

A Book By Any Other Cover

by

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Setting

An outdoor picnic table with a trash can nearby.

Time

Now and then.

Cast

KEN - Man in his 20s-40s.

CYNTHIA - Woman in her 20s-40s.

(Lights up on KEN, who sits at a picnic table, and has just started eating his lunch. He's a pleasant enough looking fellow, wearing glasses with Coke-bottle thick lenses. He scrolls on his phone as CYNTHIA enters carrying her lunch. She sits down next to KEN, but not too close. She is a pleasant enough looking woman, with a Southern accent as thick as KEN's glasses.)

CYNTHIA

Well, if it isn't my favorite co-worker in the entire world! How was your cubicle this morning, you sweet thing?

KEN

Amazing. It's the best cubicle ever.

CYNTHIA

My Lord, it is so nice to be able to come outside and eat lunch. I swear, they must keep it at sixty degrees in there.

KEN

I think it's to keep us awake. You know, if people are too comfortable, they can get kind of sleepy...it starts to impact productivity and whatnot.

CYNTHIA

Well, God forbid we should be comfortable.

(CYNTHIA unpacks her lunch, shooting glances at KEN as he resumes scrolling on his phone.)

CYNTHIA

So...TGIF! Any plans for the weekend?

KEN

Not really. Think I might get my car washed. You?

CYNTHIA

No. I suppose I could reorganize my closet, but then, every time I open it, I look inside and I just think, "Nope. Not happening."

(They both focus on their lunches for a moment.)

CYNTHIA

So, Ken...I was wondering. There's something I might kind of like to talk to you about.

KEN

Oh yeah?

CYNTHIA

But the thing of it is, if I do talk to you about it, you might think that I am a horrible person.

KEN

Why would I think that?

CYNTHIA

Well, it's...oh God...it's just not appropriate. It's wrong! I know that, but I still want to talk to you about it, and may the Lord forgive me.

KEN

Okay.

CYNTHIA

I mean...how long have we worked together now?

KEN

Oh jeez...nearly three years.

CYNTHIA

And we like working together, don't we?

KEN

Absolutely! You're great!

CYNTHIA

Could you maybe expand on that just a little bit?

KEN

Well...you're smart, you're funny, I know I can count on you any time I need help with anything. You're by far my favorite person in the whole office.

CYNTHIA

Oh, that is so nice to hear! That is wonderful! And I think you probably already know...I feel the same way about you.

KEN

Well, I kind of hoped you did, but it's nice to hear you say it.

CYNTHIA

So...this is where's it's going to get hard, but I told myself I was going to do this, and let the chips fall where they may, so to speak. It's...oh God...

KEN

What?

CYNTHIA

No...you know what? The sun is shining, the sky is blue...let's just eat our lunches like always and enjoy the day.

KEN

No, Cynthia, what is it you want to say?

CYNTHIA

You have to promise that you won't stop talking to me if I tell you.

KEN

I promise.

CYNTHIA

All right. Well, it's not exactly a secret that I am currently unattached, so to speak.

KEN

Me too!

CYNTHIA

I know that. And many's the time that I have thought to myself, "I should ask Ken if he wants to go out after work. Maybe there's a concert he wants to see or a new restaurant or something." Because you're a really wonderful man. I've known you long enough now, I see all the little things you do to try and make other people happy...the birthday cards you bring in for co-workers, when you bake your oatmeal raisin cookies and all...but I have never asked you out for one very simple reason, and it's a reason that I am so ashamed of that I can barely bring myself to tell you.

KEN

What? What is it?

CYNTHIA

It's your glasses.

KEN

My glasses?

CYNTHIA

They're horrible. I mean, hoo daddy! I don't even want to know how thick those lenses are, but I feel pretty sure they could stop a bullet, you know what I mean? But then I stop myself. I do. I say to myself, "Cynthia, it's just a pair of damned glasses! What is your problem?" And the best answer I can come up with is that for my entire life, whenever I've seen somebody with glasses like yours, it's always in a movie or some TV show. And the person who wears those glasses is usually some kind of nerd or geek or weirdo loser of some kind. And it's like a signal. This person is hideous. Avoid them at all costs. So I think what happened is I kind of developed a conditioned response to glasses like yours. I see them and it's like seeing a rattlesnake in my underwear drawer. I open it, and I'm like, "Oh my God!" and I can't slam that drawer closed quick enough because I just don't want to see it no more!

KEN

I...don't know what to say.

CYNTHIA

Well, you don't have to say nothing right now, 'cause I'm not done.

KEN

There's more?

CYNTHIA

Oh yeah. You just hang on to your hat mister, 'cause I am only halfway through.

KEN

Great.

CYNTHIA

See, there was this day, maybe a month ago, I stopped by your cubicle, you know, like I always do, and you were sitting there, but you had just taken your glasses off, I think to rub your eyes or something, and I said your name and you turned to me, and you looked at me, without your glasses on, and I swear to God my heart just about burst right then and there. You had this beautiful, poetic, faraway look in your eyes--and I know it's because you couldn't actually see me real well--but it just pierced right through me like an arrow, and not a day has gone by since that I haven't thought about that moment...just how damned handsome you are without those damned glasses.

KEN

Wow...I still don't know what to say. I'm really glad you're telling me this, but I need my glasses.

CYNTHIA

Well...do you?

KEN

What?

CYNTHIA

See, I've been doing some research, and apparently with vision as bad as yours, contact lenses are not going to do it. I understand that. On the other hand, there is this surgery they can do, refractive surgery they call it--

KEN

Yeah, I know. They shoot lasers into your eyes to burn away part of your eyeball. And of course, it's elective surgery, so it's not covered by insurance and it's like two thousand dollars per eye.

CYNTHIA

I would be happy to chip in.

KEN

You would?

CYNTHIA

Or you know what? Forget that. Ken, I will pay for the whole damned procedure.

KEN

Seriously?

CYNTHIA

Swear to God.

KEN

Well, there's possible side effects too.

CYNTHIA

In three percent of cases according to my research, which is pretty low if you ask me. And yes, I know this makes me an incredibly shallow and superficial person, but I can't just snap my fingers and undo a lifetime of social conditioning. On the other hand, and maybe I'm being all pollyanna here and everything, but we're already friends, and I think there's a real good chance that we could be more than friends if...

KEN

You think?

CYNTHIA

I do. I really do. So, I guess what I'm saying, what I'm asking, is would you think about it?

KEN

Well, yeah. Of course I would. But you see...

CYNTHIA

Now don't stop there. We're hanging out on a pretty weird ledge here together right now. But what?

KEN

Well...it's going to make things even weirder.

CYNTHIA

Weirder? I just told you I need you to laser beam your eyeballs before I'll go out with you. It doesn't get any weirder than that.

KEN

I think maybe it does.

CYNTHIA

Seriously?

KEN

Well, it's not like I haven't thought about asking you out...like pretty much every day for the past three years.

CYNTHIA

Oh my word...then why didn't you?

KEN

Because of your accent.

CYNTHIA

What accent?

KEN

You have this incredibly thick Southern accent.

CYNTHIA

Well, of course I do! I was born and raised in Georgia! What kind of accent am I supposed to have?

KEN

I know, I know. I mean, it's one thing at work. I can handle it. I can always just go to my cubicle and put my headphones on. But if we were dating or living together or whatnot, if I was around that accent all the time, I'd want to put a bullet through my head.

CYNTHIA

Are you for real? It's that bad?

KEN

Oh yeah. I mean, it's the same as your conditioned response to my glasses. I hear that accent, and I just think...dumbass. I'm sorry, I do. And yes, it's from TV and movies. Anytime there's a character with a Southern accent, they're usually some kind of inbred, alcoholic, redneck dumbass. And I know that's not you. I do. You're amazing in just about every way a human being can be amazing. But I hear that accent and...

CYNTHIA

You don't need to say another word. Oh my. Well, that is... disappointing. Not that I don't deserve to hear you saying that, I do...and I suppose it's good that we're both being so honest with one another and all.

KEN

I'm sorry. I really am. Like you said, I know it makes me incredibly superficial and shallow, but I can't help it. And besides, what are people always saying? Be happy with yourself! Be happy with who you are, right? Well, this is who we are, I'm Glasses Guy and you're Accent Girl and we need to be happy with that.

CYNTHIA

Bullshit! I'm sorry, but that is just out and out, plain old bullshit. What is the point of being happy with yourself when you don't have someone else to be happy with you? That's what I want! I want you to be happy with me. And I want to be happy with you.

KEN

You're saying we shouldn't be ourselves?

CYNTHIA

I'm saying...sometimes adjustments need to be made.

KEN

Like what?

CYNTHIA

Well...take your glasses off.
 (off his hesitation)
 Just do it. Please...

(KEN removes his glasses and CYNTHIA practically swoons right there.)

CYNTHIA

Oh my Lord...if you are not a hunk of burning love, I don't know what is. Now Ken, I want you to listen to the next thing I say very closely. Are you listening?

(off KEN's nod, adopting an upper class English accent)

Kenneth, without your glasses, the transformation is utterly remarkable. I can easily say without fear of contradiction that I am now looking at the most desirable man I have ever seen in my life.

(KEN scrambles to put his glasses back on. He stares at CYNTHIA.)

KEN

What the hell was that?

CYNTHIA

(Southern accent)

Why I have no idea what y'all are talking about.

(KEN gets the hint and quickly removes his glasses.)

CYNTHIA

(English accent from now on)

That was me, my darling. When I was in high school I was cast as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* whilst in the drama club and found that I had quite an affinity for the English accent. I spent hour upon hour listening to accent recordings to get it just right, and I was so good that from that point on, well, let's just say, I played quite a number of English roles in both high school and at university.

KEN

That's...amazing. That's...wow. Wow wow wow wow wow. That is the sexiest thing I have ever heard in my life.

CYNTHIA

Do you mean it, darling?

KEN

I do...but this is ridiculous! I can't ask you to never speak with a Southern accent again.

CYNTHIA

Why on earth not? If it makes you happy, why not?

KEN

Because that's insane!

CYNTHIA

Kenneth, I'm asking you to have laser beams shot into your eyeballs with a three percent chance of unfortunate side effects. Adopting an English accent seems like a small thing to ask in return.

KEN

But how would you explain it to your family or people in the office?

CYNTHIA

Concussion.

(she bangs her head on the
table)

Oh dear, I appear to have concussed myself, with the result that I can only speak with an English accent now.

KEN

I've heard of that! That does actually happen to people.

CYNTHIA

How wonderful! Apparently I'm one of those people and no one can prove that I'm not.

(beat)

Any plans for the weekend, Kenneth?

KEN

I need to start looking at eye surgery places.

CYNTHIA

The Pure Vision Eye Clinic is three miles from here, reports 97.8% patient satisfaction, and is open until six. Shall we knock off early today?

KEN

We most definitely shall.

(KEN picks up his glasses, but doesn't
put them on as they both stand up.)

CYNTHIA

I'll drive.

KEN

Please.

(as they start walking)

Does this mean we're horrible people?

(CYNTHIA takes KEN's glasses from him.)

CYNTHIA

Who cares, as long as we're horrible together?

(CYNTHIA drops KEN's glasses into the trash can, then takes his hand. He raises it to his lips and kisses it. They both smile and exit together.)

END OF PLAY.