

Casanelli's Lover

by

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Background to the Extract

Father David McGrath, a Catholic priest, is tormented by a stranger, Francis Casanelli, who mocks him in the Confessional box and begins to interfere in aspects of his life. Francis begins to date David's closest female friend, Gabrielle, for no reason, it seems, other than to inflame David's jealousy. Worse, he starts to visit the home where David's Alzheimer-stricken father Jack now lives.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Gabrielle holds the cell-phone to her ear, talking quietly in the mainly empty hallway.

GABRIELLE

How is he now?

DAVID (O.S.)

He's resting, comfortable. I don't think he's sustained any damage.

GABRIELLE

Now David. Is there anything I can do?

A girl school child walks passed Gabrielle, her footsteps clattering.

DAVID O.S.

Well.

He pauses.

BACK TO SCENE (David's office)

David holds the phone to his ear. His eyes flicker nervously.

DAVID

You can help me by taking care of yourself.

CUT TO:

GABRIELLE in the CORRIDOR.

The school girl with the clattering feet disappears into a classroom in the distance behind Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

(Whispering)

Now David, who was it who said a good Christian has to learn to

receive as well as to give?

DAVID (O.S.)
No one that I can remember.

GABRIELLE
(Smiling)
Well, I'm saying it now.

BACK TO SCENE

David stares at his desk, not saying anything at first. Then he starts slowly.

DAVID
What I mean is, I worry about you.
Particularly now. I want you to be
careful. Don't rush things.
(Then shakily;)
Romantically, I mean.

CUT TO:

GABRIELLE

She turns uneasily, the cell-phone under her ear.
There is an unhappy silence as her expression
changes.

GABRIELLE
(Gently)
David. This is not a conversation
I really want to be having...now.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVID
When then?

David puts his hand on his forehead as though
realizing he has made a mistake.

CUT TO:

GABRIELLE, shocked -

GABRIELLE
David!

DAVID O.S
I'm sorry.

Gabrielle turns restlessly again, nestling the cell-phone under her ear.

GABRIELLE
(Warmly)
I'm a big girl. I can look after myself.

She tries to inject humour into the situation.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
You're just not used to me spreading my wings, that's all. But I am thirty-five, you know.

BACK TO SCENE

David looks at his desk again, trying to form the right words.

DAVID
(Quietly)
You must forgive me.

There is the faint sound of a bell ringing over the phone.

GABRIELLE O.S.
Hey David, I already do. I've got to go now. You take care and call me.
(Pause)
You too. Caio.

David puts down the phone, his hand shaking slightly. He puts his hands over his face.

INT. CHURCH. SIDE CHAPEL - DAY

David in silent prayer, kneeling, his eyes wandering intently over the brown painted plaster

limbs of Jesus crucified, settling on the wounds of his feet. David closes his eyes.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Light streams in through the church windows, creating a celestial affect.

David, in his vestments, comes from the office onto the altar. He genuflects at the altar and then walks around uncertainly to the confessional.

The church is less than a quarter full for a small service.

INT. CONFESSORIAL (PRIEST'S SIDE) - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

David sits down, looking haggard. His hands cradle his forehead.

DAVID

Go ahead.

VOICE O.S.

Hello again, father.

David sighs slowly, his lip trembling

DAVID

What is it that you want from me?

FRANCIS O.S.

I find it interesting that it's taken you this long to ask the question. You could have asked last night but you didn't.

DAVID

What is that supposed to mean?

FRANCIS O.S.

That you're afraid of the answer.

David looks up and responds still tired but more alert than before.

DAVID

Is there an answer? Do I know you?
Have I ever damaged you in any way?

FRANCIS O.S.

Yes, yes and yes. But I'm not going to go into that now. This is a confession. I have something to confess.

DAVID

Go ahead.

FRANCIS O.S.

I am infected.

DAVID

How? With what?

FRANCIS O.S.

I told you about my lifestyle.
Can't you guess?

DAVID

Are you trying to tell me you're a would-be murderer too?

FRANCIS O.S.

I may turn into one soon.

DAVID

I think you're lying.

FRANCIS O.S.

Why?

DAVID

Because a man faced with his own death reaches into himself to find his morality. He doesn't play games.

FRANCIS O.S.

But I told you my morality, and my God, are as black as midnight.

DAVID

That's a child's game.

The bench creaks on the other side.

FRANCIS O.S.
We'll see. We'll see.

Francis gets up and apparently leaves. David stays where he is for a moment, feeling more confident.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

David approaches the collapsible desk with the white polythene tablecloth, the basket of condoms, and the *Hands Around the World* leaflets. A girl JENNY, looks up at him and smiles.

DAVID
Hi Jenny.
JENNY
David, have you seen our latest fund-raiser?

She hands him a new leaflet.

David is distracted, on a mission of his own.

DAVID
O Great. I'll take a few dozen and put them in the church.

Pleased, Jenny hands him a pile.

DAVID
I wonder have you heard, in any aspect of your work, have you heard of a man called Francis Casanelli.

JENNY
No. Should I have?

David scratches his ear self-consciously.

DAVID
No, not necessarily. I'm just trying to track someone down.

David looks through one of the leaflets self-consciously.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP-BACK ROOM - DAY

Francis is holding an East Indian vase with erotic illustrations-dozens of couples making love in many different positions.

Gabrielle, standing next to him, gazes at the decorations.

GABRIELLE

So, is it genuine?

FRANCIS

That's up to you.

GABRIELLE

What do you mean it's up to me?

FRANCIS

If you think it's beautiful, it's beautiful.

He looks down at Gabrielle's smiling but cynical face.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Objects are worth what people are prepared to pay for them. That's all that matters.

Gabrielle laughs and hesitates.

GABRIELLE

Francis, are you a crook?

Francis looks down at her, eyes twinkling, not at all offended. He hands the vase to her. She cannot believe it at first but his eyes remain on her to show it is a gift.

INT. JACK'S ROOM. HOME - DAY

David and Janet (David's mother) enter with the nurse. Jack is sitting up in an armchair.

DAVID
(To nurse)
He hasn't had any more visitors?

NURSE
Not since yesterday.

DAVID
And my instructions were passed on?

NURSE
No visitors apart from immediate
family. Yes, everyone knows.

She leaves. David approaches his father.

Janet remains in the corner of the room, in shadow.

David kneels down in front of Jack so they are
face to face.

DAVID
Hello, Dad.

Jack stares back at him, totally blank.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Brigit's coming home to see you.
She'll be here next week.

Janet remains in the shadows looking increasingly
nervous and upset. David smiles at his father
patiently.

DAVID (CONT'D)
The whole family back together
again.

JACK
(Very gently)
Who? Who?

Jack looks with confusion into David's face.

DAVID
Brigit. Your daughter.

Janet, suddenly overcome, turns and leaves the room. David turns and watches the door close. Then he looks sadly at his father.

EXT. PARKING LOT - EARLY EVENING

David and Janet walk towards David's car. Janet seems strangely on edge.

JANET

You look very tired yourself today,
David.

DAVID

It's been very tough recently.

JANET

And there I was thinking how easy
you've had it all these years.

DAVID

What?

They stop on each side of the car, talking over the bonnet. David gets out his keys.

JANET

I just find myself envying your
cloistered existence, your
moral certainties.

David is annoyed and resigned at the same time.

DAVID

There is nothing cloistered about
my life at present. And if I have
moral certainties they are more
likely to have come from you and
Dad than from any form of
structured learning or prayer.

Janet suddenly opens the car door.

JANET

Well, I hope your faith goes
further than the two of us.

She gets in before he has a chance to reply and leaves him standing. He slowly opens the door and gets in.

INT. SITTING ROOM - EVENING

David leans forward counseling the woman in her sixties whose husband died in the hospital. There is a cup of coffee perched on the chair arm. Numerous cards of sympathy scatter the room.

DAVID

You know when we talk about finding meaning in death, we don't mean anything glib or perfunctory. There's no hurry. Sometimes it takes months or years to feel the pain and, yes, the injustice of it all. My idea of the Creator is that He or She has infinite patience and has no intention of trying to push us into insincere acceptance.

The woman hesitates, deferring yet unconvinced.

WOMAN

I understand that, Father David. But I feel as though it's worse

WOMAN (CONT'D)

than just not accepting. I see the pain and the injustice, as you say, and I just don't know why.

Why is it there at all?

She looks at him through her pain and confusion, aware he cannot answer.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

And I keep coming back to it over and over again, what I was told as a child about how it's all a mystery. How not to question. And it's just not enough anymore.

She looks at him blankly. David looks to the

ground, betraying his own tiredness, the fact he cannot deal with this as well as he used to.

EXT. GABRIELLE'S STREET - NIGHT

David's car pulls up and parks in the only available space. The lights stay on.

INT. DRIVER'S SEAT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

David looks out, gimlet eyed, hunched over. A light is on in Gabrielle's third floor apartment. He stares at it for a long time.

EXT. GABRIELLE'S STREET - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

David's headlights are now off. Francis comes out of the ground floor of Gabrielle's house. He takes out a bunch of keys, crosses the road.

INT. DRIVER'S SEAT - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

As Francis crosses the street, David's hand reaches for the keys in the ignition. He breathes uneasily. Francis climbs into a red Porsche and the moment is lost.

David looks suddenly shocked at himself, at what he was just thinking. He mumbles to himself.

DAVID

Get a grip! Get a grip!

The Porsche lights up and zooms away. David drums the steering wheel, thinking. Suddenly, he removes his seatbelt as though going into battle and gets out of the car.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

David arrives at the door buzzer. Again, he pauses, then presses it.

GABRIELLE O.S.

Hello?

DAVID

Gabrielle. David. Can I come up?

GABRIELLE O.S.

(Surprised)

Oh David. Yes of course.

There is a buzzing noise and David pushes open the door.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

David, wired, climbs the stairs two at a time. He reaches the door on the third level as it opens.

Gabrielle, in a red dress, her raven hair pulled up with black tresses descending, appears in the doorway.

GABRIELLE

Hello.

David stops. There is an awkward second while he takes in her sudden beauty.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

How is everything?

David says nothing. Gabrielle, more worried, gestures inside.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

(Quietly)

Come in.

They enter GABRIELLE'S APARTMENT.

Candles burn on the table and the lights are low; aftermath of a romantic meal. And Italian opera CD lays on the sideboard.

Gabrielle circles awkwardly to the sofa and David's eyes wander into the bedroom through the half open door. The covers are smooth and undisturbed.

GABRIELLE

You seem very serious and silent.
What's wrong?

David perches on a chair opposite Gabrielle.

DAVID
What's wrong is I have to overstep
a line. I have to give advice that
will be unwanted.

Gabrielle turns and circles the room, putting her hand on her earring as though to unfasten it.

GABRIELLE
(Quietly)
Oh? What advice is that?

She stops and sits down to face the inevitable.

DAVID
It's about you. You and Francis Casanelli.

Gabrielle looks at him not surprised but discomfited and embarrassed.

GABRIELLE
Yes?

DAVID
He is not a good man.

Gabrielle scrutinizes her old friend sadly.

GABRIELLE
I'm trying to work out what all this means.

David looks down. Gabrielle continues quietly.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
Please tell me you weren't watching outside? Tell me you weren't waiting on the street until Francis left?

DAVID
You don't understand. It's more

important than me. You're in danger.

Gabrielle looks to the floor and speaks almost in a whisper.

GABRIELLE

It seems to me David as though you're the one in danger. I think for both of our sakes you really ought to be going. Before you say say anything else.

David gets up reluctantly. Gabrielle slips by him quickly and opens the door. David hesitates on the way out.

DAVID (CONT'D)

At least...at least protect yourself.

He stops half way through the open door.

GABRIELLE

"Protect myself"?

DAVID

Use a condom.

Gabrielle looks away as though receiving a blow. David cringes. Gabrielle closes the door on him.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

David leans backwards against the wall, closing his eyes in despair.

BACK TO SCENE

Gabrielle leans backwards against the door hugging herself as though grieving.

INT. STATIONARY CAR - NIGHT

David breathes heavily in semi shock behind the wheel

on Gabrielle's street.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM/OFFICE - NIGHT

David asleep, breathing uneasily, an empty glass - whiskey style tumbler - is on the side table.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JACK'S ROOM - DAY (DAVID'S DREAM)

Bright light streams in through the window. Blossoms and leaves twirl as in a vision of paradise.

Jack, in bed, gasps for breath. David stands in the corner of the room.

Francis appears beside him, dressed in a white doctor's coat. He has a pillow in his hands. He approaches the helpless Jack and starts to smother him.

David remains in the corner sweating, apparently unable to move.

DAVID
(Screaming)
Bastard! Bastard!

Francis looks towards him - not in mockery surprisingly, but with more than a hint of sympathy. Janet appears by the bed also.

DAVID
Mother. Stop him! Stop him!

Jack's arms and legs begin thrashing about.

Janet puts her hands over another section of the pillow, helping Francis.

DAVID (CONT'D)
NO!

BACK TO SCENE

David thrashes about in bed like his father in the dream. He suddenly wakes.

DAVID
Oh God! Oh God!

He peers into the darkness as the dream dispels.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

David saying a funeral mass, blessing the Eucharist. He is haggard and distracted.

INT. CHURCH LOBBY - DAY

It is after a funeral. People in black go past on their way out shaking Father David's hand. Some of them look puzzled at him as they walk past. Others look hurt.

A woman stops as he holds out his hand and doesn't take it. David is shocked as he meets her accusing eyes.

WOMAN
It's hard enough to lose a father
without having the priest get
his name wrong in his funeral
service.

A man puts his arm around the woman and shepherds her away.

David puts his hand out weakly for the next person, trying to keep some sense of composure.

INT. SIDE CHAPEL - NIGHT

David prays hard, his head down, his hands in front of his face. A tear oozes out from his palm and runs down his chin.

INT. ARRIVALS LOUNGE AIRPORT - DAY

David waits at the arrivals counter. He looks very tired.

The security doors slide back and several travelers come through, one of whom is a stocky woman in her early 40s, David's sister BRIGIT.

David smiles and approaches. They hug uneasily.

BRIGIT

How's my little priest?

INT. AIRPORT CORRIDOR - DAY

David wheels a trolley, Brigit walks by his side.

DAVID

So what did she tell you on the phone?

BRIGIT

You know Mom. Not much. Just about how upset she is that he doesn't recognize anyone anymore.

DAVID

Well, it's hard for her.

Brigit looks at David.

BRIGIT

Don't worry David, she'll look after herself.

David looks at his sister with disapproval. Brigit smiles.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Oh, but of course, you don't want to hear that. But you'll be glad to know I'm writing a speech about Father for the next party conference. So I can do the 'dutiful child' thing too.

David frowns.

DAVID

Does it have to be in a political

context?

BRIGIT
I'm a politician, remember? Like
BRIGIT (CONT'D)
Dad...

She sees him wince.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)
Yes, just like him, once you strip
his cult leader veneer away.

DAVID
Is that what you're going to write?

BRIGIT
Oh no, what I write will be
inspired in all the right places.
You'll be proud.

DAVID
I'll never be proud of insincerity.

BRIGIT
So why are you allowed to write
glowing tributes in your parish
bulletin? Our mother sends those
to me, unfortunately.

DAVID
Because I mean it. And I don't
belong to a party which seeks to
use things...

BRIGIT
Oh give me a break! Yes you do.
You're a politician just like I am.
You just play in a much lower
division that's all.

She holds out her hand.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)
Bathroom stop!

David stands by the trolley and watches his sister

disappear.

INT. JACK'S ROOM - DAY

David stands near the door with Janet. Brigit is kneeling up close to Jack holding a luminous glass bottle with a ship which she shakes causing a snow storm effect.

BRIGIT

What do you think, Dad?

Jack is reacting to the glowing snow storm, his eyes lighting, his hand slowly reaching for the bottle.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Reminds you of your adventurous days?

JANET

Oh. Foolish.

Janet is clearly discomfited. This is as animated as we have ever seen Jack. He takes the bottle and stares at it.

BRIGIT

That's the ship of dreams that carried you from Ireland as a boy.

David looks on amazed by the effect his sister has on his father. Through his tiredness, it appears to be giving him joy. There are tears welling up in Jack's eyes.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Remember the snowstorm? Remember how the ship swayed? How you felt like a spec in a dark, furious universe?

JANET

Brigit, don't.

BRIGIT

It's O.K.

JACK

I clung on.

BRIGIT

For sweet life. Clung on to anything warm.

Bright encircles Jack's hands over the bottle.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Well, you're safe now, Dad.

David looks on impressed; Janet is resentful of her daughter.

INT. GABRIELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gabrielle sits in her armchair, casually dressed. CDs of Italian opera; La Traviata, La Boheme etc, are discarded on the floor.

The music playing is something far more ecclesiastical and solemn, perhaps Faure's Requiem.

Gabrielle's eyes are welling up.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

David and Bright sit at the bar. Both have pints of beer in front of them.

BRIGIT

It's not a miracle, you know, David.
You can take that awestruck, 'I've
just seen a vision of the Virgin
Mary' look off your face.

DAVID

It seems like one to me.

BRIGIT

I just know him better than you,
that's all. You were the youngest.
And you were a boy. So you were
protected from everything.

She pauses again and takes a sip. She scrutinizes her brother.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Although that has a funny way of catching up.

David looks worried. His face twitches slightly, a nervous reflex which is becoming familiar.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

I sense trouble. I'm not wrong, am I?

David stiffens and becomes proud.

DAVID

What kind of trouble do you *think* you sense?

BRIGIT

Oh I don't know. Judging from the way you look up every time you hear a female voice I would say it's ...*that* kind of trouble. You were not built to be celibate, believe me.

David looks surprised and then resentful. He takes a nervous gulp of beer.

BRIGIT (CONT'D)

Or maybe it's more serious even than that.

David thinks for a moment.

DAVID

Brigit, someone, a stranger has been coming to see Dad and upsetting him deliberately. I know who it is, but I'm not sure if I can tell you.

BRIGIT

Why can't you tell me?

DAVID

There is a vow involved. The Confessional.

BRIGIT

Oh for God's sake David. Nobody cares about that anymore.

David grips his glass.

DAVID

I do.

BRIGIT

All right. So what's the point in telling me about it?

DAVID

Do you know anyone with a grudge against our family?

Brigit starts laughing.

BRIGIT

Oh David you really are something else... "do I know anyone with a grudge..." Our father was a power politician. Face it. Not Mother Theresa. Not Gandhi. Thousands hold grudges against us. And some of them are justified.

Confusion trails into annoyance on David's face. Brigit continues to stare at him.

She holds up her glass in a 'cheers' gesture.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Rain streaks the windshield. Gabrielle drives looking determined and nervous. She is on the same road as David's church.

A dark figure - David, now alone - becomes visible through the glass. He is turning the corner to his home entrance. He has an umbrella

Gabrielle turns also. David sees the headlights roll

up next to his own parked car in his driveway. He stops with his keys in the door of his small apartment.

Gabrielle turns off the lights and gets out of the car.

GABRIELLE

David. We must speak.

She approaches.

DAVID

Of course.

David opens the door.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM/OFFICE - NIGHT

David and Gabrielle enter. There is a strange hush between them as David motions Gabrielle to an armchair and David pulls his chair around to face her.

DAVID

Oh, can I get you a drink?

Gabrielle hesitates for a second. Her eyes seem dilated.

GABRIELLE

Er...yes. The hard stuff if you've got it.

David crosses to a small side desk, produces scotch and pours out two drinks-one in a mug that he takes himself, the other in a glass which he hands to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle takes a sip, turns away to scan a bookshelf.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

You know the irony is the man really is a complete gentleman.

She sways towards David, her arms folded in front

of her chest, cradling her drink.

DAVID
I hope he stays so.

GABRIELLE
He shows no signs of changing.

David looks at her searchingly.

DAVID
So have you forgiven me?

GABRIELLE
"Forgiven"?

Gabrielle laughs gently and shakes her head.

DAVID
What I mean is; how did things
change enough for you to come here?

GABRIELLE
I was thinking of mis-communication.
If that's a real word. Yours and
mine. Mine and Francis'.

She stops and considers.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
Francisis'.

She laughs again. David frowns. Is she drunk?

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
Me thinking it was sex and
flirtatiousness when it was
something deeper, almost spiritual
in fact. With Francis, I mean.

She stops dead and looks at David.

David is pained and skeptical.

DAVID
I hate asking you to be less
trusting.

GABRIELLE
You don't have to ask anything.

She takes a gulp of her drink.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
And then there is you. Another kind
of mis-communication.

She roots him to the spot with her eyes.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
What is our relationship, David?
Why did you interest yourself so
much in who I was seeing and what
he was doing to me?

DAVID
There's something you don't know.
Something I can't tell you.

GABRIELLE
David, that's far too convenient.
Whatever is going on that's too
GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
convenient. I think you're so used
to secrecy it's become your natural
hideout.

DAVID
Don't patronize me, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE
David, I saw you! I saw the
look in your eyes when you came to
my apartment, the way you scanned
my bedroom. Can you honestly say
you weren't jealous?

David looks down.

CUT TO:

REPLAY OF EARLIER SCENE

INT. GABRIELLE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gabrielle, in a red dress, circles awkwardly to the sofa.

David's eyes wander to the bed through the half open bedroom door.

The covers are smooth and undisturbed. Relief is tangible on David's face.

When he looks back at Gabrielle, the muted light seems to catch her beauty - black hair up but trailing dark rivulets around her neck.

David is rooted to the spot.

BACK TO SCENE

David looks up at Gabrielle, a light of recognition in his eyes.

GABRIELLE

So what happens now? I'm on your turf. You can throw me out if you like.

She looks up at David hopefully. David turns away and crosses to the desk. He pours himself another drink and holds the bottle in his other hand.

DAVID

You're going to confound me, Gabrielle. You're going to unpick the whole pattern. This stuff shouldn't have got caught up in it at all.

GABRIELLE

But it has.

David looks totally defeated.

DAVID

Yes.

GABRIELLE

I'm sorry. I can't un-say it. I

can't un-feel things either. Can you?

David approaches with the bottle, pours whiskey into the glass Gabrielle has outstretched.

DAVID

No, Gabrielle I can't un-feel.

Gabrielle takes the bottle from David. She bends down, puts it upright onto the floor. It wobbles and then stands still.

Gabrielle takes a step forward and, with her glass still in her hand, puts her arm over David's shoulder, pressing her face close to his neck.

David's lips part slowly as he feels the warmth of her chest against his.

GABRIELLE

I just wanted to feel you like this once. I'll leave the rest to you.

They part and she leaves, her eyes cast backwards at David with affection and longing.