

**COCAINE  
CASSIE  
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT**

**Cassie Sainsbury**



First published in 2024 by New Holland Publishers  
Sydney

Level 1, 178 Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga, NSW 2076,  
Australia

[newhollandpublishers.com](http://newhollandpublishers.com)

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ISBN 9781760796693

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## **A Trip to Remember**

### **November 2016**

It's interesting to think, I had very few times spoken to a Nick while working with Peter, I never had a name to the face, but his accent was British. His phone calls would always come through on WhatsApp as an overseas number. Peter told me that he was a business partner, I never thought twice about this. Until later, when Wendy introduced me to a Nick, saying he was her business partner, now if he hadn't spoken, I wouldn't have put it together but when he did, I heard that same British accent that I had once spoken to over the phone. He was tall, tanned, closely shaven head, lots of tattoos on his arms; snakes, dragons, and foreign words. But he was very well dressed, businessman like actually. Wendy told me that he was in town as he was about to head overseas with some girls as they often go with him for business and get to do sightseeing and travel. I thought it was rather intriguing, I did ponder for a minute and wonder what the work entailed but I didn't want to go down that rabbit hole and get stuck in a situation that I didn't want to be in again. I was surprised, this same man was in both the tourism and sex club industry?

Wendy mentioned to me later that she would be going with Nick for work and that she wanted me to tag along, that we would finally get some 'alone time' without everyone being in our business, she said she wanted to travel and get away with me so we could finally be honest with ourselves. I did not see this coming, not from her, not so direct, I think I had finally convinced myself that there was nothing between us and now she goes and says all of this? Brazil, a land of hot, cultural, Latin chaos. She told me how she wanted to spend each moment with me, it was music to my ears. She told me that Nick was going to have a chat with me and fill me in on when we were supposed to travel, she told me that she

would take care of everything else. “You saved my ass here. Now let me treat you. I will treat you the way you deserve to be treated.”

After agreeing to Nick’s proposal, the process became a chaotic ordeal. Wendy expressed dissatisfaction with the initially planned travel dates and later conveyed her unavailability for the trip. It was all stop and start continuously. I began to believe that it wasn’t going to happen, which was somewhat disappointing.

The departure dates would be provided – 10th December – 28th December – 19th January – only to be changed repeatedly at the last minute. The intended destination was Brazil, specifically São Paulo, and Wendy and I enthusiastically began crafting extensive travel plans, outlining what we intended to explore during our stay. I was now officially excited. I didn’t know how much homosexuality was accepted over there, but I was excited to explore where this trip would take our friendship.

It was now February. I hadn’t heard any updates. I was anticipating confirmation of our booked flights. I awaited the news eagerly. However, in an unexpected turn, Nick informed me that he had assigned Lynda. Same Lynda from the Club. He would send ladies from the club to the Brazil trip instead. His rationale was based on Lynda’s familiarity with the client and the country, and he expressed concerns about Wendy and me navigating the unfamiliar terrain. I will admit, the fact that we had planned a whole trip based around Brazil had been shut down, I really thought that this trip was never going to happen. Nick then disclosed his alternate plan to send us to either Hong Kong or England. Given my long-standing desire to visit England, I expressed my preference for the latter. Wendy continued to tell me about the plans to go to England, “I can’t wait to take you to England so you can see where you’re partly from, I’m so excited to do this for you. I want to be the one to spoil you on this trip. I want to show you how much you mean to me. Just imagine everything we can do over there!” She told me that she dreamt of being with me. I would finally get to see where part of my family had been born. Nick assured me to be patient, assuring me that he would coordinate the details and liaise with Wendy. My dream destination. Were my dreams finally becoming a reality?

Fast forward to the end of March 2017, nearly two months later, I received a phone call notifying me that everything was arranged for the first week of April and that I should prepare accordingly, which meant it was time to pack. It was finally happening. An email containing the flight itinerary and confirmation of a reserved and paid-for reservation was promised. On the 27th of March I received the flight details, revealing a journey to London scheduled for my departure from Australia on the 2nd of April. It was days away. I was so close to leaving. I could taste the freedom. Excitedly, I immediately called Wendy to share the news, discovering that she too had received the itinerary, which I should have expected really, considering we were going together. Despite her initial expectation of backpacking in South America, she acknowledged the allure of exploring London's many attractions. "We get to see so many other exciting things" she told me, "Big Ben, the Queen's Palace and that famous bridge. Heck, we can even visit Sainsbury's supermarket and you can take a photo out the front." She genuinely seemed excited about the trip and being with me.

## **2 April 2017**

As I stepped into Adelaide airport, the air thick with anticipation but exciting at the same time, I was about to have my first international flight with the girl that I was crazy about, but I found myself running late. Hastily navigating the check-in process, I declared my destination as London while bringing up the email I had received. The lady doing my check in seemed a little confused and asked, "Are you sure that's your final destination?" What? A startling revelation awaited me – the flight paid for concluded in Bogotá, Colombia. Bewilderment etched my face. Where the fuck was Bo-go-ta? I wondered if it was a stopover somewhere that Wendy or Nick had forgotten to mention. I convinced myself that had been the case, but I proceeded with check-in, my mind racing, intending to question Nick upon departure. I needed to confirm that they had done the booking correctly, last thing I wanted to do was end up somewhere alone and somewhere dangerous!

Attempting to reach Nick was challenging; his phone sent me to

voicemail. A message left, I wanted answers. I rang Wendy, I presumed she would know what was going on considering it was her business partner! “Oh Cassie, don’t worry! Everything is okay, Babe! Are you scared because it’s your first time travelling?” Wendy asked me. She made me feel pathetic for being worried about this. However, Wendy reassured me, explaining her delayed check-in and dismissing any concern about my solo journey. Of course I was leaving Adelaide, and she was leaving Sydney. An hour later, Nick responded, “Cass, everything’s OK. Problem with flight plan but everything on track, enjoy your time with Wendy.”

He was claiming ignorance but still assuring me of a rearranged flight to London. However, an unexpected layover in Colombia was now part of the plan. Nick sold it as an opportunity, “Hit the streets, try some amazing Colombian food! You’ll love it over there!”, urging me to explore with Wendy and he emphasized the safety of English-speaking locals. I received a text message. He swiftly forwarded a Bogotá hotel address, assuring me that he had secured reservations and would send money for expenses via Western Union once in, and that in the meantime, Wendy had everything we needed for the trip.

Departing after an exhaustive 8-hour wait in China, Wendy’s absence concerned me. Where the hell was she? Wasn’t she supposed to be here before me? Amidst the uncharted territory of international travel, an unsettling feeling crept over me in the Chinese airport, a sensation of being watched or followed, a feeling that I had once felt before, back in Sydney. I dismissed it as nerves. Surely, I was safe, but that gut feeling was back, the one I had once ignored, tempted to acknowledge. I didn’t. I gave Wendy and Nick the benefit of the doubt.

I was already starting to get anxious, considering as I wasn’t supposed to be travelling alone anymore. To top it off I was denied boarding onto the plane because, apparently, I had no return booking from Colombia. Anxiety gripped me, something that I had completely missed, in the excitement of travelling I realised that I hadn’t actually ever received a return flight. How had I been so stupid to not see that! I messaged Nick, asking for the returning flight number to Australia because I wasn’t allowed to board without it. I was nervous, this seemed a little too



disorganised now. I wasn't being told something here. I was beginning to suspect something was going on. Nick's reassurance brought temporary relief. After all, he was my lifeline and with this, I waited for confirmation of my departure from Colombia. In the chaotic swirl, Wendy's nonappearance heightened my concerns. In the meantime, I still waited for Wendy to magically appear and to make this whole process a little bit less scary, I wondered if something had happened to her in her travels. I was worried about her, after all, I was on this trip for her. She was the one who was supposed to be working on this trip with new clients, not me. I was useless without her.

An email arrived minutes before check-in's closure, revealing a departure from Bogotá on April 7th. I was quite confused, I called Nick and confronted him, "Why am I leaving Colombia on the 7th when I thought it was just a stop over? Where is Wendy, why am I alone? Why do I feel like something else is going on here that I'm not being told about? I was demanding an explanation. His response, citing urgency and a change of plans, "I'm so sorry Cass, there has been a mix up in the plans, I'm fixing it! I need you to meet with a client in Bogotá before flying to London. You'll be fine. Just do as your asked." This compelled my presence in Colombia. Protesting, I expressed my discomfort with the country and the desire to return home. "I don't want to be in Colombia, that place isn't safe! Why would you do this to me last minute, did you plan this the whole time?! I refuse to do this, I refuse to go alone, I am not boarding this plane in Los Angeles." Nick countered, "It's too late Cassie. You're in this whether you like it or not. I have invested a lot of money to send you both over there, you will do as you are told, or you will suffer the consequences. Remember, you overshared your life with Wendy & I know everything I need to know to get what I want from you." He was invoking financial repercussions and client issues.

I was speechless, what had just happened. What was I supposed to do? Trapped, I boarded the flight, somehow, I felt that this was about to get 10 times worse. I didn't know what was waiting for me upon landing but something that was sure to me was that this wasn't the trip that I had planned with Wendy, and it most definitely wasn't going to be my dream trip. An ominous feeling settling in.

### **3 April 2017 – Day One in Colombia**

Arrival in Bogotá unveiled a foreign landscape, the shock amplified by Wendy's absence, still no sign of her? Why? While walking up to customs, panic was setting in, I was stuck here, on the other side of the world. Alone. Customs passed in silence, my limited Spanish failing me. From what I had heard so far, no one spoke any English. Great, add that to the list of problems. I struggled to read the directions to get out of the airport, everything in Spanish. I made it downstairs, and I stopped to change currency for a taxi.

The desolation intensified. I had hidden hope that when I made it to the exit she would be there, Wendy would be waiting there to make this all better, no one awaited me. I was completely alone and phoneless, I chose a taxi, hoping answers lay at the hotel. Maybe, just maybe Wendy had gotten in early and was there. I hoped that this was the case. I sat in silence in the taxi, I just looked out the window, Bogotá didn't look good. It looked dirty. Lots of people on the streets with stalls. Did I mention dirty? After about 30 minutes, the taxi arrived at the hotel, "97 mil peso" the driver said to me. I blanked. What the hell was that? He said "Money, Money" I took out what I had exchanged earlier, and the taxi driver grabbed two 50,000 notes, leaving me with another two of 50,000. It seemed like a lot of money. Did I just let him steal from me? The driver then got out of the car and helped me with my luggage. Without a word, he returned to the car and left. What just happened?

Hotel Inter Bogotá.

Walking in, it kind of resembled a cheap motel, and much to my disappointment, held no trace of Wendy's reservation. Language barriers intensified the ordeal. My pleas for information met with baffled stares. But one thing became clear, there was no reservation for me. Forced into an uneasy acceptance, I paid for a night, clinging to the hope of Wendy's imminent arrival. The room cost 93,000 pesos, all the money I had left. Wendy was the one who was supposed to be paying for everything and not only that the room was supposed to be paid for. This wasn't good. Room 601, equipped with a surveillance camera right in front of my door, became my uneasy sanctuary. It somewhat made me feel better

knowing there were cameras. It seemed the only security I felt.

Connecting to Wi-Fi, silence echoed.

No messages awaited. Why had no one asked if I was okay?

No assurances.

Why hadn't Wendy checked in?

An irate message I sent to Nick revealed my predicament, the sense of abandonment and deception seeping through my words.

"What the hell is going on? Why does it seem like I've been set up to come here? Why isn't Wendy not answering me? Where is she? Why the hell am I here alone? I didn't sign up to come to the other side of the world alone and abandoned. What the fuck is going on! I want to go Home!"

I sank into the bed, awaiting a response, the weight of vulnerability settling in the foreign room. What had I done? Had Wendy really set me up for something more? Had I been so stupid?

Surely not.

I'm sure everything would be all settled the next day.

Darkness gave way to a phone buzzing, Nick's messages revealing Wendy's arrival. "Calm Down Cassie. Wendy is in Bogotá. I will deal with you tomorrow." I must admit, the whole "I will deal with you tomorrow" was a little weird. What did that even mean? But I focused on the fact that Wendy had arrived. I would be seeing her soon. Everything was going to be okay!

But the reunion never occurred. Wendy remained elusive, the two blue ticks on the phone mocking my pleas. She was ignoring me. Had I done something wrong? Had I upset her? Alone and apprehensive, tears marked my slumber. The reality of my entanglement with Nick's sinister web beginning to surface. I wanted to understand what was going on, yet I couldn't seem too. I blamed myself for Wendy ignoring me, had I upset her by asking Nick too many questions? Was she offended? Had I fucked this up like I seem to do with everything?

I needed to know what was going on.

## 4 April 2017 – Day Two in Colombia

Daylight brought minimal solace. My isolation was compounded by unanswered questions. Nobody was answering me. Being alone in this hotel, no one spoke English, I didn't know how to even order food, let alone pay for it. Reception called through to me. I didn't understand anything that I was being told, until a different voice was speaking to me, very simple English she spoke. "Cassandra, ahh, Western Union for you. You go. You boss send ah, money. Goodbye". Before I could ask the lady anything she had hung up on me. Forced to navigate Western Union alone, I googled the closest one near me, yet when I left the hotel I had no internet. I had to guess roughly where it was located. Walking the streets of Bogotá alone, it was scary, yet I couldn't shake that feeling of being watched. Everyone was looking at me. I obviously stood out in the crowded streets, no one else around me was so blonde and so pale. I wondered if that was the weird feeling of being watched because everyone was looking at me. But something really made me doubt that. I just couldn't shake the feeling of, I wasn't safe. It took me about 10 minutes to find the Western Union, it was hidden amongst a bunch of smaller shops. Walking into the Western Union, the man behind the counter looked me up and down and began speaking at me so quickly and I must have had the blankest look on my face because he stopped talking and laughed, "Pasaport."

Passport.

OK.

I handed over my passport without flinching. Why did I just hand my passport over to a stranger that I can't understand! What is wrong with me! I retrieved funds 1,500,000 Peso, the equivalent to \$700, I received the receipt and walked back the same way I had come. Walking into the hotel, booked the room I was in, until the 7th of April, because I doubted that I would be leaving sooner. The hotel staff, seemingly privy to my circumstances, hinted at their knowledge. The hotel staff, seemed, a little too understanding for my liking, but I brushed it off for them feeling sorry for me. That was it, right? The loneliness echoed, exacerbated by Wendy's silence and a persistent, unsettling awareness

of being watched. Sleep. That's all I wanted to do. Maybe if I slept long enough, I would wake up from what was turning into a nightmare.

## **5 April 2017 – Day Three in Colombia**

The isolation in the heart of Bogotá's unfamiliar streets mirrored the void left by Wendy's resounding silence. Despite the desperate messages I sent, she continued to ignore me, the two blue ticks on WhatsApp acting as cold confirmation. Each unanswered plea intensified the feeling of abandonment, my only lifeline left dangling in the abyss of uncertainty. I was left with my own thoughts, overthinking every aspect of my life since meeting Wendy, I hadn't imagined everything had I? I really needed answers. I craved them.

Summoned by an unexpected phone call from reception, the person speaking spoke Spanish to me and all I could spit out was no Spanish, and then someone else was talking "Cassandra, you come down to meet me now, I wait for you in the reception", a male spoke to me, his voice held a heavy accent, not excellent English but by far the best I had heard.

Who was this man?

The demand for my presence downstairs set an ominous tone. Anxiety gripped me as I reluctantly informed Nick of the situation, sent him a message, "Who the hell has come to meet me in the hotel?" His response, a volatile cocktail of anger and caution, did little to ease my escalating fears. "Who the fuck have you spoken too? Who have you told that you're here? You better not have fucking spoken to anyone Cassie". I replied, "I haven't spoken to anyone! I've been waiting for Wendy!"

He replied quickly "Go downstairs and meet the person, you better fucking report back to me who the fuck you've seen." He was aggressive, I hadn't seen this side to him yet, it wasn't nice. It actually scared me even more, why would he think I would have spoken to someone, and what was the big deal if I had? I mean, I was there on a holiday supposedly, right?

Descending into the lobby, I confronted a man. He wasn't what I had imagined him to look like. He was short, dark skinned, he was well dressed, wore a golfer's hat which covered his bald head. I looked

at his face, he had a huge scar along his face. His eyes, lifeless. He carried himself in a manner that would make anyone else feel as if you were below him. He presented himself to me as Carlos – a mysterious presence whose grip on a tightly held bag exuded an unsettling menace. Why did he hold his bag like that? But something else bothered me.

I saw Wendy.

At first I thought I was seeing things, but I was almost certain it was her standing in the doorway, talking on the phone. Thank God! Wendy was finally here. A feeling of ease ran through me. Everything was going to be okay now. However, what I definitely didn't expect was for Wendy to completely ignore me. I smiled at her, and she looked me up and down as if I was some pathetic bystander checking her out. What was going on? I must have upset her, but how? Carlos, I'd nearly forgotten that he stood there. He must have seen me looking at Wendy. He said, "My girlfriend," smiling and gesturing to Wendy. I snapped back to reality, a million thoughts running through my head but none of them making enough sense to string a sentence together. What did he mean girlfriend? Why hadn't she told me? Why had she lied?

What the *fuck* was happening?

The revelation that he was Wendy's boyfriend sent shockwaves through my already fractured understanding of reality.

My attempts to comprehend the magnitude of this revelation were cut short as Carlos orchestrated an unsettling outing to McDonald's under the guise of acquiring sustenance 'needing to eat'. I didn't need to eat, I needed to understand what the hell was going on. I was on the other side of the world, stuck with no understanding of how this had happened!

Carlos and Wendy both sat across from me at McDonald's, he had ordered me chicken which I didn't really want to eat, I had no appetite. Being tricked and lied too for months would do that to you. Carlos proceeded to tell me how he used to be a part of the Brazilian politics and was very well known, that he had connections everywhere. "Cassandra, you know why you are here. You need to keep your head down and not question anything you are told to do and say. We invest lots of money in you workers and we know how to make you pay if you don't do as

expected. Remember you are now in my country. I have complete control of you here, no one can help you". I tried to speak and say that I actually didn't know what I was here for, but the words didn't come out.

In the fluorescent-lit fast-food haven, Carlos' warnings reverberated with ominous intensity. Veiled threats lingered in the air, leaving me shaken to the core. Why was I here? What had Wendy done? Why had she done this to me? The only thing that had now become clear to me was that I knew nothing and that I had been so stupid, so naive, how did I let this happen, how did this happen? What could I do? Thoughts were racing through my head. I needed a plan.

I waited quietly for Carlos to finish eating, once he finished he stood up and said in broken English "You go back to the hotel now and you speak to no one but me or Wendy. You do as you are told! You don't want me to have to make you." I just nodded in fear, I didn't know what else to do, so I got up and walked back to my hotel. This just went from bad to worse.

Wendy's betrayal, combined with Carlos' cryptic demeanour, deepened the shadows of the sinister labyrinth I found myself entangled in.

## **8 April 2017 – Day Six in Colombia**

Days blurred into a monotonous routine of solitude. Wendy's silence persisted.

Nick remained unreachable. My sense of entrapment deepened, was I ever leaving Colombia? Or was I going to be here forever? Why did it feel like something way bigger was being planned for me and I had willingly walked into this? I still remembered Carlos' comments of, "You must blend in, be a tourist, you cannot make people suspect you." Although, I didn't really understand what I was going to be suspected of. Carlos was well known. He was respected by authority which meant, I didn't know who I could talk to too. Could I ask for help? But from who? Carlos' ominous reminders to venture out as a tourist rang hollow, a stark reminder of my vulnerability in this foreign web of deceit. I had never felt so trapped and stuck in my whole life, how was I supposed to deal with this, what was I supposed to do?