pulled up outside and Randy unlocked and opened both doors with a slight gesture.

The mayor followed Randy back to where Laura was waiting.

“Why, Randy? Why did he do it?” The mayor asked.

“For as many reasons as he had accusations,” Randy answered. “He felt he could pin it on anyone of you and get his own form of revenge.”