

Disco Gossip
By Erin Yoo

Glop glop. Thunk.

“Next.”

The students shuffled down the line. *Gloop glop. Plunk. Plop.*

“Next.”

The rhythm of sliding lunch trays, scooping, plopping, and glopping made up the monotonous Monday of Lunch Lady C. Although the kids just knew her as “Lady C” since that’s what the brass pin on her upper left chest said, the other lunch ladies called her “C.” No one knew her real name was Cassandra.

“Hey C.” Madsen greeted Cassandra as she walked up to the counter, tugging on her hairnet which was always just barely holding on to her thick, brown curls. She was one of the younger, chattier lunch ladies.

“Madsen,” Cassandra replied as she scooped extra stir-fry for the small sixth-grader who looked like he never had enough to eat. She was not much for talking during shifts, but Madsen was always chattering.

“You hear what Joan said about you?” Madsen asked as she dropped a lump of strawberry pudding onto the small boy’s tray.

“Joan?”

“Mhm.”

Joan was always saying one thing or another about C.

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t have any time for gossip.” Cassandra shrugged it off.

“She said she saw you at the disco hall.” Madsen smiled as if the idea was ridiculous and pure fantasy. It was the way parents smiled when kids explained how they’d seen Santa Claus for real at night.

“Ha, the *disco hall*.” She repeated it again while grinning and shaking her head. Joan was always coming up with the craziest lies.

If you had been listening closely to the beat of Cassandra’s scooping, you would have heard her skip a beat. *Disco hall? No way. She was probably talking about some other disco hall. She*

wasn't talking about the Moo Club... right? This has to be a crazy coincidence.

“Oh...that’s random.” She tried to sound nonchalant, uninterested in this tidbit of gossip. She had to sound like she never cared about the place and never would.

Madsen smiled goofily and said, “Right, that’s what I said! I asked Joan exactly why you of all people would be at the disco hall. You’re the last person to go to the Moo Club for any reason. And that’s exactly what I told her, ‘C’s the last person to go to the Moo Club for any reason!’ ”

Cassandra froze for two more beats while Madsen droned on and two seventh-grade girls stood awkwardly waiting for their food. *Moo Club. So Joan had been talking specifically about Moo Club, but...there’s no way she could know. No one that looked like Joan had been in the audience... so Joan had to be making it up. But why would she have said that?*

“Um, Lady C? Could we get some of the mashed potatoes?” The quiet, young voice pulled Cassandra out of her reverie, and she glooped and glopped two more scoops of mashed potatoes onto the girls’ trays.

Then, she asked Madsen after clearing her throat, “When did Joan say this?” She tried to hide the waver and fluster in her voice, but lucky for her, Madsen did not pay attention to enough details to notice the small voice crack at the end.

“What, the disco thing? Oh, I don’t know. Sometime this morning when we came in for the first shift I think.”

“Who did she tell?”

“Just all of us who were on the first shift, me, Sandra, Denise, but — hey why does it matter? You never care about Joan’s gossip and lies.” Madsen tilted her head to the side and looked at C. It was really unusual for C to be asking about Joan’s gossip in such detail.

Cassandra didn’t dare return Madsen’s stare and continued to scoop the stir-fry, then mashed potatoes.

Gloop gloop glop.

“It’s just weird she would say that.”

Gloop gloop glop.

“Even for Joan’s lies, that’s weird to say.”

Gloop gloop glop.

Madsen finally turned away from C and went back to scooping the strawberry pudding.

“I guess, but she’s said crazier stuff before. I mean, there’s one time she said she heard you singing a disco Jackson 5 song near the fridge in the back... hey, now wait a minute, a lot of her stories about you involve disco. Haha, that’s funny, C and disco.” Madsen laughed and shook her head. Joan always lied about the weirdest things.

Cassandra paused as the line of hungry middle schoolers came to an end. *Disco song near the fridge? Disco song... Oh no. She had sung one time when she thought she was the only person left on duty that day. She never should’ve bought Blame It On the Boogie on vinyl.*

“Ahh, like that would ever happen. I don’t think you even know what disco is,” Madsen said while smiling. Then, she shook her head seriously. “All of us were so done with Joan then. We all told her off and said she should really stop spreading lies about you. She really cares too much about the roll call. Who cares if your name is called first during our meetings? You’ve been here the longest anyway so it only makes sense. She came here months after you, so.”

Cassandra breathed a silent sigh of relief. *Thank god for Madsen and the other girls. They would never believe Joan, especially after all her past lies about each of them. For now, she was safe. No one would have to know that she was the lead disco dancer at the Moo Club.*

Then, Madsen exclaimed after thinking, “Hey, since Joan keeps making stuff up about you loving disco, it’d be funny if you actually really started singing disco. Her lie becomes the truth. Haha, wouldn’t that be funny C? That would really give Joan something to talk about.”

Cassandra walked into the back of the kitchen to clean up, replying, “Ha, yeah. Maybe.” She filled the sink with water and plunged her scooper in, allowing her startled mind to reflect on just how close her secret had been to becoming revealed.

Madsen walked in after her to get the sponges for the countertops, continuing her jibber jabber. “You know, I was thinking, or we were thinking, do you wanna hang out with me, Sandra, and Denise on Saturday? We usually go to the yogurt cafe downtown and walk around the park afterward. You know, we’ve wanted to invite you for a while and Joan won’t be there...”

“Mhmm...” Cassandra pretended to thoughtfully consider the invitation as she put on her rubber gloves to do the dishes. Truth was, Saturdays were her biggest performance days at the Moo Club. Dances started at 11am sharp and ended well past 8pm after the dinner rush.

“Well, just think about it and let us know, okay? No big rush right now, we just wanted to ask in case you were interested because we’d love to have you. But, it’s not a big deal again like I said before.” Madsen soaked her sponges for the countertop and nonchalantly shrugged her shoulders.

Tap tap tap.

Someone was at the counter. Cassandra saw the small sixth grader shyly holding an empty tray. She walked over.

“Hello?”

“Hi Lady C...” he began slowly. After a slight hesitation, he continued, “Could I please have some more stir-fry?”

C gave a kind smile at his request, turning around to get a clean scooper. “Of course. Wait a moment.”

She went back to the kitchen, opening the utensil drawer as Madsen walked out with her soapy sponges to wipe down the dessert counter. *Ah, there was one scooper left — perfect.*

C came back and *gloop glop and glumped* some more stir-fry onto his tray.

“There you go.”

Madsen stopped wiping her counter to lean over and ask the boy, “Hey, do you want more pudding too?”

“No, I’m okay. Thank you though.”

Madsen nodded before going back to wiping. “Okay, but come back if you change your mind. We’ve got a lot in the back and you’re welcome to get more anytime.”

“That goes for any food,” Cassandra added.

The boy nodded, said a quick “thank you” and started to walk towards the cafeteria tables before turning around again.

“Lady C, you’re really amazing in the Moo Club by the way,” he said before quickly walking back to his seat.