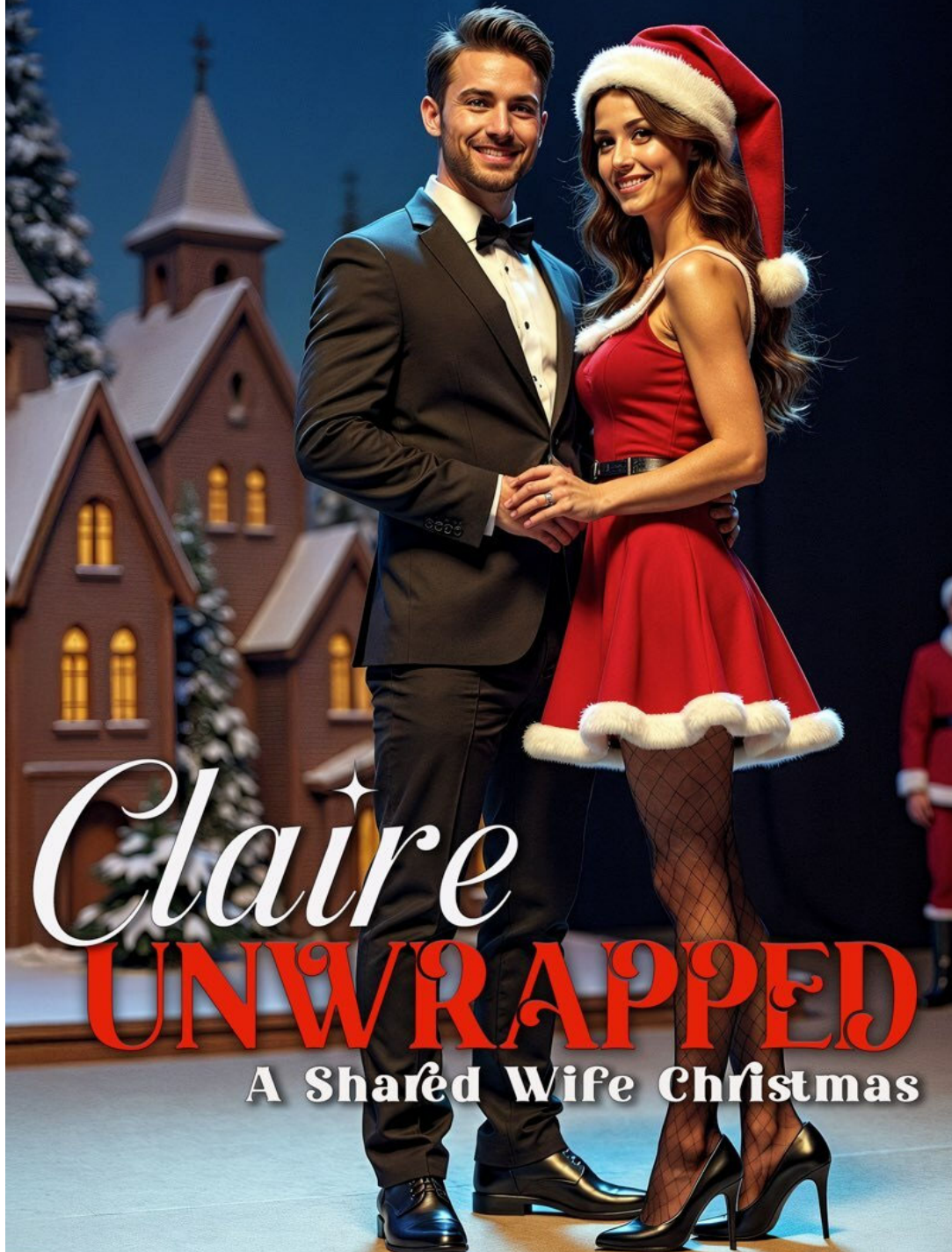


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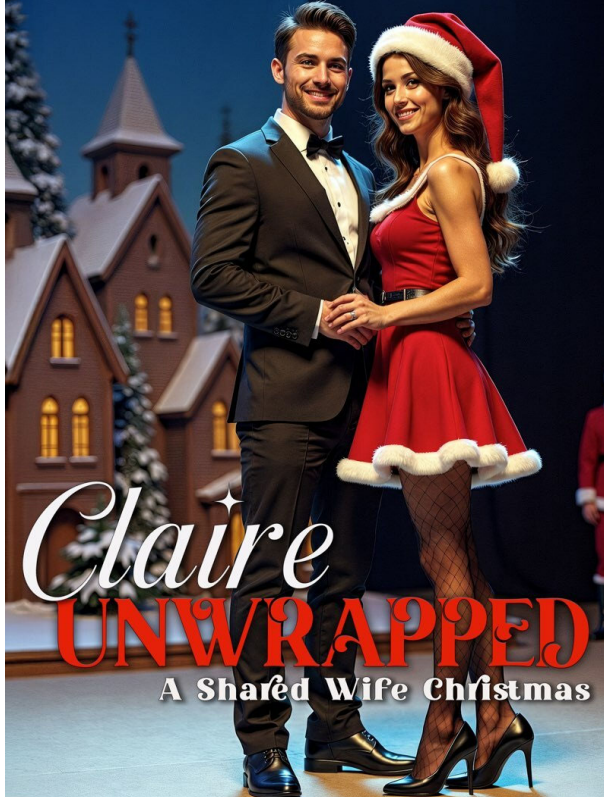


Claire
UNWRAPPED

A Shared Wife Christmas

APHRODITE  OMNIMEDIA

BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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Claire
UNWRAPPED
A Shared Wife Christmas

claire unwrapped

A Shared Wife Christmas

kirsten mcurran



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CLAIRE UNWRAPPED

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one

Claire breathed a sigh of relief when the bell rang, ending classes for the day. She loved her job, but the kids had been especially exhausting today, and she hadn't been sleeping well lately. Staring at the stack of spelling quizzes she had to grade tonight, she wondered if 4:00 was too early to open a bottle of wine.

Teaching third grade in her hometown was like realizing a dream she never knew she had. She'd envisioned a very different life for herself when she was younger. Fortune. Fame. Maybe Brad Pitt on her arm after they fell in love on the set of her latest movie. But fate had a funny way of putting you right where you were supposed to be.

Tonight, instead of partying on a yacht in the Mediterranean with Brad, Leo, and Leo's latest twentysomething girlfriend, Claire would be taking her fourteen-year-old daughter to band practice at the local rock school.

Harper got her hardcore rock chick tendencies—and she was a beast on bass—from her dad, Daniel, her artistic streak—she was a beast on the bass—came from Claire. Claire and Daniel swore that their younger daughter, Riley, had been switched at birth; she was the MVP on her basketball team, and neither Claire nor Daniel was remotely athletic.

The closest Claire came to being an athlete was that time she played a murdered cheerleader on *C.S.I.* Spoiler alert: her boyfriend did it because she was knocked up and he was afraid it would ruin his life.

Sometimes, Claire thought about what might have been. The plan had been to prove herself in a handful of small, gritty indie movies, which would have been her calling card to the studios, who would have been tripping over themselves to cast her in their next blockbuster. Later, she would have gone to Broadway to remind people she was a serious actress. She should

have had Jessica Chastain's career. She would have even been happy with Rachel McAdams's career. She and Rachel had a similar vibe.

Mostly, she was just happy that her daughters were well-adjusted girls, she had a meaningful job, and, maybe most importantly, a husband who supported and loved her. Daniel was more than she could have asked for. Brad probably would have cheated on her anyway.

Ultimately, Claire did not get to open the bottle of wine early. She had to run Riley to Target to pick up supplies for a project that Riley had ignored until the last minute. Somehow, her daughter tried to make it her fault because, "Mom, the assignments are in the app. Didn't you see it?" Claire vainly tried to remind Riley about personal responsibility.

By the time Claire settled down on the couch with a glass of wine to watch TV with Daniel, it was late. He looked just as wiped out as she felt, which had become the default in their marriage. They dealt with work and the kids, and everything else life threw at them, and when they finally had time alone together, they had nothing left.

"Do you think we'll really go away for our twentieth?" she asked.

"Yeah, babe, I know we will."

"We talked about it for our fifteenth, and we didn't do anything last year."

"We took that night in the city, didn't we? Went to a show. Got a hotel room."

"And it was great, honey. But it wasn't going away. It wasn't a real vacation."

Claire remembered the night. They'd spent weeks building it up in their heads. She picked out a slinky black dress that made her feel sexier than she had in ages, but she was even more excited about Daniel seeing her in what she wore under it. She wanted him to look at her the way he used to.

He picked the restaurant, and it was marvelous. They saw a touring company of Hamilton, which made Claire long for her acting days. Being in the local Christmas show every year wasn't the same as being on a big stage. After the show, they went back to their fancy hotel room, with its view of the city skyline, and it was the real showtime. The main event.

Daniel was as enthusiastic as she'd hoped. He was all over her, and their lovemaking was hot and sexy—much closer to fucking, like the old days—than their usual sex, but all of their promises to go all night evaporated after they both came. Claire tried to rally him, but he was a forty-five-year-old man who'd been drinking and had been up since seven a.m.

That was unfair, and she knew it. Claire had been as exhausted as her husband that night. She was just determined to take full advantage of their expensive hotel room. But in the end, she settled for snuggling into Daniel as they fell asleep, and part of her thought that was probably better than a second round of sex would have been anyway.

“We took a vacation last summer,” Daniel protested, pulling her back to the present. He stopped scrolling the streaming service menu to look at her.

“Honey, we took a family vacation last summer. We took the girls hiking out in Moab.”

“It was amazing!”

Claire paused to sip her wine and center herself. They'd all had a good time, but her most vivid memory of the vacation was Daniel—the least fit member of the family—almost passing out in the desert heat.

“It was amazing. And I love you for planning that for us. The girls will never forget it. I'll never forget it. But it wasn't us. Just us. I love the kids, but I miss being us. Don't you?”

“But we are us. How can we not be us?” He looked genuinely puzzled.

Claire leaned over and kissed his cheek. She truly loved her nerdy, too-logical husband. She couldn't imagine being with anyone else, even when

he frustrated her. He would never treat her the way the guys in LA did in her acting days.

“Really, Danny? You’re too smart not to know what I mean.”

His look of frustration told her that he really didn’t. “I know, babe. And I promise, we will have the vacation of your dreams for our twentieth wedding anniversary. I’m already saving for it. We can go anywhere you like.”

“Hawai’i?” she asked, unable to keep the excitement out of her voice. She pictured herself lying on a white sand South Pacific beach, sporting as skimpy a bikini as she could bring herself to wear and drinking a mai tai out of a coconut.

“I would love to see you in a coconut bra with a flower in your hair.” A new warmth was in his voice.

Claire laughed. “My coconut bra days are behind me, I’m afraid, but if you take me to Hawai’i, I promise I’ll wear whatever else you like.”

“As I recall, you looked pretty hot in a coconut bra and a grass skirt. And I bet you’d look even better now, babe.”

“When did you see...” Claire rolled her eyes. Daniel had always been way more excited to bring up her glory days than she’d ever been. “That’s right. When the kids in Oakview threw their own luau for spring break, and Raven dressed up for Billy. I can’t believe you remember that.”

Daniel smiled and pulled her closer. “It’s burned into my memory forever. I couldn’t believe there was anything that hot on a soap opera.”

She rolled her eyes. “I can’t believe you were in college and watching a soap opera. You should have been out trying to get laid, not watching us pretending to do it.”

“Need I remind you, I was watching *The Edge of Desire* because I was getting laid? My girlfriend Tracy was the one who got me into it.”

“No, I don’t need to hear about Tracy. I like to think there were no other girls before me.” She laughed and snuggled into him, holding her wineglass away where she couldn’t spill it.

“You like thinking you’re the one who despoiled me?”

When they met, Claire was thirty. Her dreams of Hollywood were a bust, and she’d moved back to her hometown of Kingston. Then, the idea of taking a guy’s virginity would have been a major turnoff. Now that she was older, she had to admit that teaching someone exactly what she liked could be exciting. She’d read a few romances with older women and younger men, and she’d enjoyed them. A lot.

“No, not really. I would have been out of there if you hadn’t known what you were doing. But I don’t want to think about other women with their hands all over you. Don’t tell me you like to think about the guys I was with before you.”

“I mean, I’m not weird,” he sounded almost defensive. “But the difference is that I’ve actually seen it, babe. I don’t have to imagine anything.”

Daniel slid a hand up inside her oversized Kingston Knights sweatshirt, and she yelped because his hand was so cold, making her nipples spring to hardness. But then he touched them the way only he knew, and she settled back against him, purring.

He had that strange look she sometimes caught when they talked about her time in LA, and specifically when she played Raven Chandler on *The Edge of Desire*. She didn’t understand it.

Claire got that he was proud of having married a former actress. He behaved like she had been an A-lister instead have having done a few years on a soap, did some primetime guest shots, and had come running home with her tail between her legs, but there was something else in his expression. Sometimes she thought her husband was fantasizing about her being Raven Chandler.

“What you saw was acting, honey, and not very good acting. You should know better than anyone those PG tumbles in the sheets aren’t anything like the real thing.” She chuckled and kissed him. “I don’t hold the sheets up over my boobs when we’re alone in bed, for one thing.”

Daniel grinned. “It was still hot to see you playing bad girl Raven Chandler.”

His thumb, circling her dark, thickening tip, drove Claire crazy. He’d become very good at that over the years, like he’d made learning how to tease her his life’s work. She wished he did it more. When she compared it to how they were in their early days, she felt like he’d gone into semi-retirement.

“Shut up. You’re being ridiculous.” Her laugh turned into an abrupt gasp when he applied pressure to her nipple. “Mmm... What’s gotten into you tonight?”

“I guess I’m just excited about the potential of this vacation.”

Claire couldn’t take it anymore. She grabbed his hoodie and pulled him into a kiss. She didn’t hold back, hungrily seeking his tongue with hers. His hands on her breasts became more aggressive. The rough kneading sizzled pleasure straight to her core. She tore her lips from his, panting.

“Daniel...honey...take me upstairs...”

He ignored her, pushing up the baggy sweatshirt to expose her chest. She weakly tried to stop him, but the heat growing inside her was taking control. It had always been a problem. When she was really horny, she didn’t think straight. That had been the cause of many bad decisions—and wild experiences—during her time in LA.

His lips touched her throbbing bud. Fresh pleasure bloomed, and she forgot they were in the family room where they could be walked in on at any moment. His tongue teased where his lips had been. The gentle touches, a tease of what she really wanted, were the sweetest torment. He kept it up

until she lost it, like a pet teased with a treat, and pulled his mouth hard against her soft, yielding flesh.

“God...hon...stop teasing me...” She dug her nails into his scalp when he began suckling her in earnest.

Daniel didn't stop. He tilted her further back on the couch, moving between her legs. She stretched her arm to try and place her wine glass on the coffee table, but couldn't reach. Some of the red had already splashed out and stained her sweatshirt and the rug, but she was too distracted to worry about cleaning it up.

Claire tightened her thighs around his torso, but grinding up at his chest didn't do much. It was just instinct. She softly moaned and panted, his name slipping from her lips. A man who discovered how sensitive her nipples were could take complete control. Daniel was a master at it.

He kept his face buried in her chest and shrouded in her bunched-up sweatshirt, but tugged at her tight, black leggings. Not only was Claire barely keeping her wine upright, but she finally realized that letting Daniel strip her on the family room sofa was a colossally bad idea. She didn't want to have to start a therapy fund for their daughters on top of the college funds.

“Dan...Danny...stop...take me upstairs...”

He didn't, and she smacked his shoulder. He ignored her protests, lost in teasing her tits, and the longer he did it, the harder it was for her to stop him. Finally, she shifted her body beneath him, making Daniel move.

“I am not...getting caught by the girls...with you on top of me...” she panted. “Take me upstairs where you can fuck me properly.”

“I miss the days when we could just do it on the couch whenever we wanted. Or bent over the kitchen table. Or on the steps when we came in from a night out.”

Daniel was flushed when he lifted his face from her, and he was as breathless as Claire. She still found him as cute as ever, but she wasn't in the mood for cute—not after what he'd been doing to her.

“We can try that when the girls go to camp next summer. Right now, you need to take me upstairs unless you want me to take care of this myself.”

His eyes flashed with excitement. “Can I watch?”

“Dork! Get off me!”

two

Following his wife upstairs with a hard-on in his khakis was uncomfortable, but Daniel was so horny he would have followed her anywhere. She had a good point. He didn't want the girls to walk in on him fucking their mother. He couldn't imagine anything more horrifying. He'd just gotten so hard so fast that he couldn't help himself and pounced on the couch.

Daniel didn't think about Claire's days on *The Edge of Desire* very often anymore, but whenever he did, his dick went from zero to sixty in three seconds. He liked to think that was impressive for a forty-six-year-old man—whatever the cause.

When they first met, he couldn't believe Raven Chandler was standing in front of him, in the flesh. The hottest girl in all of daytime television should not have been at a coffee shop in Kingston, thousands of miles away from the bright lights of Hollywood. He just had to say something. He couldn't help himself. Any conversation that began with, Hey, aren't you... should have led to an awkward encounter—maybe an autograph—but for reasons Daniel still didn't understand, Claire found him cute.

Now, she told him to close the door as she walked toward their bed and threw off her sweatshirt. She'd always been like that. His wife was not one of those women who needed to be finessed into bed. When she was ready, she was ready, and she wasn't afraid to ask for what she wanted. And Claire could be pretty easy to turn on. Some people might have judged that, but he always saw it as a feature and not a bug. That was one of the many reasons that he always got so hard when he thought about her on that soap, or in LA in general.

Daniel could only imagine what wild things she did out there. He never believed her when she told him she didn't get turned on while shooting those *Edge of Desire* love scenes.

“Are you just going to stand there?” she asked, rolling her panties down with her leggings. Even her impatience was hot—because she was impatient to get fucked.

“Maybe I just like watching you get undressed.”

“Well, now I need to see you get undressed and get in bed with me.”

Claire crawled onto their king-sized bed, with its high, black wrought-iron headboard that he’d always thought would be a great anchor to tie her down. He’d just never had the nerve to bring it up.

She lay on her side, head propped up on her hand, and watched him. Seeing her there, stark naked, froze him in place. Her body was softer now, with rounder hips and heavier breasts, but god help him, Claire was as sexy as the day he first saw her on *The Edge of Desire* and wondered who that goddess in the bikini at the Oakview community pool was. Only when her hand dipped between her thighs did he remember why they were there.

Daniel tore off his forest green work polo and khakis as quickly as possible, almost falling on his face when he tried to peel his socks off. Claire giggled at that, but she didn’t stop touching herself, fingers stroking through the downy dusting of dark hair that covered her mound.

His hard-on bobbed before him as he rushed to the bed. Her eyes never left it. She knew what she wanted, and that made his balls throb. He practically tackled her when he arrived, rolling Claire farther onto the bed and onto her back. All he wanted to do was sink his cock into her, but first, he needed to impress her. She deserved it.

“Hon...you don’t have to...I’m read...dy...oh god...hon...”

Sliding with smooth precision—as smooth as he could with a bad knee and torn labrum—he moved down between her legs and deeply kissed her pussy. She wasn’t lying. She was more than ready. Claire hadn’t been that wet in quite a while. He hoped it was all about him, not some hot guy she’d seen at the supermarket. However, that would be hot, too.

He dipped his tongue deep inside her, and she rewarded him by bucking her hips back at his mouth. He cupped her soft ass with both hands and pulled her tight against his hungry mouth. She twisted on the bed and grabbed fistfuls of sheet.

“Yesss...there...god yesss...right there...Dan...”

Claire may have been ready to skip straight to the main event, but she loved the diversion. Every bit of body language, every moan, told him that. The old intrusive thoughts forced themselves into his head.

How many guys have seen her like this? Who's been lucky enough to see her really lose control? Daniel wasn't a weak cuck by any stretch, but he was sure some Hollywood stud had taken her places no mortal man like him could hope to reach. Was it Chase Hutchinson? Did he want the real thing after faking it on camera? Chase was her main love interest on the soap. Daniel had always been convinced they fucked.

His efforts narrowed to focus on her clit. He worked his tongue furiously in a cross-cross pattern and locked his lips right there. Claire squeezed his head between her thighs. He slipped two fingers inside her, pistoning hard. Her moans turned urgent, her breathing faster.

“Yesss...ahhh god...yesss...Dan!”

Her thighs crushed his head when she came. Claire squealed in ecstasy, stiffened, jerked, and stiffened again. It was one of those orgasms that overwhelmed her. Daniel knew them well, even if he hadn't experienced one in a while. He eagerly drank her release, sucking and lapping at her clit until she pushed his mouth away from her.

“I...I need...too much...please...stop...god...”

Daniel thought he had her on the verge of coming again, but he backed off. He needed to be inside her anyway. He'd been grinding the mattress while going down on Claire and thinking about her Hollywood nights. It was all too much.

“Hon...I need...a minute...” she panted, gently pushing against his chest.

He ignored her. He was burning for her. It had been ages since he'd been so inspired. She opened her legs wide when he moved over her, and even reached for his thick root, holding it to her slick, swollen lips. He thrust into her the moment he felt his head seated in her cleft.

“Ohhh...god...yes!”

Daniel was woozy for a moment when he felt her heat grasp him, but her hips urged him into motion. Holding himself over her like he was doing push-ups, he thrust down into his wife with staccato motions, trying to find a rhythm. He always needed a moment to warm up, which had always embarrassed him. He was sure her Hollywood boyfriends got in there and just started hammering her. But she never seemed to mind.

“Yesss...god...Dan...fuck me...”

Finding his groove, he did his best imitation of how he imagined Chase Hutchinson pounding his wife. It had always been a feather in his cap that he could satisfy a woman who'd lived so much life, but deep down, he always questioned if he really did. She was a very good actress.

They moved in perfect sync, the way they always did. Her hands were on his shoulders, nails digging in when he took her to the next level. Daniel could appreciate just how good it was, the passion in Claire's eyes when she looked up at him, if he could get out of his head. Instead, all of those old, dirty fantasies kept bubbling up.

“Can't...wait...to see...my luau girl...all the boys buzzing around R...”

He barely caught himself before he said Raven.

Claire only responded by planting her feet on the mattress and thrusting up at him harder. Heat sizzled through Daniel when his wife started fucking him as hard as he tried to fuck her. Did she screw Chase like this because she couldn't get enough of his cock? He felt a twinge in his back when he threw his hips at her with all the power he had. Sweat beaded on his brow.

“Do it...right by the pool...in the rec center...fuck, babe...”

“God...ohhh...I’ll be your bad girl...sneak me in at night...mmm...fuck me in the pool...yeah...just like that...I’m gonna be in so much trouble...”

“So bad...can’t keep away...from the...boys...”

“Mmm...you’re my favorite...” She rippled her sheath around him. It felt like heaven. “This is my favorite dick... Now, give it to me good...”

“Shit...Claire...”

Daniel wanted to hold out and make her come even harder than the first time. He wanted to make her lose her mind and scream—even if the kids were down the hall—but she felt too good, and his fantasies of his wife’s slutty alter ego were too much for him.

“Babe...dirty...shit...”

Shanking deep inside her, he let go, flooding her with his desperate finish. As he pulsed into Claire, she finished with him, locking her legs around his waist, pussy gripping him tightly while she cried out and stiffened beneath him. Her legs slowly released their tension, and she pushed at him. Daniel hadn’t even realized that he’d collapsed on her, crushing their bodies together.

“Honey, I can’t breathe,” she whispered beneath him.

“Yeah, sorry, babe,” he gasped, rolling off her with a groan.

“It’s okay. That was intense,” she replied, rolling onto her side to kiss his cheek and snuggle against him. Usually, she wanted space to cool off and wind down after they had sex, but Claire was like a different woman that night.

“Yeah, it was. That was great.” He was panting, and she rubbed his sweat-damp chest, trailing her fingers through the curly hairs that were showing the first traces of gray.

“What got into you tonight?”

“I don’t know. I guess thoughts of you on a Hawaiian beach got me going.”
He slid his arm around Claire and squeezed her.

“Is that all?”

Daniel smiled and said, “You know, I’ve read they have a nude beach in Maui.”

“Oh my god! I could never.”

“Never? You’ve never been skinny dipping? Even I’ve been skinny dipping.”

Claire laughed against his chest. “I plead the fifth. But skinny dipping is not the same thing as going and displaying yourself on a nude beach. Do you think I would just strip down and put myself on display for strangers?”

“A guy can dream, can’t he?”

Daniel really did dream about it. Nothing would make him prouder than guys hanging out on a nude beach watching his wife strip out of a little sundress. Life twitched back into his cock when he thought about them jerking off while they watched Claire rub lotion over her curves. Those were fantasies he’d never shared with his wife in the sixteen years they’d been together.

“That’s what you dream about? Aren’t you supposed to want to punch anyone who looks at me?”

He shrugged as best he could while lying in bed. “I’ve never been particularly jealous. I thought you liked that about me.”

“No, you’re right. Definitely a positive change from the other men I’ve been with.”

She paused and gave him an evaluating look that made him uncomfortable. Daniel felt like he’d always done an excellent job of masking his dirtier,

crazier fantasies about her. He didn't expect Claire to understand the things that turned him on because he didn't understand them himself. Their root was clear—watching her with other guys on TV—but he didn't get why that affected him the way it did.

He just knew that he was into some questionable things. The internet told him that he wasn't alone in having those forbidden thoughts about his wife, but he didn't expect her to accept them. No woman wanted to hear that her husband thought it would be hot if she fucked another guy. Daniel prayed he hadn't let the mask slip.

“Danny, when we were having sex, did you really fantasize about me as...” She paused, like she was embarrassed to even ask. “...as Raven Chandler?”

“Maybe... Not really...” He hated how he tripped over his words. “I mean...it was just in my head, after what we talked about downstairs.”

Claire gave his chest a reassuring caress. “It's okay, honey. If you're going to fantasize about a younger woman, I guess I'm glad it's still me. I just hope forty-eight me turns you on as much as twenty-two-year-old me does.”

She smiled to show she was kidding, but he saw a hint of doubt there.

He pulled her up, bringing her lips to his. The kiss they shared was slow and passionate. “The woman you are now is the sexiest you've ever been. I want you more now than ever.”

“Then why don't we have more nights like this?” She kissed him again.

“It's just life, babe. It's not that I don't want you. I'll try harder. I promise.”

“We both need to. It's not just you.”

“I guess. But I don't want you to ever doubt how much I want you. I'm going to be all over you, even if you're busy with the Christmas show.”

Claire sighed and settled back against his chest. “I don't think you need to worry about that. I've been thinking about it for the last couple of months, and I'm pretty sure I'm done.”

“What? Why?”

“It’s just run its course. Someone else deserves a chance to be the star.”

Daniel laughed and ran his fingers through her long, chocolate-brown hair. “But you’re assuming you’ll be the lead if you want it. Don’t you need to audition?”

“Right.” She laughed along with him. He loved that laugh, husky enough to reveal a hint of her earthy soul. “We both know I’ll be the lead as long as I want it.”

“But you don’t want it?”

He watched her jade eyes flick across the ceiling while she tried to put her feelings into words. She always did that, like she was typing them up in her head. It looked like she was counting the spots on the ceiling that he kept promising to paint over.

“I don’t know. I feel like... I’m almost...” She seems to think better of it. “I’m on the wrong side of forty-five. Don’t you think it’s time I stop pretending I’m still an actress? I’m a third-grade teacher, Danny. I’ve been a teacher for longer than I was an actress. And the people in Kingston, I love our neighbors, but they treat me like I won an Oscar, not someone whose last work was playing one of Charlie Sheen’s bimbos on *Two and a Half Men*.”

Claire had no idea how many times he’d rewatched that episode on streaming. It didn’t melt his brain the way her old *Edge of Desire* episodes did—yes, he’d found them online and kept them in a folder on his laptop—but seeing his wife playing a local dog walker who falls into Charlie’s bed was so hot.

She came bouncing into the house in a halter top with a bunch of dogs on a leash and shamelessly flirted with Charlie. Claire said he was nice because it was before he was out of his mind on drugs. Later, she had a scene in her bra and panties when his TV brother walked in on her sneaking into the

kitchen for water after sleeping with Charlie. She said he was very sweet, making sure her robe was right there when the director called out.

Claire had told Daniel later that she'd always felt silly throwing on the robe when they were just going to reset and do another take. She didn't care if the Teamsters saw her half-naked. That admission alone always made Daniel hard. I bet they were all jerking off to her that night. I wonder if any of them asked her out for drinks afterward. Maybe Charlie Sheen...

Daniel snapped out of it and remembered that his job was to reassure his wife. "But you come alive on stage, babe. I know you love your work, and you love us, but you need to feed that part of your soul, too. Don't give it up because you think you're past it. You're the only one who thinks that."

"Really? I don't seem like I'm just trying to hold on to old glories?" she tentatively asked.

"Never. You love doing it, and everyone loves you in it. You're always great."

Claire made a face. "I don't know. I'll think about it. But no promises."

"No promises," he echoed, knowing there was no way she was giving up the annual Christmas show at the community center. She loved it too much. She just needed to feel courted for a change.

Daniel held her and set his mind to making sure she knew exactly how amazing she was. Claire would feel like the most wanted woman in the world.

three

“You can’t be serious, Claire! I don’t have a Christmas show without you.”

“Stop it, Paul. The show is not about me. Someone else can play the lead. Someone else probably should get the chance.”

Claire wasn’t surprised by his reaction to her doubts about doing the Christmas show again. Paul Hamilton had always had a flair for the dramatic, going all the way back to high school. He was an English teacher at Kingston High and the director of the local theater group.

He was a slight man, as he always had been, spoke emphatically, and dressed for attention in bright colors and patterns. His sandy hair was thinning in his late forties—which the combover didn’t hide—but he was still handsome, with a mischievous glint in his pale eyes.

Paul had never married, leading to whispers about his lifestyle, but Claire knew for a fact he was at least bi—not that it was anyone’s business but his. They’d briefly dated in high school. He wasn’t the lucky boy who scored her V card, but they went far enough that she was sure he liked girls—or at least her.

“Sure, anyone can do anything. Tom Selleck could have been Indiana Jones, but would we still be talking about Raiders of the Lost Ark if it hadn’t been Harrison Ford?”

She laughed, nearly spitting out her salad. The middle school and high school shared a campus, and they frequently had lunch together. They were in a corner of the staff cafeteria. “I am not Harrison Ford, or even Karen Allen. And our silly little Christmas shows are not blockbusters. No offense.”

“I think we put on great shows,” he sniffed. “And you’re integral to that. You’re my only real actress.”

“That real actress needs air quotes, my friend. I was on a soap opera a thousand years ago...”

“And primetime television,” he interrupted.

“In which I played cheerleaders, strippers, a dog walker that one time, and let’s not forget the very uptight nanny who wanted a boob job.”

Paul took the excuse to stare at her chest, and she tried to pretend that she didn’t notice. Her romper dress didn’t show off her body, but it certainly didn’t hide it. She always dressed professionally for school, unlike some of the younger teachers. It was like they didn’t understand they were teaching boys with raging hormones, she often thought.

“I don’t know why anyone thought you could play a girl who needed a boob job.”

“Well, maybe a lift now, but back then, the producers strapped them down and used a body double for the before scenes.”

Claire smiled, thinking about her guest spot on that basic cable plastic surgery show. It was her biggest role outside of *Edge of Desire*. Fortunately, she was not uptight about her body back then because the role required her to show a lot of skin. The producers had been great about it—better than the ones from her last-ditch efforts to stay in Hollywood, which shot quick and dirty with no budget. But no one—not even Daniel—knew about those roles.

“I remember thinking that couldn’t be you,” he replied with a wistful look in his eyes.

“You would know,” she replied, laughing. They laughed sometimes about their intense three weeks of dating in 11th grade. “You’ve seen it?”

“I watched everything you were in, Claire. I’m your biggest fan.”

Not everything, she thought. If anyone she knew ever saw that trio of movies that ended up on Cinemax After Dark that she'd filmed right before giving up on her acting career, she'd be mortified. They weren't porn, but she didn't want anyone to see her that way. She'd only agreed to film them when the producers promised to only show the movies in Europe. The producers had lied.

The way Paul looked at her made Claire wonder if he had seen them. No, she thought. He couldn't have. He's just thinking about Nip/Tuck or Edge. Still, Paul's attention showed that he still carried a torch for her. She hadn't believed it when Daniel first pointed it out, but it was true.

Claire dragged her attention back to the present. "Anyway... This isn't about my stellar body of work. I think I've just lost my fire to get up there again. It should go to someone who really wants it. We always mix it up, but come on, Paul, it's always the same thing."

"Not this year! We're doing something brand new. Maybe this will get you excited."

Her interest was piqued. "Not just a reshuffling of a tired classic? Sorry, but it's true."

Their usual Christmas show was a retelling of a classic holiday tale, adapted by an aging local playwright who was a patron of their community theater group. Last year, it had been A Christmas Carol with some holiday songs shoehorned in, and the lead gender-swapped so that Claire could play Eleanor Scrooge. It had been interesting the first time they'd done it. The third time...it was tired.

"I promise this is something brand new."

"Did old Elwood finally get a new idea?"

Paul frowned. "Elwood told the board he's much too busy this year to work on the Christmas show and suggested they just take one of his old plays. The board wasn't keen on that—they want people to be excited—and what's when Kirsten stepped up."

“Kirsten?”

“She’s that writer who lives over in the Pine Knoll development. Don’t tell me you haven’t heard of her.” When she shrugged, he continued. “She’s, like, our other local celebrity. She’s some kind of successful romance writer.”

Claire racked her brain. “I think I’ve heard of her. I had one of her kids in my class last year, if I’m not mistaken. I met her and her husband briefly on Parents’ Night. She seemed nice.”

“She’s awesome. Anyway, she has a great idea. She’s promised to do a fun take on those Hallmark Christmas movies everyone gets so crazy about.”

“Really? I love them, but they’re so cheesy. Why does she want to do that?”

“Our first rehearsal is next week, and you can ask her yourself. But I think she plans to take the piss out of them.”

“Okay, I’ll admit that could be fun. And the chance to finally do something different could be exciting, if it’s good.”

“And I have one more surprise! Bob Connelly will not be your lead this year.”

“Don’t tell me he’s too busy, like Elwood,” she snarked.

Claire wouldn’t have believed it. She thought the high point of their local Ford dealer’s year was getting on stage with her, especially if they got to share a romantic scene. He’d never pass up the chance to do a Hallmark movie on stage with her.

“No, I haven’t even asked him. My nephew, Ethan, is home for the holidays for a change, and I’ve convinced him to do it. He’s a real actor, like you. He even teaches acting classes in New York City while he’s auditioning for Broadway.”

“He’ll have to audition. Bob won’t be happy.” She always threw up roadblocks when her anxiety spiked. Right now, it was soaring.

“We hold auditions every year, but it’s always you, isn’t it, Claire? Trust me, it will be Ethan. Besides, is there any way that Bob will outshine a real actor?” Paul chuckled.

That was the problem. She was a big fish in a little pond in Kingston. Claire was the star because she was the real actress. She hadn’t acted with a professional in over a decade. And when she was an actress, she was on a soap opera. Paul’s nephew was auditioning for Broadway. He’d almost gotten her interested in the show again, but she was absolutely going to pull out now. She didn’t want to get on that stage and make a fool of herself in front of the entire community.

“What is it?” Paul asked, clearly reading her expression.

She stalled by stuffing more salad into her mouth. After she washed it down with water, she replied, “Nothing. It’s nothing. It will be exciting to have some new blood.”

He smiled. “And some real talent to act against. I know working with Ethan is going to make you shine, Claire!”

“Right. I’m looking forward to it.”

She forced a return smile that she didn’t feel at all.

four

“Can we please focus?” Paul said, trying to wrangle the room into order. His voice echoed through the large open space of the community center’s all-purpose room.

The first time the theater company met for a new production was always unruly. The group was buzzing with excitement about the new project, but they had to get through his agenda before they could get started. Meanwhile, Paul was trying to use an assertive tone—but to Claire, he just came across as pissy.

Claire knew most of the people in the room. The core members of the community theater company had been working together for years. They really were like a family.

Half of the crew members were potential actors, and they would audition for the role they wanted. Although Paul would have loved to have her as his star year-round, Claire only consistently participated in the Christmas show.

Paul, Elwood, and Bob Connelly, who was president of the nonprofit that formed the local theater company, usually made casting decisions. No one was shocked that Bob always landed the lead role, even though they claimed he recused himself from that decision. This year, however, a different team sat behind the folding table in the community center. Marci, Bob’s wife, sat next to Paul, and Kirsten, the new playwright, had Elwood’s seat. Kirsten was a petite woman with chestnut brown hair and chic cat’s-eye glasses. Claire thought she remembered her from Meet the Parents night, but the woman hadn’t said much so far tonight.

“Everyone has the script for our new play, A Christmas Promise,” Paul continued. “I’ll give everyone a few minutes to look it over and consider which role they want to audition for. We have two leads, of course, four supporting roles, and then we’ll need various townspeople. I want to say that

I think Kirsten has done an amazing job, and this is going to be a fun new direction for our little company. Why don't you get up and give us a brief synopsis of the play, Kirsten?"

The author shuffled papers on the folding table, glancing down. Claire gathered that she didn't like being the center of attention. But as Paul sat, she rose and put on a warm smile. She wore a cute, vintage navy A-line dress with tiny white starbursts, dark tights, and sparkly purple combat boots. Claire liked her quirky style.

"Hi, guys, I hope everyone is excited about what we're going to do this Christmas. I know it's a little different, and that might be a challenge, but I think stretching yourself is good. We learn something even when it all goes horribly wrong." Kirsten seemed to realize her words weren't exactly uplifting, and quickly added, "Not that anything will go wrong here. Everything will be great!"

Claire had thumbed through the script and noted that the dialogue was standard, cheesy holiday movie fare, but she caught the subversive tone the writer was going for. She was cautiously optimistic.

"So, on the surface, this is going to seem like any basic cable Christmas movie, big city professional woman comes back to her old hometown, there's a meet-cute with a local hunk, and she begins to question everything about her life. But our play has that plot on steroids. It's going to be laughably over-the-top, and no one is going to notice except for our heroine's kindly aunt, who raised her when her parents were lost in a tragic Christmas tree accident."

"Will it be too subtle for the audience to get?" The question came from the back of the room. Claire thought it was one of the women who painted scenery. The company's chairs were arranged in three concentric rows of semi-circles. "Will they think it's just a really bad, sugary holiday story?"

"Hopefully not," Kirsten cheerfully replied, pushing up her glasses. "When these crazy, saccharine traditions start piling up, Holly's aunt—Holly is our protagonist—will hammer home how absurd everything is."

“Tell us about Holly.” Claire said.

“Holly, right. I’m so glad you asked. Holly Winters has come back to her small hometown to convince the local Christmas tree farm to sell their land so her company can build a data center. It’s very timely. Holly is driven because if she can’t close the deal, she’ll be punished. Maybe even lose her job.”

“Punished?” someone asked.

Kirsten smiled, and Claire noticed how the red lipstick highlighted the bow of her lips and contrasted against her pale skin and black-framed glasses. “There’s an implication that there’s something going on between Claire and her boss, something a little extra spicy. It mostly unfolds in a series of text messages she reads aloud.”

“How spicy?” The question came from Maryanne, the company’s costume mistress and a local church organist. Claire heard the apprehension in her tone.

“Don’t worry, it will meet Kingston’s community standards. I didn’t write 50 Shades for a community theater group.”

Claire smirked at the comment about Kingston community standards. Even though she knew Kingston to be a normal, run-of-the-mill suburban town, there were persistent rumors implying that her neighbors were part of a wild, underground community of swingers and wife swappers. She and Daniel always laughed when they heard a scandalized comment, but she sometimes looked at her neighbors and wondered. Could any of those crazy rumors be true?

For example, rumors had circulated about Dana and David Richardson for years. He was the owner of a successful construction company, and she’d recently become a high-profile real estate agent. The rumors were that Dana was showing more than the updated kitchens in those houses she sold—with her husband’s enthusiastic approval. Claire had been to the famous blowout barbecues at the Richardsons’ and found the rumor absurd.

And then there was Dane Armstrong. He was the local hot divorcee that all the married women secretly fantasized about. Yes, even Claire—after all, there was no harm in admiring his very tight ass. He could have had his pick of women, but he'd never remarried.

Gossip said that he was sleeping with two married women, Jessica Early, who looked like a real-life pin-up girl, and Laura Richards, who was married to Michael, one of the nicest guys in the world. Claire couldn't imagine cheating on someone like Michael—he was cute and sweet—but those same rumors suggested that Laura wasn't exactly cheating.

Claire found rumors like those impossible to believe. Not the cheating. Everyone cheated. Well, not her and Daniel, but people did it. No, it was the open-marriage part of the rumors. She just couldn't understand how a husband would be okay with his wife sleeping with another man.

Ethical non-monogamy was all the rage, but men were jealous creatures. Most guys lost their minds if someone else even flirted with their wives. What kind of guy let his wife sleep with strange men? It had to be worse if it was someone they knew and had to look in the eye, like Michael Early and Dane Armstrong. And then the suggestion that these husbands didn't just let it happen, but that they liked it? What kind of man wanted to see that?

Claire had seen things—and done things—when she lived in LA. But that was a lifetime ago in a seedy fantasy land. It wasn't real life. Kingston was real life, and people in real life didn't do that stuff.

Daniel would never sit back and happily let her go off to hook up with someone else. He loved her too much. And for him to actually sit in a corner and watch her do it? It would turn his stomach. How could it not? Claire would poke her eyes out before she'd watch Daniel with another woman.

The conversation had continued around her while she ruminated on her neighbors' (rumored) secret, kinky sex lives. Kirsten was sitting again, and Paul was back on his feet.

“Everyone take twenty, and then we can read for parts,” he said.

The line of people reading for the role of Holly Winters was not long. The women in the company knew the deal. There was no way anyone but Claire would play the lead in the Christmas play as long as Paul was in charge. It was embarrassing in a way, but Claire hadn't really thought about it much before this year. She loved being in the spotlight, and she didn't feel the need to consider it more deeply.

Two other women read for the lead role. Lila Holmberg was a tall, slender brunette who cut her black hair into a fashionable shag and had a nose ring. She did something in finance, but everything about her screamed cool. She had some kind of performance experience, Claire recalled; maybe she was a dancer? Regardless, Lila had miles of stage presence, but Claire didn't see how the edgy woman could pull off playing sweet, harried Holly Winters. Besides, she seemed too cool to care whether she got the part.

The other potential Holly Winters was Lila's polar opposite. Riki Ruskin was a flame-haired bombshell and the kind of woman that people in Kingston loved to whisper about. Her curves had gotten more than one husband elbowed in the ribs when he couldn't tear his eyes away from her.

Claire's best friend, Ellen, was sure that Riki Ruskin had slept with her neighbors' college-age son, Chase, several years earlier. Ellen saw them sneak away from a Halloween party thrown by Chase's parents. Of course, when Claire had seen Chase—who worked for David Richardson's construction firm while he looked for a post-college job—she'd privately decided that if Riki had surrendered to a moment of weakness, she couldn't be blamed for it.

Riki clearly wanted to steal the part from Claire, but Claire didn't think Riki could pull the part off any more than Lila could. Riki was too brassy. Holly Winters was supposed to be beautiful but unassuming. Nothing about Riki was unassuming. And age was a factor. Claire knew she was stretching things trying to play Holly at forty-eight, but Riki was a few years older than she was. Holly Winters should be in her late thirties at most—a professional woman who heard her biological clock ticking.

The women also had to sing. A handful of holiday songs were always shoehorned into the show. Claire could carry a tune, but she was not a confident singer. Riki had all the confidence in the world, but couldn't find the melody with Google Maps. Lila had an amazing, earthy voice, but it was more suited to singing lead in a Fleetwood Mac cover band than performing holiday classics.

When they finished the Holly Winters readings, the men read for the part of kindly, hunky Christmas tree farmer, Nick Garland. Even with Bob Connelly out of the running, the local men of Kingston were not beating down the door to appear in the community theater Christmas play, and the pickings were slim.

Wilson Lennon was a handsome Black man with more than his share of charisma. He was a local personal injury lawyer with his face on billboards all over town. Claire suspected that performing in the holiday play was actually a gambit to drum up more business. When Wilson got on the stage

and told the panel that he had been a musical theater major in college before he decided he actually wanted to earn a living, he laughed at his own joke. His singing voice was a rich baritone that gave Claire goosebumps, but his wooden line readings made her long for good old Bob. Beyond that, he was pushing sixty. He couldn't possibly pull off the role of Holly Winters' love interest.

Aspiring Nick Garland number two was a local musician named Graham Smith, who Claire didn't know. He was a tall, shaggy man in his late thirties with a solid try at a beard, but he was more teddy bear than heartthrob. That said, he had a sweetness that could bring Nick Garland to life, and Claire thought he was cute enough. She wouldn't mind playing his prospective love interest.

Paul had only been half-paying attention to the auditions, and when Graham stepped down from the stage, he stood and looked around the community center with a huff of frustration. Right—Claire remembered his nephew, Ethan, who was supposed to be the ringer for the role of Nick Garland. She looked around, too, but didn't see anyone who looked like a potential Broadway star.

“If that is everyone who wants to audition for the leads, we can move on to the supporting roles,” Marci Connelly said, making a note on her paper.

“Just one minute,” Paul interrupted. He raised his voice. “Is that everyone who wants to try out for Nick? Everyone?”

Claire's heart ached at her friend's obvious desperation when his tension released with a relieved sigh. She followed his gaze to the double doors at the back of the all-purpose room.

It happened just like a Hollywood movie script. A handsome young man came through the doors in a rush. He pushed his wavy dark hair up his forehead and out of his eyes, then froze when he realized everyone in the room had turned to look at him.

Claire saw his quick calculation, and then the performer in him came alive. He flashed the most charming smile she'd ever seen. It was the sort of smile

that sent tingles straight to her core.

“Sorry, I’m late, Uncle Paul. I was reading and I lost track of time,” the newcomer said.

So, that’s Ethan. He could definitely be Nick Garland—if he can act, Claire thought. She hadn’t ruled out that Paul was only pushing him because of nepotism. If he was actually a lousy actor, the pressure of potentially taking the stage next to a real actor again would ease.

“Some things never change,” Paul replied, shaking his head. “Well, you’re here now. Just remember when we start rehearsing for real, you’ll need to be on time.”

Claire cringed. He should have at least pretended Ethan didn’t already have the part.

“Is he, uh, here to read for Ethan?” Kirsten asked. Claire knew that hungry look. It wasn’t just that she thought he embodied the part she wrote.

She hoped she hadn’t looked at Ethan the same way the writer was—not that Claire could blame her. Yes, he was young, but he was effortlessly cool in his vintage denim jacket, black jeans, and engineer boots. He was a 21st-century James Dean. She smiled when she saw the Dark Side of the Moon t-shirt under his jacket. The album was at least thirty years older than him. Hell, it was older than Claire.

“Yes,” Paul replied. “This is my nephew Ethan. He’s my sister’s son. He’s in town for the holidays, and I thought it would be fun to have him try out for the play since he’s a real New York actor.”

The eyerolls in the room were almost audible. But Claire noticed that she and Kirsten weren’t the only women paying extra attention to Ethan. Meanwhile, Ethan looked confused by his uncle’s comments. He was obviously about to ask a question when Paul pushed a script into his hands and guided him toward the steps up to the stage.

“Is there any, uh, scene in particular you’d like me to read?” Ethan asked.

“How about the first time Nick and Holly meet? I can read the Holly parts. It’s on page seventeen,” Kirsten told him, seeming way too excited to step into the role. That enthusiasm had been noticeably lacking when she’d read against the other men vying for the role.

“Okay, give me a minute or two.”

Ethan turned his back to the room and flipped through the script. He had to push his hair back again when he bent forward to read it. His hair wasn’t long, but it was unruly in the best way. Claire wondered if he was blessed with hair that behaved directly out of the shower or if it had taken an hour to get it to look effortlessly unkempt.

“Okay, I’m ready,” he said, turning back to the front of the stage. “Do you want to take it from the top?”

“Why don’t we pick it up from where Nick walks in on Holly in the barn?”

Claire sat back in her folding chair, arms crossed under her breasts, watching closely. She was going to be acting opposite Ethan whether or not he was any good, so she felt like he was auditioning for her as much as for Kirsten, Paul, and Marci. She admired the way his stubble highlighted his strong jaw. At least, he’ll be nice to look at, even if he can’t act.

Ethan had everyone in the room in the palm of his hand the moment he opened his mouth. Claire didn’t understand how he gave such a natural, charming performance after glancing at the script for two minutes. He barely even looked at it while they did the scene.

She remembered actors on *The Edge of Desire* who could memorize their pages and pages of dialogue in their sleep, but they were old pros. Ethan not only seemed to have a photographic memory, but he became Nick Garland, as if he’d flicked a switch. Kirsten was so taken with him that she stumbled over her own words, but Ethan returned his lines like he was acting against Dame Judi Dench.

Everyone in the room knew Ethan would be Nick Garland when the scene ended, and not just because he was Paul’s nephew. Claire was surprised there

wasn't applause when Ethan and Kirsten were finished. The writer looked like she wanted to run up there and take the role of Holly Winters for herself.

Wilson Lennon looked annoyed that he'd been upstaged. He would not be sticking around to join the company in another capacity. Graham Smith looked resigned that he wouldn't be the frontman of this production.

Marci was flushed from the young man's performance, like she wanted Ethan to take Bob's role as the leading man in her bed, too. She sipped from her water bottle and cleared her throat before moving things along.

"If that is everyone for Nick Garland, we can move along to the supporting parts now."

five

After a brief break for Paul, Kirsten, and Marci to confer, they announce that Claire will be Holly Winters and Ethan will be Nick Garland. The supporting roles are also announced. A couple of people have the grace to make surprised noises and congratulate Claire, and Graham claps Ethan on the shoulder.

Lila seems to take her loss in stride, but Riki is clearly angry to have lost the role of Holly to Claire. She was new to the theater company and maybe didn't know about Paul's devotion to his friend. That was being generous. All Claire had to do was catch the predatory way Riki looked at Ethan to see why she was so hot to play against him. Claire was more certain than ever that Riki had fucked the neighbor's son.

With the roles handed out, the other volunteers broke in their respective departments, many of them doing tasks they'd been doing for years to support the company. Claire had always been impressed by the level of artistry, especially in their set design. She couldn't wait to see how they made the Christmas tree farm come alive.

It was pushing nine when they broke for the night. Claire was exhausted, a reminder of how she'd feel for the next few weeks while they got the production off the ground. A day of teaching how been followed by an evening of rushing to feed the kids so she could get Harper to band practice before coming to the community center. Daniel would have picked her up by then.

Tired as she was, Claire was not someone who could just grab her things and go while there was cleaning up to do. She went to the coffee table and began stacking unused paper cups.

“Can I help you with that?”

She turned to find her fresh-faced leading man standing beside her. God, he looks even younger up close, she thought. The stubbly beard barely helped. Am I going to look like a desperate cougar up there with him? Holly Winters is not supposed to be that.

“It would be great if you could grab the pot and dump it. I’m Claire, by the way.”

“I’m Ethan,” he replied, unplugging the tall, silver pot and wrapping the cord around his hand. “Where do I dump it? I’m new here.”

Claire smiled. “Everyone knows who you are. That was quite an entrance, Ethan. Here, follow me to the kitchen.”

Gathering as many empty cups, stirrers, and boxes of sweetener as she could brace against her chest, she led the way.

“I like to make a memorable first impression. Are you sure you got all of that?”

“I’m good.” She wasn’t at all confident about that. “It’s just through this way.”

“So, you’re my leading lady. My uncle told me you have some acting experience, too.”

Claire scoffed. “Don’t listen to Paul. That was a thousand years ago.” She immediately regretted the turn of phrase. It made her sound so old. “I’m a middle school teacher. I’ve been doing that far longer than I acted.”

“Don’t be so dismissive. I think that if you have an artist’s soul, it never goes away.”

An artist’s soul? Did I sound like that when I was a young, sincere actor? I felt like a very serious artist when I played a dead cheerleader on CSI. She was glad he was behind her and couldn’t see the roll of her eyes.

They arrived in the community center kitchen, and her tenuous grasp on the coffee items gave way, sending cups, coffee stirrers, and sugar packets

scattering everywhere. Claire cursed and immediately bent down to pick them all up.

Ethan set the coffee pot down by the sink and squatted to help her. She noticed how perfect his ass looked in those black jeans and turned away. You should not be noticing that, she thought.

When she turned around again, they were so close they almost bumped into each other. His blue eyes were startling close up. Claire froze for a moment, lost in them. It was going to be very easy to gaze into those eyes and pretend she was Holly falling for Nick.

“Hey, Claire, are you okay?”

She snapped right out of it. Why does his crooked chin have to be even sexier than his eyes?

“Sorry...yeah...got distracted...I tossed everything, everywhere. Sorry. I’m not usually so clumsy.” She smiled and wondered, Am I smiling too much? Why am I smiling so much?

From afar, she’d thought he was a cute—okay, hot—younger guy, but up close, Claire was smitten. She reacted to Ethan on a chemical level, like her body knew it wanted something from him and her brain hadn’t caught up yet. Something it couldn’t have, her brain reminded her pussy.

What is he? No way he is even thirty! He’s a kid. And, oh yeah, you’re married, dummy.

“Stop apologizing,” he replied smiling again. She wished he’d stop that. “Things happen. Just don’t toss the props everywhere when we’re on stage.”

“I’m not that clumsy. I’m a grown woman.”

Ethan gave her an appreciative look. Claire knew that look, and he should not be giving it to her: an older—no, seasoned—married woman. The look turned the butterflies that made her so unsteady into a deep throb.

“Yes, you are.”

“Right,” she said, trying to get to her feet, and away from him, too fast.

Her forehead knocked against his and she began to stumble backwards, spilling what she’d just picked up again. Ethan dropped what he’d gathered to grab Claire’s arms and steady her. He helped her to her feet while she rubbed her forehead.

“You okay? Why don’t you just stand here while I get this? Seems like you’re having a rough night.”

Claire cocked a hip against the counter and watched him crawl around to clean up after her. She felt her forehead was hot, but it wasn’t from the bump.

What is wrong with me? Stop acting so goofy. You’re not really Holly Winters. You’re a grown, married woman with two daughters. Ethan must think you’re a bumbling idiot—not that it matters what he thinks.

While she was busy chastizing herself, Claire couldn’t help but enjoy the view of the young actor crawling around on the floor. He really did have a great ass. And the way he kept having to push his hair back... She just wanted to grab it and... No, don’t think that.

“I’m just tired, I guess. You know how it is. Work all day, then the kids, then running out the door. Sorry, I guess you don’t know how it is.”

“Not yet. Some day, maybe. If I meet the right girl. My real life Holly.”

“Oh? There’s no real-life Holly now?” Don’t sound so interested.

“Not yet. Most of the girls I date are actresses, y’know? I’m looking for a little more depth.” Ethan looked up, fixing her with those blue eyes. “A little more maturity. I mean, you acted right? Uncle Paul said you were out in LA? You must know what I mean.”

She managed a sardonic smile. “I think you’re saying I was one of those shallow actresses.”

“I would never. I’m sure you were different. Not every actress is a shallow, attention-seeking party girl.” His words rushed out. He stood and stacked cups on the counter beside her. “I mean, you left all of that behind to become a middle-school teacher, right? Obviously, you had your head screwed on straight. You didn’t find some rich douchebag producer to marry when the career...”

“Don’t worry, Ethan. I’m not so easily offended.” She laughed and squeezed his arm, which felt like corded steel. He was not a soft artist type. “I am not a delicate flower. And what you were going to say was right. The career didn’t work out.”

“I’m sure it was great. I wasn’t implying you weren’t any good or anything. We both know luck is as important as talent.”

Claire knew she probably was something of a vapid party girl in her LA days. She took her craft seriously, but she also spent a lot of her waking hours chasing a good time. A young, pretty girl had endless opportunities for a good time in LA. She even had a shot at a douchbag producer or two. One of them was an executive producer on a popular network TV franchise of shows.

“Take a deep breath. It’s okay. Not everyone’s dreams work out, and I am not bitter about mine. I have everything that matters in life. A family I love. Work that has meaning. This should have been the dream all along. But I hope your dreams work out for you. Paul told me you’re a Broadway actor?”

Ethan was picking up coffee stirrers from the floor.

“I’m a Broadway actor like you’re a movie star. I understudied on a Rent revival, and got to fill in a few times, but that’s my only experience on the Great White Way. I’ve done several off-Broadway productions. But I pay my rent teaching acting classes and working as a mover, which is not fun in New York. Trust me.”

He stretched past Claire to put the stirrers on the other side of her on the counter. Their bodies briefly pressed together, and she felt that it wasn’t just

his arms. Ethan was hard everywhere. Maybe even? No...

He felt good against her, and Claire chased away several improper thoughts, instead thinking of her younger co-star carrying a couch up five flights of stairs in a New York City walk-up. He lingered long enough for the earthy scent of his aftershave to tickle her nose.

“I can imagine. Our movers killed themselves when we moved into this house.”

“You and your husband?”

Claire laughed. “Yes, Daniel and I.” What was that about? “My husband and my two daughters. Anyway, I’m sure you’ll get there. I saw it while you were up there on our little community theater stage, reading those pages. You’re a star, Ethan. Give the world a minute to catch up.”

“I’m sure you were amazing too, Claire.”

It felt like the air in the kitchen stilled. The noises for the all-purpose room faded into the background, and it was just the two of them. The space between them was charged. It was the kind of chemistry they couldn’t fake on stage if they tried. Claire knew he had to feel it, too. Chills danced down her spine. All of a sudden, she felt like she was way too close to Ethan.

“Are you two running lines already?” Riki Ruskin asked from the doorway. “Very dedicated.”

Claire jumped back from Ethan like he’d caught on fire. She definitely felt the heat. She also felt guilty—without reason, she knew. Riki looked at the two of them like they were guilty of something. The redhead crossed her arms under her heavy breasts, pushing them higher in her tight, scoop-neck bodysuit, and looked at the co-stars like they were definitely up to something illicit.

“Just cleaning up,” Ethan replied, also looking guilty for no reason. “Although you have a point.” He turned to Claire. “I know you’re probably

busy, but we should find time to put our heads together and work on our parts. I'd love to run lines with you."

Riki eyed her suspiciously. "I'm sure Claire would love to find time to run lines.. But if she can't make herself available, I have a lot of free time. I may not be lucky enough to be your leading lady, but you're welcome to come over to my house and run lines any time you like."

Claire rolled her eyes hard and didn't care if Riki saw it. Ethan had the grace to flush.

"That's great... Riki, was it? I'll definitely keep that in mind."

Claire looked at her watch. "I really should get out of here. Daniel must be wondering where I am."

"Of course, darling. You don't want him thinking you've been kidnapped. It could turn into one of those true crime podcasts. I can help Ethan finish cleaning up."

"That would be great. Thanks, Riki."

Claire left them alone in the kitchen, angry at herself for her tinge of inappropriate jealousy.

six

Daniel was happy that his efforts to convince Claire to stay in the Christmas show worked. She'd had an excitement in her eyes since rehearsals started that he hadn't seen in years. He felt guilty that perhaps he hadn't noticed that her fantastic light was dimming while it was happening, but now that it had returned, he was determined to make sure that it never faded again.

The night that she'd come home from the first dress rehearsal, Claire enthusiastically laid out the idea for the new play. He saw her relief that they wouldn't be going through the motions with another dusty old Elwood idea. Daniel took it as evidence that he was right. Her performing days weren't behind her, but she simply needed material that got her excited.

Basing a show on a Hallmark holiday movie parody was a fantastic idea—one that he was glad old Elwood would not be executing. The man was simply not equipped. Daniel had gone back and read his old work, before his primary creativity was writing the local Christmas play, and he'd never been impressed.

The new play was written by some local writer, Kirsten, and Claire assured him that she was a professional who actually sold books. He'd taken her name down and meant to read some of her books.

Claire's newfound enthusiasm was not limited to her creative spark. That first night she came home she'd pounced on him. Daniel was in the kitchen, rinsing dishes from the sink to run the dishwasher, when she walked in through the door from the driveway. She'd briefly paused behind him to whisper, "Come upstairs and fuck me. Now."

The dish slipped from his hand and cracked in two in the sink. He'd left it there. He'd even left the water running in his haste and had to turn back to shut it off. It was the second time in the last couple of weeks that she'd told him to follow her upstairs for sex, but he'd started it last time, and Claire

didn't tell him to come up and fuck her. She must've at some point, but he couldn't remember those words ever coming from his wife's lips.

By the time he'd caught up with her, Claire had thrown off her top and bra and had been shaking her long, chestnut hair out of the bun she'd had it in all day. She'd pushed her skirt over her hips, but paused with her thumbs in her tights when she'd seen him. Instead of stripping completely, she'd crossed the bedroom to him and initiated a fiery kiss, while dragging him toward their bed.

Their clothes had come off, but not before Daniel had felt her wet heat through her tights and panties. She'd ended up clawing his hips in her frantic fumbling to drag down his boxers. Claire had been soaked with hardly any foreplay at all. He didn't complain, but wondered what had possessed his wife. Again, she'd whispered the dirty exhortation, "Fuck me, Danny..."

He'd done his best to give Claire what she wanted, but that night she obviously needed more because she'd turned them and taken over. She'd ridden him hard, pounding her hips with enough power that the bed sounded like it was going to rattle apart beneath them.

Their sex life hadn't calmed down since then. They weren't back to doing it every night, Daniel sincerely doubted either of them had the energy for that, but it was two-to-three times a week, when they'd been down to a couple of times a month before that. And Claire was always just as fiery and demanding.

It would have been hot enough if that had been a return to their sex life when they'd began dating, but she was even wilder than she'd been then. Her new passion was how he'd always imagined she'd been in her Hollywood days, before she moved back to her hometown to become a teacher, and eventually a wife and mother.

For the first time in their marriage, Daniel felt like he was experiencing a taste of the Claire who went to trendy nightclubs and flirted with hot guys—maybe even went home with them. Probably went home with them in his fantasies. But as much as he loved seeing this sexy new side of his wife, he couldn't help questioning what brought it on.

He knew all the cliches about some women hitting their sexual peak in middle age, but thought that was all bullshit. Even if it were true, Claire's change came on too suddenly for that. Perhaps acting in a project she enjoyed for a change took her back to the old days and brought that other side out in her, but he didn't quite believe that either. Maybe it was because he didn't want to.

Daniel wanted there to be a reason. A specific kind of reason. He was determined to prove himself right.

The community center was buzzing with activity when Daniel walked in. He had some time to kill between dropping Harper off at band practice and picking Riley up from basketball. Seeing his wife on stage, even in

rehearsal, was a thrill. Performing, even doing Elwood's lame plays, transformed her.

Claire's star burned so brightly. It was so obvious to Daniel. He didn't understand why the rest of the world—why Hollywood—hadn't seen it. When he watched her perform, it was like that was the reality she was supposed to be living. The universe had split into a weird alternate timeline when it allowed her to become a suburban mom. Daniel was thankful he was the beneficiary of that cosmic error, but he couldn't help wanting more for her.

Toward the back of the multipurpose room, a group painted scenery, a stage backdrop of a snowy town. The theater company reused sets and props whenever they could, but a new play demanded new scenery. A crew of techs was gathered in another corner. Daniel was glad they were putting in the effort to make the material, and in turn his wife, shine.

Claire was on stage with three other actors. They were in the middle of rehearsing a scene. She and two other actors, a man and a woman, held scripts, but the man in front of her seemed to be working from memory already. Daniel wondered if that was the real actor, Ethan, his wife had been talking about.

She tried to subdue her enthusiasm whenever she mentioned her costar, but Daniel knew his wife too well. Working with a real actor again was clearly part of her excitement about doing this new play. He saw the self-doubt, too, but Daniel worked overtime to reassure her that she was the equal of anyone they put against her.

Seeing the man playing his wife's love interest, Daniel wondered if Ethan's talent was the only thing that had Claire all worked up.

The young actor, who she said was Paul's nephew, was a handsome hunk of a man. Daniel had never been the type to feel his manhood was threatened by admitting to another man's attractiveness. On the contrary, when it came to men in his wife's orbit, he was all too ready to acknowledge when they were hot. His comments had drawn strange looks from Claire over the years.

One of the reasons he used to jerk off to her sex scenes with Chase Hutchinson on *The Edge of Desire*—tame as they were—was because Chase was such a good-looking guy. Of course, she wants to fuck him, he thought. Daniel didn't distinguish between Claire the actress and her character, Raven, in those moments.

Seeing her with such a hot guy just looked right, like they belonged together. He never fathomed that the goddess he watched every afternoon could be his one day. He got that strange feeling once again, seeing Claire on stage with Ethan Blake.

The scene ended, and Paul told the other actors to take five, but asked Claire and Ethan to stay on stage. He stood on the floor, looking up at them. "Let's do the trees scene again."

"The one where I come out of the trees, or the one where she finally confesses that she's head over heels in love with me?" Ethan asked with a cocky grin.

"The latter one. We need to make sure your chemistry is right. That's what sells this whole thing. I need to buy that Holly finally understands the thing she's been waiting her entire life is standing right in front of her."

"I buy it," Ethan replied.

"Of course you do," Claire laughed, rolling her eyes.

"I'm getting there, too. You guys just have that It Factor when you're on stage together. But I need it to be seamless, like it's totally real."

"Hey, I'll do that scene as many times as you like, Uncle Paul."

She smacked him with her script.

"Don't enjoy this too much. It's unprofessional. I think you really like the other scene better because Nick is all manly and confident, and I'm tripping over myself."

“That is cute, Claire,” Ethan agreed. “You’re a natural comedienne. And nothing says I can’t enjoy my work.”

“Okay, you two, let’s take it from the top. Remember, it’s nighttime. You’re in the middle of the Christmas tree field. It’s freezing, and it’s just started snowing.”

Watching the actors on stage, Daniel had to agree about their chemistry. They weren’t even acting yet, but their playful energy was infectious. Another man would have been jealous to see his wife interact with another man that way. He felt something very different.

The actors took a moment to set themselves, and Daniel tried to picture the scene as Paul described it. He hadn’t read the script, so he only knew what Claire had told him about it. He could see them out there in the pine trees on a cold, starry night, although she would be frozen without her big, puffy coat.

Claire was in a russet-colored, cable-knit sweater dress that clung to her curves and came to just above her knees, beige tights, and riding boots. It was her quintessential look when she wanted to be a little dressy, but not look like she was making too much of an effort.

Daniel had an epiphany that she’d been dressing up for rehearsals in a way she’d never bothered to when Bob the car salesman was her costar. Nothing that would raise suspicion—or look like she wanted attention—but cute outfits that a guy like Ethan would definitely notice. And looking at the actor on stage with his wife, Daniel was sure he noticed. Ethan’s eyes seemed to follow Claire’s curves in that dress as she moved.

“And, action,” Paul called up to the stage.

Watching her body language completely change when she shifted into character gave Daniel the chills. He always felt like that when he watched his wife perform. He was her biggest fan. She wandered around the stage like she was lost.

“Nick! Nick, are you out here?” she called.

Ethan only stood a few feet away from her, which made her look silly, but Daniel knew it would be different when the set was in place. Ethan waited with his arms crossed while she shouted his name again. Finally, he stepped forward.

“What are you doing here, Holly?” His voice dripped with venom, but Daniel heard something beneath that. Sadness? Hurt?

This kid is good, he thought. And Ethan was a kid, compared to them, anyway. It was hot that Claire’s love interest was so much younger and clearly into her, and he wasn’t ashamed to admit it. He was proud that his wife was so sexy.

“I had to see you. I couldn’t leave things how they were.”

“I’m pretty clear on how things are.”

Ethan turned his back and Claire grabbed his shoulder.

“Wait. Let me explain.”

“What is there to explain? You’ve just been buttering me up to get my land for your company. Three generations of my family has farmed Christmas trees here, and now it’s all gone. I’m the one who lost it all.”

“It wasn’t you, Nick. You’re trying to climb out of the hole your father left you in.” Claire paused when he turned on her. “Okay, I see that wasn’t helpful. But I wasn’t here to distract you or trick you out of your family’s Christmas tree farm. Do you really think I’d seduce you for your trees? What kind of a person do you think I am?”

Ethan smirked. “I don’t know, Holly. I know how much you love wood.”

Daniel was rapt. They were playing characters, but he was dying to know how Ethan knew that Claire loved wood. He had to read that play, although it couldn’t even be as racy as her soap opera work. The community theater company would not risk scandalizing the town.

Claire looked like she wanted to smack him. Instead, her voice softened. “Nick... I love you. I’m sorry, I’ll make this all right.”

“Unless you can stop them from seizing my family’s Christmas tree legacy, I think it’s too late.”

“It’s never too late if you lead with your heart. You taught me that.”

Daniel’s heart ached when he saw the way his wife looked up at Ethan. He was totally in the moment with her. He wanted these two crazy kids to get together. And then Claire kissed Ethan and his brain broke.

There weren’t any kisses in any of the other community theater plays Claire had done. Daniel hadn’t seen her kiss another man since she was in bed with Charlie Sheen on primetime television. But it still hit him just as hard as it always had. Harder, because he was witnessing it in person.

All of the other people in the community center faded away. It even felt like he wasn’t there. The world locked in on those two people kissing on the Kingston Community Center stage. It was like all of the lights had gone dark, except for a spotlight cascading from above to focus on Claire and Ethan.

“Keep going. You need to start doing this like it’s for real. We’re only a few weeks away. Go for it, you two,” Paul said. Daniel heard his words like he was underwater.

What had been a soft, tentative kiss kicked into high gear. And Claire was the one to push it! Daniel was breathless like he was involved in the kiss. She had been holding the front of Ethan’s shirt, but she slid her hands up his chest and then through his lush, dark hair. The kid had incredible hair. Better hair than Daniel had ever had.

She boosted onto her tiptoes, and Ethan held the small of her back. It was an intimate gesture. Daniel was locked in on the intimacy of their moment, even though the couple was kissing on stage for everyone to see. In his mind, Claire kissed Ethan like she’d been dying to kiss another man.

The couple peeled apart and he swore she was flushed and a little but breathless Daniel couldn't excuse his looking, but he was sure Ethan was as hard as he was. And Daniel was throbbing. It was hard to hide in the guy's tight jeans. If there were lines after the kiss, they seemed to have forgotten them.

"I can't speak for anyone else, but I believed it, guys. Incredible work," Paul gushed.

Claire stepped back from Ethan, and that was when she spotted Daniel. She did a weak little wave, but more than anything else, Daniel swore she looked like she'd been caught.

seven

Raven Chandler waited in the changing room at the pool where her boyfriend, Stone Hammond, was a lifeguard for the summer. She paced back and forth in a floral-print string bikini that was risqué by ordinary daytime television standards, but pushing the envelope was *The Edge of Desire's* bread and butter. She looked incredible in it. Her tits were pushed up like they were on offer. Claire was in her mid-twenties, playing younger, and her body looked like it had been sculpted for that bikini.

“Raven, what are you doing here?” Stone asked, startled to find his girlfriend in the changing room. “The pool is closed. I’m just locking up.”

“Does that mean we’re alone?” she asked with a saucy grin.

“I’m the last one.”

“Good.”

Raven reached back to untie her bikini top and threw it away. The shot was over her shoulder, capturing Stone’s stunned face when he stared at his girlfriend’s naked tits. It was daytime television, after all. They didn’t push the envelope that far.

“Raven! You’re crazy. I’ll be in so much trouble if we get caught,” he hissed, scrambling to grab her top from the floor.

“Oh, Stone. You make me crazy,” she gushed, the line reading so over-the-top it wasn’t even in the same zip code as the top. She reached for him, pulling his hard chest against her. His tank top showed off his muscles instead of hiding them.

The young lovers kissed, and Stone’s resistance visibly melted away. Raven Chandler was the perfect sexy bad girl. A good guy like Stone didn’t stand a

chance.

“The things you do to me, Raven... I can’t even think... When I’m with you...”

“Stop talking and kiss me, Stone,” she insisted.

Daniel didn’t blame the kid. No man could have resisted Claire in that bikini. Kid was a relative term. Chase Hutchinson was playing a teen, but he was a decade older. He was probably the same age as Claire’s current co-star, Ethan, he thought.

What followed was a scorching-for-daytime-television love scene montage, but it was tame by any other standard. Lots of quick cuts and soft lighting. Hands on innocuous body parts that showed lots of skin, but ultimately showed nothing. And so much kissing. Claire’s passionate facial expressions were not acting. Daniel knew exactly what she looked like when she was turned on, and they were real.

It was all enough to get lonely housewives and teenage girls watching after school to get all aflutter, and it was enough for Daniel, too. He’d watched the scene so many times that he could see every shot without playing it back. But he liked to play it back.

Daniel was sure he saw a bit of sideboob when Raven reached for Stone. It must have slipped past the censors. His mind filled in the other blanks. And his cock filled his hand.

That wasn’t a flash of the young lover’s stomachs he saw. It was Raven and Stone, fully nude, pressed together while he thrust inside her. Stone wasn’t caressing her side. He was massaging her big, firm breasts, making her whimper for more. She was clinging to his shoulders because he was pounding her pussy the way only a young stud like him could. Daniel saw her legs wrapped around Stone, pulling him deeper—a detail they’d never show on a soap opera. His hand moved faster on his shaft.

They’d made mad, uncontrolled love when Claire came home from rehearsal that night. She wasn’t the one who started it this time, but she needed it just as badly as he did. Daniel didn’t even wait for her to undress.

She was standing beside their bed, unzipping a boot, when he was on her. She barely got the words, “What are you...” out of her mouth before his lips locked to hers. Just like Ethan’s had earlier that night. Daniel replayed that kiss in his mind while he kissed his wife and groped her the way the younger man couldn’t up on that stage.

He loved the way her curves felt in that clingy sweater dress. He knew Ethan wanted to grab her tits the way he freely touched her. Would Ethan have done it if he’d known that Daniel wouldn’t mind? As he felt the padded bra under her dress, Daniel had the wicked thought of telling Claire to go without a bra to her next rehearsal. If only he had the nerve.

Claire didn’t protest when he bent her over their bed. She helped him pull her dress up over her waist and held it there while he wrestled her tights and panties down to her knees. They kept her legs squeezed together, which only made it a tighter fit when he thrust into her.

“Fuck me,” she hissed, raising her ass for him.

Daniel was getting used to his wife saying that. He loved it. But even more, he loved that she was always so ready for sex. He loved foreplay, but there was something incredible about having a forty-eight-year-old wife who was down to fuck at the drop of a hat. Most guys his age were married to women who didn’t want to fuck them at all.

He was convinced Claire was turned on for the same reason he was. Her kiss with Ethan. Her desire had been carved into her body language, and he knew it wasn’t all acting. She got horny kissing her handsome, younger costar, and she rushed home to take it out on Daniel. Other men would have been jealous. The knowledge made him burn like a supernova.

That heat made him finish very quickly. Fortunately, he wasn’t too quick. Claire came while he was draining his balls inside her, shouting into the duvet as she clenched around him like she needed every last drop of him.

The moment was so incredible, Daniel wished he could will himself back to instant hardness and fuck her again. Darkly, he thought, Ethan would be hard

again right away. He'd fuck Claire all damn night. That dark part of him wanted that for his wife—and for himself.

They didn't talk about what had them so hot for each other, but Daniel couldn't get it out of his head, which was how he ended up downstairs with his laptop, watching his prized cache of videos of Claire's old performances. Very specific performances.

Daniel scrolled the video back to where Raven and Stone began fooling around. He watched the video differently the second time. Claire was not Raven, but his fortysomething wife. And Stone was Ethan.

She dropped her bikini top for her younger scene partner, and his eyes went wide. Ethan reached for her discarded top, and Claire pulled him to her, determined to seduce her costar. And then they were doing it. Daniel groaned while he watched that old familiar scene through a new lens. Watching his wife seduce another man melted his brain.

Daniel came into a wad of tissues just as the scene cut Raven in Stone's arms. They lay on a pile of chaise lounge pads, and she clutched a ridiculously oversized towel to her body, demurely hiding it from the boy she'd just fucked in the changing room.

"Fuck..." he gasped to the empty room.

His self-induced orgasm was so powerful that it drained the last bit of energy out of him. Daniel was so exhausted that his brain was hazy. He could have fallen asleep right there in the study, but it wouldn't do for someone to come down and find him like that in the morning.

But one clear thought pierced the haze. I want Claire to fuck him. I want my wife to fuck another man.

Claire was not surprised Daniel was dragging in the morning. She'd felt him get out of bed in the middle of the night and reached for him, mumbling for him to come back. But she'd been exhausted, and sleep pulled her right back into its oblivion. She had no idea what time her husband returned to their bed.

Oblivion wasn't quite accurate. She didn't often remember her dreams, but she was deep in the grip of one when she woke, which imprinted it onto her brain. The cause for the dream was obvious and normal—she'd had many anxiety stage performance-induced dreams over the years—but this one was a little different. She'd never woken from one of them soaking through the boyshorts she slept in.

In her dream, Claire was Holly Winters and Ethan was Nick Garland, and they were out in a field of Christmas trees on a cold, snowy winter night.

She was pleading with Nick for another chance, and she felt it. Claire felt a deep, all-consuming love for this man who was slipping through her fingers.

And then she kissed him, and heat bloomed deep in her core. She kissed Nick with a need that she felt in every cell of her body, which was when her alarm went off.

As she peeled back the webs of her slumber, Claire realized that she still felt that heat, but she was very much awake. She felt the dampness between her thighs, but didn't believe it until she touched herself. She was so surprised that she nearly started touching herself in bed beside her sleeping husband.

Trying to rouse Daniel for morning sex didn't work. Frustrated, Claire jumped in the shower and did something she hadn't done in ages. She took the massaging wand down from its holder and gave herself a quick, toe-curling orgasm. And it was not Daniel she was thinking about.

Claire was not ready to admit she had a crush on her co-star and chalked it up to being fully immersed in her role, which she decided was a good thing. Having a role she was excited about again was a blessing.

Daniel came out of the shower while she was adjusting her outfit in the mirror.

"You're looking good today, babe," he said, drying his hair with a towel.

"It's just a normal work outfit," she scoffed. She'd worn the long, loose pleated skirt many times. That day, she'd paired it with a sweater and a wide belt. She didn't think she looked bad, but there was nothing special about the outfit.

"I think it's hot. I love the way that skirt drapes your ass."

Claire looked over her shoulder in the mirror, and he was, indeed, staring at her butt. "Daniel! I'm going to chalk this up to you not wearing your glasses, because if I believed you, I'd have to change."

He laughed. "Why?"

“I cannot go to work looking hot.”

“But you do it every day.”

“Stop it. Seriously, put your glasses on.”

The front of his robe was tented. He was serious. Claire thought she looked good, but hot was ridiculous. She always dressed to look good. She couldn't recall the last time she even tried to look hot. Moms her age didn't do that. She'd probably feel silly if she even tried.

Daniel closed the distance, and she felt what was tenting his robe. He kissed her, tasting of toothpaste. She indulged him for a moment before twisting her lips from his.

“Careful, I already did my lipstick. Why are you such a horndog this morning?” In her mind, she added, And where was this when I needed it forty-five minutes ago?

“Because I have a sexy wife.”

His hands slid from her hips to her butt, and Claire felt guilty. She'd awakened just as horny, but she couldn't say it was about her sexy husband. Daniel was still attractive to her, but her soaked pussy was not about him. His erection still poked her, and the guilt made her want to take care of it.

Reaching into his robe, she thought that he could bend her over their bed and hike up her skirt like he did the night before. That had been so hot. She would have pounced on him anyway, but she loved that he did it first. She'd been feeling a little slutty for throwing herself at him lately anyway. But she couldn't go to work as a teacher with his cum running down her thigh.

“Claire...fuck...” he groaned while she tugged him.

“I guess you do think I'm sexy,” she purred. The animal hunger in his eyes was new. It made her rethink bending over the bed. I have time to clean up.

“Fuck...you're making me crazy, babe...”

His grip on her ass tightened, and for a moment, she thought he was going to finish and that she'd have to change anyway. His cock poked out of his robe, and she tilted it away from her so he didn't smear precum on her skirt.

Claire had another, wilder idea. It wouldn't take care of the fire that was growing in her again, but she wanted to see his reaction when she did it. How fast would he come if I just fell to my knees right here and sucked his dick?

She wanted to think she was still the kind of woman who'd do that—give a quick blowjob before work. Claire forgot all about her lipstick and began sinking down, staring right at Daniel while she did it.

“Mom! Are we out of Pop Tarts?” Harper called from the bottom of the stairs.

Claire cursed under her breath. Daniel's cock was right in her face. She paused to take a deep breath and get a normal tone into her voice before shouting back through the closed bedroom door.

“They should be in the pantry, Harp. Did you look?”

“I did! I swear!”

“Goddamit,” Claire cursed, releasing the cock and getting back to her feet. She shouted, “I'll be right there.”

“Babe...wait...you can't...” Daniel whined.

She kissed him hard, giving his shaft one last tug. “I know, I'm sorry. I promise I'll make it up to you later.” She disengaged.

“Claire...” He sighed, defeated. “Fine. Yeah. Do you have rehearsal tonight?”

“Every night this week,” she replied over her shoulder, fixing her outfit in the mirror—again.

There was a tiny, stick smear on her skirt. She brushed it with her thumb, and it didn't come out. She licked her thumb and rubbed again, rolling the salty taste around in her mouth. The mark was out of her skirt, but she'd remember it was there all day.

“Okay, I'll hold things down here. I stopped in last night. You and...what's-his-name...were amazing up there.”

Daniel said what's-his-name oddly, like it was forced, but she didn't have time to question it. His whole tone was weirdly casual, like he wasn't saying what he wanted to say.

“I saw you out there. Why didn't you stop and say hi? I could have introduced you to Ethan.”

“I had to rush out and get the girls. Besides, you and Ethan were making magic up there. I couldn't interrupt that.”

Claire turned with her hand on the doorknob. The look in Daniel's eyes was as off as his tone. Harper called from downstairs again, and Claire didn't have time to decipher her husband. “You could have come over when we were done the scene. I always have time for my biggest fan.”

“I hope so.”

“Let me get downstairs before she storms up here.”

On the way to the kitchen, Claire was struck with an odd thought. Is Danny jealous? Is that why he... She shook the thought out of her head. It was silly. He'd never been like that. If anything, he was a little too cool with it if a guy paid attention to her. But is he? Was last night about my scene with Ethan? Was Danny jealous and trying to reclaim me somehow?

The idea was so absurd that Claire thought she needed her head examined. That just wasn't her husband. Besides, she was just acting. It wasn't like he saw her kiss someone else for real.

Claire got pulled into the girls' drama, and her brain never made the connections between her arousal and that maybe her new role had affected

her husband the same way.

eight

Daniel had a new obsession. After so many years of marriage, he'd learned to manage his dirty fantasies about Claire with other men, but seeing her kiss Ethan on that stage brought them rushing back with more power than ever before. Seeing her kiss another man in real life was so different than watching it on screen. He couldn't get it out of his head.

When she was too tired to have sex after rehearsal, which was surprising after the way she'd been behaving, he slipped out of bed and jerked off, watching her old videos again. And then, as he sat there in the dark, vaguely ashamed of his weakness, he became paranoid.

Why was Claire too tired? He wondered. Acting with Ethan had ignited a spark in his wife, and it wasn't only her creative juices that were flowing—but then she was tired instead of horny. Daniel looked for a reason, his mind going to the places it wanted to anyway. Did she come home tired because she'd already taken care of her urges? Did she and Ethan do more than run lines?

Daniel trusted his wife implicitly, but the question of her faithfulness popped into his head because it played right into his fantasy. He knew it was twisted, but a part of him wanted Claire to give in to Ethan's charms. He wanted her to lose control.

The idea twisted his guts in knots, but also sizzled the blood in his veins. He imagined Claire and Ethan off in one of the smaller rooms of the community center—it was an old school building with many rooms—running lines together. Daniel had finally read the script and imagined they were doing the scene where they were snowed in at Nick's cabin.

There was a lot of playful banter and wild, funny accusations thrown between them, but eventually they got real, sitting in front of a roaring fire. The dialogue was intentionally cheesy. He thought this Kirsten was a good


writer. Finally, Holly literally threw herself into Nick's arms with exaggerated horniness, and they kissed.

In Daniel's head, the kiss became real, and they didn't stop. Claire pulled Ethan closer, practically climbing into his lap. He wrestled with her top, and she raised her arms so he could pull it off her. Ethan was frozen for a second when he saw her magnificent tits threatening to burst from her lacy bra.

Daniel was sure his wife had the best tits in Kingston, and they'd only gotten better with age—fuller and softer. He didn't care that they didn't sit as high and tight as when they met, and he knew Ethan wouldn't either. The younger man will be all over them. Daniel pictured Claire's costar burying his face in them while she pulled her bra off to give him better access.

In his scenario, Claire would end up on her back on the desk, with her skirt up around her waist, and Ethan would fuck her. She'd wrap her legs around his waist and pull him into her. Claire would moan for Ethan to fuck her the way she'd been telling Daniel.

It was all impossible, of course. She would never do any of that. But he watched her body language. Monitored Claire for subtle changes, signs that maybe she'd been tempted into an affair. In his darkest heart, he hoped that she had.



Daniel watched the clock. It was nearly eleven. Claire should have been home at least an hour ago. She hadn't answered his texts. He wanted to drive over to the community center, but he'd been drinking, and the girls were upstairs anyway. Instead, he waited, mind filling with darker, sexier thoughts.

Claire finally texted. She said her car wouldn't start.

▪

Claire

I think it's the battery

-
-

Daniel

I can come over and jump it

-

Even as he typed it, he knew he probably shouldn't drive. He wasn't exactly thinking clearly.

-

Claire

Ethan already tried that. Didn't work.

-
-

Daniel

Do you need me to come and get you?

-
-

Claire

That's sweet, honey. It's cold and it's late. Ethan can give me a ride

-
-

Daniel

Okay. Great. I'll see you soon then

-
-

Claire

Yep. On my way soon. Love you

-
-

Daniel

Love you more

-

Claire didn't need him. Ethan can give me a ride. Daniel smirked in the semi-darkened living room. The only illumination was the twinkling colored lights of their Christmas tree. He's probably been giving her a ride all night, he thought. His cock thickened. Maybe she was texting from his place as she pulled her clothes back on.

Daniel pictured Claire tugging her bra into place, remembering she needed to check in with him, and guiltily typing out the text. No, she wouldn't throw everything away for a roll in the hay with a hot younger guy. So, why did part of him wish she would?

The ride from the community center only took about fifteen minutes—maybe twenty with traffic. There was no traffic in Kingston at eleven

o'clock at night. Daniel didn't see the headlights in front of their house until forty minutes later.

Did she need one more? Ethan probably couldn't keep his hands off of her and pulled her back into bed.

He lurked by the window, watching from behind the curtain. A Jeep Wrangler sat running in their driveway. Of course, a rugged young guy like him drives a Jeep. Claire loves Jeeps. It's her dream car. The headlights meant Daniel couldn't see what was happening inside the vehicle.

Another ten minutes passed before she swung the door open and climbed out of the Jeep. Daniel pictured them in there, making out one last time, Ethan's hands up her shirt, like a horny teen dropping off his girlfriend after a date.

Daniel was back in his chair, scrolling on his phone, when she came into the house. She hung her scarf and coat on the hooks inside the front door and came into the living room. After dropping her purse on the couch, she balanced on the arm of the chair beside him.

"Hey, you. Be glad you didn't come out to rescue me. It's nasty out there. That wind was cutting right through me."

"Seems like Ethan had things well in hand."

He studied her for signs that she'd been fucking. Her hair was back in the typical ponytail. Nothing amiss there. The burnt orange skirt she wore over tights wasn't misbuttoned. Her top, a slightly sheer white, off-the-shoulder top over a black tank top, seemed in place. Daniel realized he was just a little disappointed to find no telltale signs of infidelity.

"I'm lucky he was still there." She paused, face scrunching like she'd just registered his tone. "What does that mean, Danny?"

"What does what mean? I'm glad you're home. I should thank Ethan for taking such good care of you."

Claire was running her fingers through his hair—an affectionate gesture that always gave him the good shivers—but she stopped and dug her nails in to

turn his head and make him look at her.

“Is something going on?”

“I’m just sitting here waiting for you to get home. Why do you think something is going on?”

After sixteen years of marriage, she knew him too well to buy his bullshit casual tone. “Something is up with you.” She stared harder at him. “Do you think something is going on?” When he didn’t answer, she added, “With Ethan?”

“I trust you.” Daniel was well aware it was not a direct answer.

Claire slid off the wide arm of the chair and onto his lap, forcing his phone to the side, so he couldn’t hide in it. He only caught her familiar floral scent, no sign of him. She was cold from being out in the winter night, but she still heated him up. His arm went around her, and he tried to ignore that her chest was right in his face and look her in her pretty green eyes.

“I hope you trust me after all this time. I would never cheat on you. You don’t seriously think anything is going on with Ethan, do you?”

“No, I don’t.”

It was the truth. He didn’t think she was capable of it, no matter how tempted she might be. Wishful thinking was playing tricks with his head. Twisted, wishful thinking.

She went back to running her fingers through his hair. “But you’re jealous, aren’t you?”

“When have you ever known me to be jealous, babe?”

“That’s why I’m so shocked.”

“I didn’t say I’m jealous.”

“You’re something.”

“Should I be jealous?”

“I thought you trusted me.”

“I do, but that doesn’t mean there’s no reason to be jealous. If you want to be real, Claire, let’s be real. You think he’s hot.”

She blurted out a laugh. A little too hard. “I do not. He’s a child.”

“He’s what, thirty? That’s not a child. He’s a man.”

“I don’t think he’s quite thirty.”

“Still a man.”

“He was a toddler when I left acting behind. Jesus, Danny, I’m old enough to be...”

He found it amusing that she couldn’t finish the sentence. It was also nice that he was no longer on the defensive. “None of that means you don’t think he’s hot. I saw him. I get it.”

“It sounds like you want me to think he’s hot. Or maybe you’re hot for him. Are you trying to tell me something, Danny?”

Claire squirmed on his lap, clearly uncomfortable with the conversation. Her motion made his already tingling cock thicken. He ignored her playful taunt.

“Yeah, that I know he turns you on. Why else would you come home from rehearsing every night ready to jump my bones?”

“I do not!”

“Really? I don’t remember you telling me to come upstairs and fuck you before you started working on this Christmas play.”

His fingers traced circles on her thigh, just below the hem of her skirt. Twisted like that, the buttons down the front of it looked like they wanted to pop open. I bet Ethan noticed how tight her skirt is, he thought.

“You know, most husbands would be thrilled if their wives were initiating sex this far into their marriage. If it’s a problem for you, I can always stop.”

Claire tried to push out of his lap, but he held her down. The struggle made him even harder, and he stifled a moan. Daniel imagined her guiltily struggling when Ethan kissed her, but giving in because deep down, she wanted it.

“I never said I wanted you to stop. I just want you to admit it’s not just about me. It’s okay. I’m not going to be mad that you have a crush.”

She kept struggling, but she wasn’t seriously trying to get away. She even laughed as she tried to twist out of his grasp. Her ass grinded like she was giving him a lap dance. Her breasts kept pressing against his face. Daniel was losing his mind.

Claire stopped moving and stared at him like she was putting the puzzle together. Then she kissed him with so much fire that he was breathless. Finally, she said, “You want me to be turned on by Ethan, don’t you? You’re not jealous, you’re...”

Daniel kissed her. He didn’t want to hear her say the words because he didn’t know how to answer the accusation. She’d see through the lie. He was afraid she’d judge the truth. Claire loved him, but he couldn’t expect her to understand. Even he knew what he felt was weird. So, he kissed her instead. It was an easy distraction. He wanted to tear her clothes off anyway. She had fistfuls of his hoodie, pulling him hard against her while she devoured their kiss.

“I know you’re jealous. Why does it turn you on?” she breathlessly asked.

He doesn’t answer directly. “Why are you so late? Running lines with Ethan?”

“Yeah, we were. It’s part of the process. Danny, what...”

He kissed her again, pressed his hand up her skirt. She tensed her thighs, but he was insistent, and they relaxed. He felt her damp heat through her panties and tights. She moaned into their kiss when he applied pressure there.

“Alone?” he asked, lips still brushing hers.

Claire’s eyes darted back and forth. “Yes,” she breathed.

Daniel pressed the edge of his hand, and she gyrated against it, pushing her tights into her swollen cleft. He imagined her pussy was swollen because Ethan fucked her earlier. He was spiraling. Do I taste his cock on her mouth? It disgusted and thrilled him.

“Take me upstairs...” she panted.

“No,” he murmured, just as breathless. “Admit it.”

“Fine...he’s hot...” The words spilled out between kisses. “You, too...”

Daniel forced out a moaned reply. “I...like it...”

Claire pulled out of his lap long enough to kick off her boots and shimmy out of her tights and panties. He pushed down his sweatpants and underwear. She straddled him in the recliner. He couldn’t believe it. She wasn’t thinking clearly, and he loved it.

“The girls are probably asleep, so we have to be very quiet,” she whispered, settling onto him with a low, satisfied moan. “God...Danny...”

He didn’t point out that Harper was very likely still awake. She was a night owl like him. But she probably had her headphones on and was practicing her guitar. We’ll be quiet, he thought. Claire’s reckless need was as hot as anything else in his head.

Claire’s forearms rested on his shoulders. She leaned down and kissed him while slowly working her hips. Her skirt was up around her waist, and he gripped her ass, pulling her harder against him. His head spun. It felt like he was taunting him with her pussy.

“Tell me...what did you think we were doing...”

The words were barely a whisper, carried into his ear by her hot breath. Fear seized him. He felt exposed. In all their years together, he’d never even

considered discussing his darker fantasies with Claire, but with her pussy wrapped around his shaft and grinding, he found it impossible to deny her.

The words came haltingly, forced out.

“You...were...alone...doing that scene...”

“We were...ohhh....just running...mmm...lines?”

“Did that kiss...shit, babe...I don’t...know...” His grip on her ass tightened, and he began thrusting back up at her. “The kiss...didn’t stop...”

“I...kissed him?”

Daniel heard it, that little hitch in her voice. She was imagining it, too. She liked it. Heat surged through him. She could play off her attraction to Ethan all she liked. Her body didn’t lie.

“Kissed him back...couldn’t help yourself...”

“Couldn’t help myself...” She paused like she was contemplating it.

“Ohhh...Danny...”

His confidence grew.

“Put you on the desk...pulled off your top...”

“Danny...I’d never...couldn’t...”

But her hips moved faster. Claire kissed him hard, tongue seeking his. He fumbled for the edge of her top and pulled it upward. She didn’t want to stop kissing to let him undress her, but he kept tugging. He wanted to see her the way Ethan saw her. She relented, and he pulled the top over her head.

Claire shook her ponytail free and fully embedded him inside her, grinding hard with a moan from deep in her chest. Her eyes were closed. He knew she was there, in his fantasy.

“I know...but you wanted to...imagine you could...”

“I don’t...”

Her sheath rippled around him, and she kissed him again. Daniel was relieved that she was just as conflicted—aroused, but fighting it—as he was. Her hips began churning again, more forcefully, like she was trying to drive to her climax.

“What else...did he...did you want...did you see...”

Daniel massaged her tits through her tank top before pulling it free of her skirt, too. He didn’t yank it off because he didn’t want to break her momentum. Claire was close. He could feel it. The tank top had built-in support, and she was nude beneath it. Her warm flesh was supple in his hands. Her pebbled tips burrowed into his palms. She whimpered when he brushed those tips with his thumbs.

Daniel panted when he tried to speak. He was close, too. It took effort to keep from popping too soon. “He’s all over you...can’t get enough...your tits...pulling up your skirt...”

“Danny...oh god...you don’t want me...to do that...ohhh...I’d never...”

“Not about me...you’re carried away...I understand...it’s okay...fuck, babe...”

The chair began to creak beneath them. Claire rode harder, like she wanted his cock to punch the orgasm right out of her. He heard how wet the fantasy made her.

“That’s so wrong...I couldn’t...not Ethan...ohh god...” Her nails dug into his shoulders. Her hips pounded onto him. She hastily added, “Not anyone... Danny...”

Claire doth protest too much, he thought, rolling her nipples with more and more pressure until she hissed. He didn’t mind that her eyes were closed because he knew what she was seeing. Fuck, she really wants to fuck him. Claire might really do it!

“Does he... ohhh god, Danny...does he...”

“He...uhnnn...fucks you...right on that desk...because you want it...you need it...”

“Ohmygod...yesss...no...it’s...ssssooo...wrong...fuck me...Yes!”

She came apart on top of him, stiffening and then shaking, her pussy locking around him and rippling in waves. Claire came as hard as she ever had with him. Daniel was right there with her, finally letting go and filling her with a grunt. He jabbed his cock up into her, like he needed the motion to get it all out. She pressed her sweaty forehead against his while she tried to regulate her breathing.

“Danny...ohmygod...that was...why...it was...”

He softly kissed her. “You loved it, babe.”

Claire kissed him, deeply, drawing it out, rather than answering him. It was strange how her reaction to his dirty fantasy empowered him. He should have been distraught because he was fairly certain that his wife actually wanted to fuck her co-star. But he returned the kiss just as passionately. Her pussy kept rippling around him with the aftershocks of her climax.

“I would never cheat on you,” she finally panted. “I don’t want to cheat on you.” She kept randomly kissing him.

“I know, babe. I know. I wouldn’t want you to cheat on me.”

“But this...fantasy...isn’t it about that?” She finally stopped kissing Daniel and really looked at him. “You’re not jealous.” A long pause. “It turns you on? Does thinking about me...cheating...turn you on?”

Daniel felt his walls going up. Now that she was cooling from her orgasm, Claire was realizing how weird he was. He did not want her to see him that way. He wanted to shift her off him and hide, but her weight pinned him to the chair. His deflated cock was still inside her.

“No, Claire, it’s not about cheating. It’s not that at all.” He felt like he was tripping over his words in his rush to explain himself. “It’s about you letting

go, your unbridled passion. It turns me on to think about you like that. That's all."

"With someone else? Another man?"

"You have fantasies, too," he shot back, way too defensive.

"Not about you sleeping with other women. Ew, no. It doesn't break your heart to think about me with someone else?"

"No...it's not real...it's not like that..."

Daniel grabbed her hips and pushed until she took the hint and climbed off him, stiffly pushing out of the chair. She pulled her skirt down to cover herself. He pulled up his sweatpants. He couldn't look her in the eyes.

"It's not cheating," he continued. "I don't think of it that way. I don't want you to cheat."

He was not prepared to tell her that he knew it wasn't about cheating—or being a cuckold—because he'd been turned on by thoughts of Claire with other men from before they were married, when she was just a sexy star on TV.

"You said that. So, this isn't something you want? You're not asking me to..."

His brain was jumbled. The thoughts bounced around too quickly for him to grab one and express it coherently. Claire picked up on the hair he was trying to split, the difference between cheating and Daniel asking her to do something with another man.

He didn't know what he wanted because he wasn't a fool. He understood all the ways asking Claire to fuck another man could go wrong, just as he knew that even asking for it in the first place could change everything, even if nothing happened. Daniel just knew what turned him on. What had turned him on for a very long time. But the longer he waited to answer her, the worse it was.

“No, it was just a dirty little out-there fantasy, babe. I think it’s probably hot because it could never happen, right?”

“Right,” she quickly agreed.

“Even I wanted something like that—which I don’t—you’d never do it anyway. It was just a fantasy for you, too, right? I mean, you don’t want to screw Ethan.”

Claire scoffed. “No, I told you, he’s a child. But I don’t want anyone else, anyway. I love you. I’m happy with you. I don’t need another man.”

“I love you, too. And I don’t need anything freaky in our sex life. It was just a little wild fun. Don’t even think about it anymore, babe.”

“I get it. Fantasies are fun. We all have them. I’m glad we could do something a little different. I, uh, I’d better get upstairs and take a shower. It’s really late.”

“I’m right behind you. I’ll just check the locks and turn off all the lights.”

Daniel watched his wife go up the stairs and thought her answers sounded as rushed and unsure as his. He was still sure that Claire would never cheat on him, but he was equally sure that she wanted to fuck her young co-star. And knowing that was going to make everything so much worse for him.

nine

“This isn’t just about me and my family legacy, Holly! This is about the whole valley! They’ll take all the water!”

“I swear, Nick! I didn’t know. They didn’t tell me about their plans. I thought they just wanted the Christmas tree farm land for...”

Claire went up on her line and said the first thing that popped into her head. “...for their sex dungeon!”

After a long pause, everyone burst out laughing. The new play by Kirsten may have been a little steamier than anything they’d done before, but it was still family friendly. There were certainly no sex dungeons. But the crew could be bawdy when the audience was not in front of them. Claire laughed so hard at her own gaffe that she had to catch her breath.

“And that will take all the water in the valley! Think of all the clean-up,” Ethan finally added, before cracking up himself.

They couldn’t go on, and Paul called the scene. “Okay, guys. Stop. Take a minute. Obviously, you’re a little distracted tonight, Claire.” His eyes narrowed. “I guess you have something specific on your mind.

Claire, trying to control her laughter, said, “That is not my thing. It just randomly popped out.”

“Freud said nothing is truly random,” Kirsten called out from her place sitting by Paul. “There’s subtext behind everything.” She held the script in her hands and had a strangely knowing look, like she understood something the actress didn’t.

“Okay. Haha,” Claire said, pacing in a circle, with a hand on her side. “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

“Or it’s a penis,” Ethan added, with a wink.

“Just take a minute, get your head in the game. We’ll try another scene,” Paul said. He liked fun as much as everyone else, but he also took his role as director very seriously.

Claire walked off to the side of the stage and bent to pick up her water bottle. When she turned, sipping from the metal straw, she swore she caught Ethan checking out her ass, but he looked away so quickly, she couldn’t be sure. I’m crazy. This is Danny’s fault.

Paul was right. She was distracted. Things had been off since that weird night with Daniel a few days ago. They acted like it never happened, or at least, that they didn’t go to where they did, but they’d been awkward around each other, and that was a first in their sixteen years of marriage. Even when they’d fought—and they’d had some doozies—they settled it and didn’t allow it to linger.

But neither of them knew how to chart this unfamiliar territory. Their sex life wasn’t boring, but they weren’t a kinky couple. They didn’t ordinarily share fantasies during sexy time. Certainly not fantasies about bringing other people into their bed.

Although, as she recalled it, Daniel’s fantasy was about her on a desk—not in their bedroom—with Ethan on top of her. She had to look away from her younger co-star when the thought materialized because she was afraid he was going to see something in her eyes. Ethan was perceptive, like all good actors were.

Claire had so many questions for Daniel. His hurried, too-casual-by-half denial about wanting the fantasy rang false. She was a perceptive actor, too. She wanted to be able to freely discuss anything with her husband, but the situation was complicated because he wasn’t entirely wrong, and she didn’t want to admit that.

Ethan was a good-looking man—even if he was young—and she’d been nursing a silly crush since the night they’d met. Maybe she’d done some daydreaming about their romantic scenes—not that she would ever admit it.

And lying in bed at night, her mind may have wandered to Ethan pulling his shirt off by the hot fireplace in his cabin—which was a scene that Kirsten should definitely add.

But it was nothing more than a silly crush. There was no possibility of anything there. Claire could have been willing, but she was probably twenty years older than her co-star. He did not see her that way. How could he? Except for those times—like a moment ago—when she swore Ethan was scoping her out, or even flirting with her. But then, Claire didn't know if she remembered what flirting felt like.

“Have you pulled yourself together, darling?” Paul asked.

“Yep. I'm good. I'm ready. Sure you don't want to try that scene again? I think I can nail it this time,” Claire said.

“I don't know,” Ethan interjected. “I think I like your version with the sex dungeon better. Kirsten, can we get a rewrite?”

“Only if you want the good people of Kingston to come after us with pitchforks. You're not from here, but trust me, our neighbors are not ready for a kinky Christmas play. But a Christmas-themed sex dungeon could be a fun idea for one of my books.” Kirsten looked up, as if she were thinking, and added a tagline. “This year, Santa is rewarding the naughty.”

“He could tie them up with garland and spank them with oversized candy canes,” Ethan replied.

Kirsten smiled. “Not just spank... Sorry, I need to get my mind out of the gutter.”

“Please, go on,” Riki Ruskin said from the far side of the stage. Her red curls were tied back in a loose ponytail, and her chest, in a tight, red Henley, screamed for attention. She'd been doing everything she could to pull Ethan's focus from the start. Desperate much? Claire thought.

“Doesn't sound like I'm the kinky one here,” Claire said, playfully pushing Ethan. “You're a little too into this idea.”

A strand of garland left over from the ongoing set decoration was draped over a nearby table. He grabbed it and looped it around Claire, pulling her in. She whooped and laughed, but her heart was racing.

“I don’t think being tied down is too kinky in 2025, is it?” he asked.

“I don’t think so,” Kirsten agreed from the floor. “People do all kinds of things. I’m glad we’re finally talking about it.”

Claire playfully pushed against Ethan’s chest, which was distractingly solid under his worn, untucked denim shirt. She wasn’t truly trapped. They were just having fun, but being so close brought that night with Daniel right back to the front of her mind.

“I think that’s your New York, big city values talking. We’re not like that here in Kingston.” Claire said it confidently, despite the rumors about her neighbors.

Handcuffs, blindfolds, and paddles were not alien to her. She’d seen things during her time in LA.

She caught Paul staring at her, held against his nephew by the loop of golden garland, with something like longing. He blinked it away. “Put that in your books, Kirsten, but no one is getting tied up in this play...”

“We could do an after-dark version for the afterparty,” one of the stage crew guys called out.

“Sure,” Paul agreed. “But let’s get back to the actual play. I want to do the cookie bake-off scene. Can we get set, please?”

Claire was aware that everyone was watching her and Ethan together. Do they think something is going on like Danny does? She pushed away from her co-star, snapping the garland. Of course, Danny insisted that he didn’t think anything was going on. She didn’t know what to believe. She didn’t want anyone to think that she would cheat on her husband. But she didn’t mind that Ethan looked disappointed when she pulled away.

The stagehands carried out a table and placed the props on it: a bowl, a rolling pin, a hand mixer, and hand towels. In the scene, Holly and Nick were a team competing in the annual Merryvale Christmas Cookie Bake-off. They'd been forced together by the town's busybody mayor, known at Christmastime as Mistletoe Mary. Riki Ruskin had reluctantly taken the role after losing out on the part of Holly. The scene took place when the couple was still falling for each other and in denial.

Claire took a deep breath and got in the zone. She loved the process of becoming someone else, and that night she needed the distraction. Ethan waited for her at the table, and she took her place beside him.

During the performance, they'd have actual baking supplies so they could make a mess, but during the rehearsal, they were pantomiming. Holly knew nothing about baking, but wouldn't admit it because she had to be the best at everything, so she fought Nick at every turn. He was good-natured about it, enjoying Holly's fight. Apparently, he was a master baker on top of everything else.

The whole point was that Nick was too good to be true—just like too many real-life men, Claire thought. She also thought Holly was kind of a cold bitch and didn't understand why Nick chased her so hard, but Claire didn't buy into a lot of the silly Romance tropes.

“You're doing it wrong,” Nick told Holly, who was rolling out the dough on the table.

“I think I can work a rolling pin. I close million-dollar deals, Nick.”

“And you come in like a wrecking ball. The dough needs more finesse than that.”

“Okay, Mr. Expert. Is there anything you're not good at?”

“Let me show you everything I can do, and then you can tell me,” Nick laughed.

He moved behind Holly, putting his arms around her and his hands over hers on the rolling pin. Nick took over, guiding her hands. He was fully pressed against her back, and his grip tightened. Their bodies rocked together in an intentionally sensual rhythm while they rolled the dough out. Everything Nick and Holly did was so obviously sexual that it was insane to pretend that the play was chaste.

The pressure of Ethan's body against hers, combined with the motion of their bodies moving together, took Claire right out of Holly's head. Instead, she was the fortysomething suburban mom getting overheated by her hunky younger co-star. His arms around her, his strong grip on her hands, his hard body rocking against her all combined to give Claire heady, dangerous feelings. It was all so inappropriate and embarrassing. Luckily, Holly was supposed to be feeling some of those same things in the scene.

Daniel's fantasy swam back into her mind, and Claire told herself, Stop being ridiculous. You're probably just another suburban mom wannabe actress to Ethan. Whether he really wanted it or not, her husband's fantasy was absurd.

"There, isn't that better? See how much smoother it is. You need to really push and get your whole body into it," Nick told Holly. He squeezed tighter and gave her the full press.

"I feel the difference," Holly agreed, wiggling back against him. "Feels like a big difference.

"We're almost there, Holly. Just a few more rolls." Nick exaggerated the roll of his hips.

"I can feel it, Nick," she breathlessly replied.

Claire's core tightened when she really did feel it. Ethan clearly did not see her as some suburban mom actress wannabe. His very large, very strong bulge pressed into the softness of her ass. Unless he was a Method actor, Ethan was feeling it too. The way he was grinding into her was all for him. The audience couldn't feel what Claire felt. Her body acted on instinct. She

ground right back against him and was rewarded with a soft groan only she could hear. We cannot be doing this, she helplessly thought.

“How are you two coming along?” Mistletoe Mary asked, strolling by their table.

The non-couple jumped apart like they’d been caught doing it right on the table. The mayor was smug. Inside, Claire was more smug. Riki was dying to be the one in Ethan’s arms. Claire was starting to believe that the safe path might have been to give the redhead the role.

“Great. We’re, uh, great.” The words were Holly’s, but the emotion was all Claire.

“Terrific! Got your oven preheated?” Mistletoe Mary asked.

“I, uh, think so,” Nick said, clearing his throat. “Is it, Holly?”

“Oh, it’s hot. We can shove them in as soon as they’re ready.”

“I knew you guys were a perfect match...for the bake-off. I can’t wait to taste what you’ve got. Nick always satisfies,” the mayor said.

Nick pressed on the imaginary dough on the table. “I think you can give Holly all the credit for inspiring me. My dough has never been firmer.”

“And scene!” Paul called out. “Wow, you guys. That was incredible. You two should be on the big screen together. You were made for each other. I feel like I was watching Tracy and Hepburn.”

“Thanks, Uncle Paul, but like my character said, it’s all her.” Ethan bowed to Claire. “She inspires me.”

Claire was already flushed, but the compliment made it worse. “Stop it. You’re the professional. I’m just a middle school teacher.”

Ethan laughed. “You’re the one who’s been on TV. I’m just an acting teacher and occasional caterer. Seriously, I really felt your commitment in

the scene. We were totally vibing.” He paused, and meaningfully added, “Don’t tell me you didn’t feel it too?”

Claire pushed aside her conflicting feelings and enjoyed the moment. The way Ethan looked at her made it easy. “Mmm, I felt it. You brought that all out of me. Totally vibing.” Would Danny be okay with this?

“I can feel it, too,” Riki said, looking between them. “It’s so natural, I’d swear you’re really doing it.”

“Just acting,” Claire defensively replied.

“Whatever you guys are doing, I want more of it,” Paul said. “The audience is going to eat it up. Don’t take your foot off the gas.”

“You guys were perfect. Just what I imagined when I wrote it,” Kirsten agreed.

Ethan slid an arm around Claire. She fought the impulse to recoil from the danger. The heat of him felt too good. “I promise, Uncle Paul. I’ll nail it. Um, we’ll nail it. Right, Claire?”

Claire forced a smile. “There will be nailing, Paul. I promise.”

ten

Claire sat on a couch with Ethan in a cozy, lounge decorated with fake plants, bookcases, and an area rug. It had been a classroom during the community center's previous life as a school. She held a copy of the script in one hand and clutched her water bottle in the other. Ethan held a gaudy can that contained an energy drink.

"How can you drink that at nine o'clock at night?" she asked. "I'd be up all night."

He shrugged. "I dunno. I'll be up all night anyway. Might as well be productive. That's how I roll."

"I forgot, you don't have a real job." She laughed. "Or have to get kids off to school. Enjoy it while you can. Real life comes at you fast."

"Not too fast, I hope. Although if I can be as happy as you seem, maybe it's not so bad."

Ethan gazed at her with an admiration that made Claire uncomfortable. After that baking scene, she was acutely aware of the kind of attention he paid to her. It wasn't unwelcome, which made her feel like a tease, but it wasn't appropriate.

They'd been running lines together and discussing how to play scenes every night after the main rehearsal ended—that was why she was so late the night her car wouldn't start—but she tried to get out of it that night. She knew being alone with Ethan was not a good idea. But he insisted, and she didn't have a good reason to cancel, other than saying she was tired, which she was. But Claire was not going to admit she didn't have his energy. She did not want to be an old lady.

“I have a good life,” she agreed, and abruptly changed the subject. “I need to go soon. Is there anything else you wanted to go over?”

“I want to do the cabin scene one more time. Maybe I’m wrong, but I feel you holding back, Claire. A little stiff. If people are going to believe you’re ready to throw everything away for me, they need to see it up there. It can’t look like we’re acting.”

Paul was pretty pleased tonight, she thought. But that was because she had been in the moment—dangerously so. She didn’t want that to happen again, but being so close to Ethan didn’t make it easy.

“I think we’re doing fine. This is a community theatre play, remember? What we’re doing is already light years better than anything we’ve done in the past.”

“That doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be the best it can be, right?”

His earnestness tugged at her heartstrings. Claire vaguely remembered being like that once, before show business chewed her up and spit her out. She didn’t want to be the one to crush his spirit, even if she was worried about what he was doing to hers. She sighed. “You’re right. The size of the stage doesn’t matter. Let’s do this.”

The scene took place when Holly was snowed in at Nick’s cabin. The night that cemented their bond. They sat by the fire, sharing their life’s disappointments and hopes for the future, learning that they weren’t as different as they thought they were. The scene ended with a kiss and Nick easing Holly back onto the bearskin rug—of course he had one—and the lights went down.

Ethan’s dark eyes sparkled while he waited for Claire to start the scene. He’d slid closer on the couch, as close as Nick would be to Holly. Doing the scene felt dangerous in a way it hadn’t before the night started—before that night with her husband.

“Nick, I had no idea you’d been through all of that with your grandfather. It must have been terrible to see him trampled by a herd of reindeer. I

wouldn't blame you at all if you hated Christmas."

Her voice was low, dripping with emotion. Holly touched Nick's cheek, but Claire felt the heat of Ethan's skin.

Nick looked away, unshed tears in his eyes. "I did for a long time. I kept the farm running, but I was empty—just going through the motions. But I never blamed the reindeer. They were just scared by Gramp's chainsaw. But you've given Christmas back its magic. When I'm out there among the trees and I make my fingers all sticky, it means something because of you. I love making my fingers sticky for you."

Claire found it hard to keep a straight face and remain in character. Kirsten was an inventive writer. She took his hands.

"I want to be there with you, Nick. I want to help you get your fingers sticky. I want to feel them covered in it. I never knew I could love it so much—the tree sap."

"Do you mean it, Holly? Do you want to get sticky with me?" Nick earnestly asked.

"I want it all over me. Cover me in it. Every time I smell it, I'll think of you. I never thought I'd feel this way about sap."

Nick leaned in and kissed Holly. A peck would have been enough. Stage kisses in rehearsal were often just for show to preserve the dignity of the actors. They didn't need to go for it every time they ran the scene. Claire appreciated the effort to prevent those with malicious intent from taking advantage.

Ethan was kissing her. It was not Nick kissing Holly. She felt the difference because when she started kissing him back, it was Claire doing it—no matter how much she wanted to convince herself it wasn't.

She froze at first, torn between playing her part and the very real heat his lips sparked inside her. But he was in her head. Claire didn't want to be accused of holding back, and she went for it. It had been many years since

she'd practiced stage kissing, and she shifted into kissing him the way she'd kiss any man she found attractive.

Both hands came up and raked through his floppy hair, so different from Daniel's thinning hair. Ethan wasn't the one who pushed things. Claire opened her mouth to him, playfully flicking out her tongue. He engaged, encouraged by her response. His fingers played along the back of her neck, while the other went to her hip as he guided her back onto the couch.

Her leg came up, her boot heel hooking onto his calf. Ethan stroked her side, hand moving from her hip to the side of her breast. Claire's core throbbed with needy heat. The longer she kissed the young man, the more she wanted to. She let go and lost herself in the kiss—in his touch. Everything was forgotten except for her growing craving. His hand brushed over the swell of her breast. It was an exploratory move to see how she'd respond, and she danced her tongue at his, ignoring the growing warning bells in the back of her mind.

Ethan ground his hips into her. Only when she felt that big bulge in his jeans, the one she'd felt against her back on stage, the one pressing directly into where she needed it, did those warning bells become full-on alarms. When Claire felt herself grinding back at him that she realized, I can't do this! Oh god, I'm married! This is cheating!

Claire tore her lips from his, but Ethan only moved to kiss her neck. She gave a deep moan, and her body surged at him. His lips were incredible, the kind that tempted girls to do all kinds of sinful things. But she could not be that girl. Claire was a woman. A married woman.

"Ethan...we have to stop..." she whimpered, nonsensically adding, "the scene is over..."

The younger man kept kissing her, only stopping when she gave a little shove. Fortunately, he was honorable. Too many men would have kept pushing. He sat up and ran a hand through his hair. He was flushed, wide-eyed, and panting.

"I guess we got carried away," he grinned.

“Yeah, we did,” she softly replied, touching her lips. They felt hot and swollen, like the rest of her. “We can’t do that. It can’t happen again.”

Ethan looked stricken. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to force...”

Claire reached over, touched his thigh, then pulled her hand back. “You didn’t. It wasn’t just you. I...kissed you back. But we just got carried away. We both know it happens, no matter what actors say in interviews.”

It was a shameful truth, but she’d always gotten aroused when she did love scenes with an actor she was attracted to—even the time she kissed another woman. In her days on *The Edge of Desire*, Claire wasn’t mature enough to control her emotional swings and threw herself right into it. Actors claimed it was impossible to get turned on with a dozen Teamsters standing around. A kinky part of Claire had liked having the audience.

“I’m sorry...but you’re so damn sexy, Claire. It’s hard to hold back.”

“Okay, now you’re being ridiculous,” she self-consciously laughed.

“Seriously. Don’t you own a mirror? I’ve tried to be respectful, but it’s hard...”

“I felt that.” She wanted to slap herself. It was not a time for jokes. “Sorry.”

Ethan grinned. She hated how much she loved that grin. “Don’t be sorry. I like that you’re fun. You’re not at all what I thought you would be.”

“And what was that? A boring, uptight old mom?” She should have leaned into that stereotype, but she couldn’t. Claire didn’t want him to see her that way, even if it was safer.

“Never. I saw your spark the moment we met. You’re just so much more than I could have hoped for.”

“You shouldn’t be hoping for anything, Ethan. I’m married.”

“I know.”

“And you can’t be into me like that. I’m nearly old enough to be…” She still refused to finish that sentence.

“My sexy dream fling? My Mrs. Robinson?”

Claire rolled her eyes. “How do you even know that movie? It’s from before I was even born.”

“I like old movies. I have Netflix,” he laughed.

“Whatever. Listen, Ethan, I mean it. I don’t cheat on my husband. I’m not like that. I’m sure you can find a willing Mrs. Robinson.”

He touched her thigh. She moved his hand. “You seemed pretty willing a minute ago.”

“That was a weak moment. It can’t happen again. I won’t let it. How about Riki? She seems more than willing.”

He laughed. “Yeah, she is. I bet she could rock my world, too. But she’s a little too obvious, isn’t she? That’s not what I want. She isn’t you, Claire.”

“But you can’t have me. I’m…”

“Married. I know. You keep saying it. I get it. I’ll behave if you want me to.”

“Thank you.”

“But if you change your mind…”

“I won’t. I have to go, Ethan. I’ll see you tomorrow, and we’ll reset this whole relationship. Okay?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her eyes rolled again, and she slapped his arm. “Don’t do that.”

Claire pried herself off the couch, grabbed her things, and hurried from the room. The car was barely started when she freaked out.

Oh my god! What was I thinking? Am I a cheating slut? God, did Daniel call this? He knew! How did he know? And then, as she shifted into drive and calmed her racing heart, she thought, Is it cheating? What if he really does want this? Will he be furious when I tell him or pin me down and fuck me? Which do I want? She gripped the steering wheel tightly.

It doesn't matter if Daniel wants this. I don't. Because I can't. I don't want to be that woman. I need to control myself. It isn't right, whether he wants it or not. I can't give in to those desires because I might not stop.

Claire spent the entire drive home wondering what she'd tell Daniel—if she should tell him anything at all.

eleven

The house was dark and quiet when Claire got home. She felt a wave of relief, but it only led to more guilt. On the way home, she'd resolved to tell Daniel about the kiss with Ethan, but if he was already asleep, she could put it off until tomorrow. She'd tried to convince herself that the kiss had been about their characters, but that would have compounded her sin: lying and infidelity.

Unwinding her thick, woolly scarf, she still tried to justify the kiss. It started as playing the scene, so it's not like I just kissed Ethan out of nowhere. And I stopped it the second it got out of hand. Is that really cheating? She hung the scarf up with her coat. Admit it. You wouldn't be okay with Danny kissing anyone else, no matter how it started. And had she really stopped the kiss as soon as it got out of hand? She chose not to think about it.

She grabbed a glass of water, and on her way upstairs, she saw a soft glow emanating from the study. Maybe Daniel had just left his laptop open? She didn't hear any noise from the room.

The urge to go up without investigating was strong. If he was in the study, she could slip into bed before he came up and still put off her confession.

Claire couldn't be a coward. Her biggest parenting challenges were convincing the girls to confront hard things and to admit, unequivocally, when they'd done something wrong. Teenagers loved excuses.

She peeked in the study door. Daniel was on the loveseat just inside the door, with his feet dangling off the far end. His back was to the door, and he didn't hear her open it because he had earbuds in. She was about to tap on his shoulder and let him know she was home when she realized what she'd walked in on.

That was her on his laptop. Claire had to squint to be sure because the video quality was awful—DVRs hadn't existed when she'd been acting on *Edge of Desire*, so someone must have digitized an old videotape, like someone had digitized an old videotape. It had to be that because she was pretty sure DVRs weren't a thing back then. He was watching Claire back in her *Edge of Desire* days.

Her first thought was God, I can't believe I was ever that skinny, followed by but I was so unhealthy then, and then the crucial question why is he watching my old soap operas? And then she recognized the gentle rocking motion of his body on the couch.

The laptop sat on his chest, so she couldn't actually see what was happening, but the way his arm was moving made it obvious. She recognized the scene he had pulled up. She and Chase had just run inside an old cabin to get out of a rainstorm. That was when the hurricane hit Oakview, if she remembered correctly.

They were both soaked to the bone, which of course made their clothes clingy and translucent. Claire didn't have to act like she was freezing in that scene because the set was always cold. She peeled off her wet clothes while Chase tried to start a fire. The show was always trying to find reasons to get her and Chase out of their clothes. Raven Chandler was a bad girl, so it wasn't hard to find an excuse.

She could smile at the memory now, but at the time, it had all been annoying. One of her co-stars had convinced her that she was being exploited. At that point, all of her experience had been on the soap; she'd had no idea what exploitation looked like. Yet.

On the screen, she peeled off her wet blouse. Underneath was a leopard-print bra with garish pink lace trim. So 2003. Of course, Raven wore a leopard-print bra. She was a tramp. Because it was daytime TV, her panties were plain black and offered much more coverage than Claire had worn at the time. much larger than anything Claire would have worn in real life back then because this was daytime network TV.

Maybe I was too skinny, but I rocked that ridiculous underwear. Claire worked hard to keep in shape, but she'd never have that twenty-four-year-old body again. Her mind drifted to Ethan. What would he think if he saw me like that? I was about his age then. He would have torn my clothes off.

Chase turned from the fire—a gas flame element they pulled out whenever they had to fake a fire—and saw Claire standing there in her half-naked glory. He grinned and pulled off his shirt. God, he looked good with his shirt off. Even better with the rest of it off. She used to love their sex scenes. She'd gotten so wet.

The walk down memory lane leapt off a cliff when she realized what Daniel was doing. Claire's own confession slipped her mind while she grappled with what was happening. Is Danny jerking off to my old Edge sex scene? There was so much to unpack that she didn't even know where to start.

When they first got together, Daniel used to fanboy out over her brief acting career, and when he was feeling brave—or a little drunk—he'd ask her questions about her love scenes. At first, she'd thought he was jealous, but over time, it was clear that thinking about it turned him on. She'd playfully given him details, loving his reactions—but as they got older, had kids, and that all faded away.

Daniel wasn't the first guy she'd dated outside the industry who had a million questions about sex scenes in TV and movies, and she'd gotten used to answering them diplomatically.

No, it wasn't like fooling around in real life. No, they never had actual sex on set, no matter how realistic the scene seemed. And no, actors didn't get turned on during sex scenes. That last one was a lie, at least for her, when she was working with actors she'd found attractive. And the skepticism she sometimes encountered when she gave the first answer was why she'd never told a soul about the last few projects she'd worked on before leaving L.A.

The scene Daniel was watching went into the familiar montage of shots that implied the audience was seeing more skin than they'd ever show. A close-

up of Chase unhooking her bra and sliding it apart on her back, lots of them kissing. Claire gripping Chase's arm.

She could have gotten lost in the memory of what an amazing kisser Chase was, but her husband's low moan kept her pinned to the present. His arm was moving faster. Daniel rewound the video to when she stripped and let it play again.

Claire felt weird just watching him, but knew interrupting him would be much weirder—even though what she'd done earlier was worse than what she was watching him do. She couldn't stay quiet. He didn't react when she whispered his name. His earbuds were noise-cancelling. She tapped his shoulder.

“What the fuck?!?”

Daniel started so violently that he nearly fell off the couch. The laptop tumbled to the floor, landing on its side. Her love scene continued to play. He scooted away and turned to see Claire standing in the doorway. He looked stricken, like he'd been caught shooting up. She smiled and reached for Daniel, trying to reassure him, but he scooted as far back as the loveseat would allow. She came into the room and closed the door behind her.

“Babe, what are you... This isn't what you... How long were you standing there?”

“I just came in. Can I turn on a light?”

“No! There's no reason to do that.”

Claire watched him computing his next move. His eyes darted to the laptop. A box of tissues and the bottle of hand lotion from her nightstand were on the floor beside it. But his sweatpants were also pulled down to his knees, and his cock stood straight up. He was very hard.

“It's okay, Danny.” She looked from the laptop to his cock, just like he did. “Jerking off is normal. You don't have to hide it from me.”

“I know. I wasn’t doing anything wrong,” he defensively replied.

“No, not wrong. But I’m curious…”

She bent and reached for the laptop, but Daniel scrambled and slammed it shut. She had no idea he could still move that fast, and she was just as surprised that his dick didn’t stab through his belly.

“It was just…y’know…a walk down memory lane.”

“Right.” She drew out the word. “I saw that. But those are my memories, not yours.” She carefully sat on the loveseat beside him, not wanting to spook him.

“That was on national television. It’s everyone’s memory. They still talk about you in the Edge of Desire Reddit sub.” Daniel still didn’t cover himself, like she wouldn’t notice his cock was out and hard unless he called attention to it.

Claire was very aware of his cock. Too aware. The kiss and tumble on the couch with Ethan had left her soaked. The weirdness between Daniel and her wasn’t lessening either of their arousal.

“Do they? Are you spending a lot of time in Edge of Desire groups?”

She was flattered, even though she wondered why he did that. Should I be doing that? Dropping in? Claire thought it would feel too desperate. She didn’t need attention that badly.

“Not a lot. Hey, you are my wife, and I’m proud. I Google your name now and then.”

Claire wasn’t buying the diversion. Honestly, it felt better to concentrate on what she’d caught Daniel doing than on her own guilty secret. “Do you…do this…a lot?”

“Jerk off? Masturbate? What’s a lot? We have a great sex life, it’s not about that, but I am a man… Don’t you do it?”

“I don’t jerk off, no, but I...y’know... Sure. Sometimes.” She wanted him to calm down. She didn’t like seeing him so defensive. She just wanted to understand—if she could. “But I wasn’t asking about jerking off in general. I was asking about this.” She nodded at the closed laptop. “I was talking about jerking off to me—old me.” She laughed. “Well, I guess younger me, actually.”

“I...uhh...”

“It’s okay, Danny.” She laid her hand on his knee, just above the waistband of his sweatpants, and he didn’t recoil. He seemed to accept the situation. “I just want to understand what’s going on.” She thought about Ethan. I have no right to be angry.

“I don’t know... I don’t have an explanation... Sometimes, I just like to watch old videos, and...” He finally managed a wry smile. “Isn’t it better that I’m doing it to you than porn?”

Claire seriously considered it. She supposed it was. Weird that it was her twenty years younger. That made her feel a certain way. But who didn’t want to be their husband’s fantasy—especially after so many years together. Still...

“Is it because I was hotter then?” She hated how insecure the question sounded, but she couldn’t hold it back.

“God, no, Claire. No way.” He put his hand over hers. “You’re in your prime now.”

“Don’t lay it on too thick if you want me to believe you.” She chuckled nervously.

“It’s not because you were hotter then. I mean it.” He reached over to caress the swell of her breast. “I mean...this body...damn, babe... It’s...”

Claire squeezed his hand tighter. “Just tell me, Danny. You can tell me anything.” She hoped he was as generous when she made her confession.

“It’s... Shit, Claire. I feel weird saying it, like it makes me creepy.” After a deep breath and a longer pause, he let go. “It’s... Okay, I like watching you...your old scenes...with guys... I know it’s weird, okay... But I think it’s hot. I’m sorry.”

“Danny, don’t... Don’t apologize. Thank you for opening up to me.”

Claire stopped talking as she processed his confession. I like watching your old scenes...with guys. Was that...did he mean... It’s not younger me he’s jerking off to. Danny is turned on watching me...with other men?

“So, the other night...that wasn’t out of nowhere...this is...” She chose her words carefully. She still didn’t understand his kink, didn’t know how it made her feel, but she didn’t want to shame the man she loved. “It’s your thing? Watching me? Thinking about me with...other men?”

“It...is?” Daniel winced like she was going to smack him. “I mean, it is. I guess it is. Like I said, at least it’s you I’m fantasizing about, right? There is no other woman for me.”

“I appreciate that, Danny.” Her tone was measured. “Do you watch all of it? Do you have all of my old scenes?”

“Yes?”

Despite her best efforts, she was a little creeped out by that. God, does he know about... Claire didn’t even want to think about it. But was it creepy? Daniel wasn’t one of those creeps who snuck pictures of their wives and jerked off to them. Or worse, take pictures she’d sent him and share them on the internet. She knew that kind of thing happened.

He’s right. That stuff was broadcast on television. It’s not like my husband is my stalker. I think I can be okay with this. I know he loves me, and I love him.

“Okay, I think we can acknowledge that this isn’t a normal thing in a marriage...”

“I bet more guys would do it if they were lucky enough to have old clips of their wives...doing stuff... There’s a whole kink around it. It’s called hotpast.”

“Is it? Okay.” I’m not sure that makes it better. “You’re turned on watching old clips of me performing with other actors. Let’s be clear. These are clips from TV shows. These aren’t old sex tapes.” Not that there aren’t one or two of those floating around. God, he’d better have destroyed those like he promised he would. “And you’re not jealous?”

“It’s in there, I guess.” Daniel shrugged. “But I’m really focused on you, babe. You’re so hot, so passionate. Most guys never get the chance to see their wives from that perspective. I know it’s acting, but it feels real to me. In those scenes on *The Edge of Desire*, when you were chasing Stone, it was like you’d do anything to get him. Seeing you that free, just chasing your desires... God, it’s everything, babe.”

Claire focused on one thought. One question. But she was going to need to work up to it. “Do you still... Do you think about me now... Is it just the old clips, or do you think about me in real life...” She was being so timid that she was frustrating herself. “Do you think about me...the real me... doing stuff...now...with men?”

Daniel looked away. This was the part he didn’t want to talk about.

“The other night, when Ethan dropped me off, and we... It wasn’t just the situation, was it? This is a thing for you now, isn’t it? You think about me and other men.”

“Not all the time. But I saw you two on stage, and it was like those old TV shows, but right in front of me. In the flesh. It should be the same, but it felt different. Stronger. Listen, don’t freak out. I’m not saying that I want you to do anything.”

It was Claire’s turn to look away. He didn’t have to tell her to do anything. She was weak and perfectly capable of cheating on her own. Daniel didn’t need to give her permission.

“I have to tell you something.”

twelve

“What?”

“Tonight, when Ethan and I were doing our scene... We went off on our own to run through it because we want to get it right.”

“Of course,” Daniel replied, eyes narrowing.

“It’s the scene when we’re snowed in at Nick’s cabin. There’s a kiss in the scene...”

“I remember, babe.”

“We kissed... Danny, honey, I’m sorry, but it wasn’t all Holly and Nick. I’m sorry.”

“You kissed Ethan?”

“The scene has a kiss. We were doing the scene. I didn’t just kiss him.” Claire hated how defensive she sounded.

“So, you guys were just doing the scene?”

Daniel sounded confused, but the fire in his eyes said he understood exactly what had happened. Claire was angry that he was going to make her spell it out, but if she did it, she should be able to say it.

“We were doing the scene, but like I said, it got out of hand. I felt something was changing between us, and then I shoved him away.”

“Right away?”

After a pause, “Yeah.”

Daniel couldn't even hide his excitement. His cock twitched in his lap. She'd been so caught up in everything, she'd almost forgotten it was out, but now it was all she saw. He really likes it. He's not jealous at all. Does this mean he wants me to do it? Would he want me to... Claire tried to wrap her mind around it.

"You guys were kissing, and it wasn't just like a peck, or a stage kiss." He spoke slowly. His breathing was heavy.

"Yes."

"And then it was a real kiss."

"Yes."

"And you liked it?"

"Danny, I..." She looked from his cock to his excited eyes. Both things confused her. "Yes, but that doesn't matter. I stopped..."

"At kissing? It didn't go any further than that?"

Claire flashed to Ethan's weight on top of her, his muscular body between her legs, his hands on her, and how amazing it felt. They didn't really do much, but it felt like so much.

"Pretty much. We were doing the scene, and Nick laid Holly back on that silly bearskin rug..."

"Ethan was on top of you?" Daniel gasped.

"For the scene...not really on top...I was sort of reclined..."

Daniel set the laptop aside and lunged across the loveseat. He was on top of Claire before she could react. Their lips were inches apart. He was between her thighs, and she felt his hard length.

"Was it like this, babe?"

“Sort of...”

“Did he kiss you like this?”

His lips pressed to hers, and she melted. Underneath all of her confusion and questions was a deep, persistent need. It had been there since she'd touched Ethan, and it had grown during the weird conversation with Daniel. Claire might have been disturbed by Daniel's kink, but being his fantasy was a scorching turn-on.

“Yes...” she whimpered between kisses.

“How did he touch you?” Daniel's voice trembled, as if he were on the edge of something dangerous.

“Like this.”

Claire took her husband's hand and brushed it up her side the same way her younger co-star's hand had glided over her earlier. The men kissed her so differently, and she felt Ethan's stubble against her cheek when they did it, but when she closed her eyes, she went right back there, and it was Ethan on top of her again, his crotch grinding down into hers—except Daniel was not wearing jeans. She felt the distinct line of his hardness rubbing her cleft through her tights and panties. If they weren't in the way...

Pushing his hand to her breast, where Ethan's had landed before she shoved him away, Claire reached down and pulled up the cute black skirt she'd worn to rehearsal. She wrestled with the waistband of her white, snowflake-patterned tights.

Daniel's touch started out tentative, like he was trying to experience her the way Ethan had, but she was his wife, and he wasn't shy about touching her. He roughly kneaded her breast, and the firm pressure made her core throb harder. The growing heat between her thighs took precedence over the conflicting thoughts crowding her head. It was easier to feel than to think.

“Danny...move a sec...let me...”

Claire knew he was reluctant to shift off her because he took a moment to react—until he realized she was trying to strip. He lifted his hips enough so that she could work her tights and panties down. He grabbed them and took over, wrenching them down her legs. Getting her tights and panties past his knees required too much flexibility, and he clumsily tumbled to the floor. They both laughed.

“I’m so smooth,” he laughed. He obviously wasn’t thinking straight because he kept trying to pull off her tights without removing her boots.

“Honey, you have to...”

Daniel gave up and got back on top of her. The tights and panties at her ankles allowed him to open her legs enough to get back between them. She pulled her legs back, opening them wider. She was a little ashamed of how badly she needed him inside her because deep down, it wasn’t all about Daniel, and they both knew it.

“I bet he was much smoother, wasn’t he?” he hissed, fumbling to get his cock slotted against her.

Claire reached to help him. “He wasn’t... He didn’t...”

Her sentence went unfinished because his cock sliding inside her took her breath away. “Oh god...Danny...yesss...” She clenched around him, like she was desperate to have him there. She was.

“Fuck...you’re so wet, babe...” He grunted, driving his cock into her hard and fast, like he had no control. “For him...so wet for him...”

“No...Danny...I want you...I love you...it’s not...ohhh god...not him...”

Claire was ashamed. She couldn’t admit the truth. She worked her hips back at him, but he was so wild it was difficult to match his rhythm. “Danny... slow down...please...” She tried to lock her legs around him, to regulate him, but her damned tights were in the way.

“It’s okay, babe...shit...goddam it...you can...say it...”

The truth was like a slap in the face. He wants me to say it. He wants me to tell him... Oh god, I can't... It's wrong... He'll hate me...

“Yesss...Danny...god help me...yesss...when he...kissed me...it was so...”

“He made you so fucking wet...”

“Oh god...yesss...I'm...sorry...”

Daniel pumped her faster. She prayed he wouldn't finish too quickly. She was nearly there.

“No...so hot...don't...” He clenched, like he was trying to hold back. “You wanted him...didn't you...”

“Yesss...didn't want to stop...I did...”

“Wanted to fuck him...”

Claire wanted to tell him, no, no she didn't, but Daniel shuddered and shanked deep inside her. The flood of his release brought about her own, and she arched her back off the cramped loveseat, her entire body clenching as he filled her. For a forbidden flash, it was Ethan inside her, filling her like that. Her pussy locked around her husband, milking every drop.

They were finished just as quickly as they had started, tangled together in an overheated jumble of limbs. Daniel's weight was suffocating, and she pushed at his shoulders, groaning that she couldn't breathe. He pulled back, and the slick trail his softness left on her thigh was a testament to how much she loved their twisted coupling.

Claire pulled her skirt down. It was the first time she'd ever felt the urge to cover herself in front of her husband, but what they'd done felt so dirty—so wrong. She didn't want him to see her traitorous pussy. But Daniel couldn't look at her any more than she could look at him.

What was that? We've lost our minds. When did we become so dirty? We don't do this! It isn't real. I have to tell him... I have to tell Danny I don't

want Ethan. I can't let him think...

"It's okay if you do it, Claire." Daniel was looking away and said it so quietly, she was sure that she had misheard him. She must have.

"Danny?"

He looked at her, and she saw the fear of judgment in his eyes. Claire hated that he thought she would ever reject him. She hadn't quite wrapped her mind around her husband's kink, but she would never reject him over it. She loved him.

"If you want to...with Ethan...it's okay."

"I never said I wanted that. Whatever happened tonight, just happened. It wasn't planned. And...this...that was just...I don't know...dirty talk."

Daniel stared at her. She understood how implausible it must sound to him.

"I have no plans to sleep with Ethan. I can quit the play if you want me to. Paul will freak out, but I don't care. Riki Ruskin will be in my place before you can blink, anyway."

"But if you want to sleep with him, you can." His voice was preternaturally calm.

"I said..." Claire stopped talking. She could keep denying she wanted Ethan, and Daniel would just keep telling her she could do it if she wanted to. Instead, she asked, "Do you want me to?"

"I'd never ask you to do anything like that, but if you want it..."

"Don't do that. Don't put this on me, like you're doing me a big favor. Wanting me to sleep with another man isn't about generosity, is it?"

Daniel looked stricken. "If you don't want to..."

"I didn't say that." Why did I say that? I don't want to sleep with Ethan. Right? "That's not what I meant. We need to be real with each other, Danny."

Do you want me to fool around with Ethan?”

“It’s not that simple,” he started. Claire stared him down and watched him try to form a reasonable response. “If you wanted to, and it happened, yeah, that would be hot. I would be good with it.” She kept staring at him. That wasn’t good enough. If they were going there, he needed to say it.

We’re not going there, are we?

“Okay. You being with Ethan would turn me on. I never thought I wanted something like that—not in real life—but I can’t get it out of my head. I want it, but only if you want it, Claire.”

She opened her mouth to say she didn’t want it, but couldn’t say the words. Claire hadn’t sought it out. She’d never have asked for it. But now that it was right in front of her, something she had previously found to be unthinkable. So out there that she’d never considered it.

Do I want this? She kept coming back to that question and realized she might be afraid of the real answer. Claire closed her eyes and felt Ethan kiss her.

“Would you want to watch?” she asked. She didn’t think she could do anything if Daniel was there.

“That would be awesome, but I don’t know how it would happen, unless you brought him here and I hid in the closet or something.”

“I can’t bring him here.” The words rushed out. The thought of it made her chest tight. “I...we...couldn’t let it intrude on our real lives. The girls live here.”

“Of course. I don’t want that. Hiding in the closet and watching another man...fuck you...would just be too creepy. I feel like going that far would be emasculating.”

Claire was relieved he felt that way. She tried very hard not to judge, but she couldn’t look him in the eye if he hid in the shadows and jerked off

while she was with someone else.

“Do you want that?” she asked. If you want him to say it, you have to do it, too, she chided herself. “Do you want me to go that far? To fuck him?”

“If that makes you...” Daniel stopped himself and took a deep breath. “If you want to fuck Ethan, that would be crazy. It would be the goddamn sexiest thing ever. I’m sorry, I’m sure I sound like some kind of loser pervert to you, but...”

Claire took his hands in hers. “You’re not. I swear you’re not. It’s a lot to process, but I’m glad you’re being honest with me. I don’t think you’re a pervert. I think you have a thing, but everyone has things.”

“Do you?” he asked eagerly.

“Not like this, no. Mine are...” She stopped herself. She could not say mine are normal. She knew exactly how it would sound. “But it doesn’t matter. I don’t think we can even control the things that turn us on. They’re just there.”

“I didn’t just decide watching you turns me on, babe.”

“Right. So, I’m not judging you. I just want to understand it. I’m sure I will. We’ll get there.”

“So, are you going to do it?”

“Slow down, tiger.” Claire laughed. “There’s lots of parts to this. I don’t know what I’m going to do. I don’t even know if I can do anything. What if I start and it just feels wrong, like tonight? And I told Ethan it could never happen again. He’ll think I’m some flaky bitch if I keep flip-flopping.”

Daniel grinned. “You’re hot. I don’t think he’ll care. He’ll just be happy to get in your pants.”

“Maybe. I don’t know if it’s that simple. I’ll think about it. I need to be very sure before I do something like this. So do you. We can’t take this back, Danny.”

“I know. And I am sure.”

“What do you get out of this if you can’t watch it?”

“I think knowing you’re doing it will be enough. And you’ll come back and tell me all about it.”

“Oh, I will? You think I’ll sit there and give you all the dirty details of my infidelity?” She was warm and playful, but she didn’t know if she could do that either. She’d feel guilty. Wouldn’t she?

“Not infidelity, babe. I want you to do it. I gave you permission.”

The permission part rankled, but she let it slide. I don’t ask for permission for things. I’m a grown woman. “Okay, it’s not cheating, but we’d sit down over coffee, and I’d tell you how I fucked someone else?” She didn’t see that happening.

“That’s not quite what I have in mind. Coffee wouldn’t be involved.” His hand slid up her leg.

“Oh,” she replied, feeling dumb. This was a kink. Daniel got off on it. If she were giving him details, he’d be turned on. And she might be too. Ohmygod, could I tell him about being with Ethan while we did it? Their dirty talk was scorching, but it wasn’t real.

“Is that terrible?” he asked. “I feel like if you’re with someone else, I should do something to, y’know, reclaim you when you come home.”

Her thighs relaxed when his hand climbed higher. It was late, and she was exhausted, but the possibilities were working on her. Claire didn’t want to tell him no. Daniel could have her again. As he’d just said, he needed to reclaim her after she kissed Ethan.

“Why don’t we go up to bed, and we can practice the reclaiming part? You can show me what it’s really like.”

thirteen

Daniel was proud of the good face he'd put on for the girls. He was acting like this was just another Christmas show their mother was in, and Ethan was just another co-star.

Both Harper and Riley clutched bouquets for their mother. They knew their mother had been an actress, and they were always excited to glimpse her star power. Even rock chick Harper, who normally acted too cool for something as square as a community Christmas play, was excited for her mom.

As their tickets were torn at the door, Agnes, the older woman ushering, told them they'd be so proud because Claire was so good. The local theater company was like a family, and they all knew Daniel and the girls.

That made him wonder if others had noted the obvious chemistry between his wife and Ethan and suspected something could be going on. He hated the possibility that they could be the subject of gossip, but that didn't deter him from what he wanted. Nothing could. He was a man possessed.

Daniel told the girls to go to their seats and that he'd join them in a minute. He needed a minute to settle himself, and he pushed through the crowd to anchor a spot on the wall. Just stepping into the community center made his heart race. He hadn't seen Claire and Ethan together since that evening he stopped by and saw them on the stage, but he'd been thinking about it constantly. Watching them kiss in the play wasn't the main event, but it would prime his pump.

It had been a week since he stepped off the cliff, and he'd spent a lot of that time wondering if he'd made a huge mistake. It's okay if you do it, Claire. Those words could end his marriage. Maybe that was dramatic, but he felt what he'd felt. He gave Claire permission to go off and fuck someone else.

At least she didn't tell me I'm sick and throw me out, he thought. That had been his biggest fear about exposing his kink to his wife. He'd carried that fear, that shame, for years. He didn't think a wife could understand their husband confessing something like that. He didn't care what the internet said.

Claire was different, and he should have trusted her. His wife was not some naïve waif. She'd told him about some of the wild things she'd seen when she lived in L.A. He'd been dying to know if she'd not just seen things, but joined in. However, anytime he probed her on it, Claire shied away from admitting anything. That only made him sure she had. Without a confession, his dirty imagination had put her into some wild scenarios.

Daniel imagined a new possibility every night while she was at rehearsal. Claire claimed nothing had happened yet. She swore she still wasn't sure she wanted anything to happen.

He wasn't convinced about the latter. The only reason he didn't jerk off every night fantasizing about Ethan fucking Claire somewhere in the community center was that he was waiting to give it to her when she came home. Their sex life had never been hotter.

Ethan had been respectful, according to his wife. He was a decent guy, and he wouldn't keep pushing when she said no. Daniel didn't understand how any man could resist her. If he had pushed, Daniel would have kicked his ass, but he also would have understood the urge. Of course, according to Claire, whenever she and Ethan were alone, she did her best to hint that she had changed her mind. She was a shameless flirt, and she found excuses to be close to him.

Claire could claim she hadn't decided what she wanted all she liked. Daniel knew her too well. She wanted to fuck Ethan. She came so hard when they roleplayed in bed. She'd found a sultry side he hadn't seen since they were first dating. Claire wanted it as much as he did. Maybe even more.

It's probably now or never, he thought. The play was a two-night event, and it was the second night. Unless Claire called Ethan afterward and threw herself at him, she'd probably never see him again. It's going to happen.

They'll have a few drinks, she'll loosen up, and she'll go for it. The old Claire will come out.

In his mind, 'the old Claire' was a Raven Chandler version of his wife. The woman who set her sights on a man and did whatever it took to seduce him. If Claire wanted Ethan, he would be hers. Daniel pictured her dropping to her knees and sucking her startled co-star's cock.

Daniel had to shake all of that out of his head, or he'd never get through the night. He couldn't make it happen, but he kept trying to will it into reality. The wrap party. That's where he'll have her.

"Hey, Dan, how's it hanging?" Joel Ruskin put his hand out for a fist bump, and after a moment, Daniel returned the gesture.

"Good, man. Long time no see. How have you been?"

"Great. Really great. Riki's super excited about being in this thing tonight. I've been on her about it for years. She's so dramatic in real life, she's a natural for the stage, right?"

"Yeah, sure," Daniel replied.

"I don't have to tell you. You're married to a real actress. Claire is always so good. You should be proud."

"Oh, trust me, I am. She's incredible. I'm a lucky man."

"Honestly, Claire's the reason I've had trouble getting Riki to try out. Everyone knows she's always going to be the lead, and Riki doesn't play second fiddle to anyone."

"That's not true. Claire auditions every year."

Joel made a face. "Come on, man. She's a real actress. She's been on TV, for God's sake. Besides..." He leaned in closer and dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "We can talk like men, right, Dan?"

“Yeah, sure.” Does this guy know something about Claire and Ethan? Did Riki see something and tell him?

“Even if Claire wasn’t a real actress, that part is hers because Paul wants to fuck her. You know that, right? Some people think he was a little fruity, but nah, not with the way he gushes over her.”

Fruity? What the fuck is wrong with you? Even if Paul was gay, fruity?
“Listen, Joel...”

“I didn’t offend you, did I? He doesn’t have a shot with Claire. No one would think that. Maybe I’m a little off. Between you and me, I think it’s hot if another guy wants to fuck Riki. I guess it’s a pride thing, but I want other guys to want my wife. You’d fuck Riki, wouldn’t you? Like if you weren’t married to Claire?”

What is this conversation? Do I have some sign on my head? Can everyone read me now that I confessed my kink to my wife? “Uh, yeah, Riki’s hot.”

“That body, right? Who doesn’t like a fiery redhead? And trust me, man, she’s fucking fiery.”

“Her body’s sweet,” Daniel agreed. He knew he should get out of the bizarre conversation, but there was something about Joel Ruskin’s tone that made him wonder. Is he like me? “Riki’s got great tits. You’re lucky.”

“Yeah, I am, but Claire’s still fit. Body like that, what does she do, Pilates or something? If everyone was single and I had a shot, shit man, I’d love to see what it’s like to fuck a Hollywood starlet. I’m not overstepping, am I?”

“Um, no, not at all. I’m not insecure. I get what you’re saying. And yeah, it’s nice to know that I’m not the only one who thinks Claire’s still got it. But don’t get any ideas. She’s all mine.” He added the last part in case Joel got the wrong idea, then thought, And Ethan’s. Tonight anyway.

“My man.” Joel gave him a bro handshake. “We should grab a drink sometime, Dan. Sounds like we’ve got a lot in common.”

“Yeah, sure. But I really should get back to the girls. They’re probably wondering where I am.”

“No problem. I’ll look for you afterward.”

The men parted, and Daniel wondered if being so close to fulfilling his kink was fucking with his head, or if that was the weirdest conversation he ever had with another man.

A Christmas Promise was so good that Daniel couldn’t quite believe he was watching the community Christmas show. That wasn’t a direct knock on the company. After years of doing the same stale things, anything fresh would have been exciting. But the new play was cute, funny, exciting, and yes, sexy. Of course, he might have been biased.

Normally, he would have lamented the girls wanting to sit with friends they spotted. They were at that age where they were consciously separating from their lame parents. But with the intense, conflicting feelings warring inside him, Daniel was happy he didn't have to hold it together when he watched Claire and Ethan on stage. There were things he did not want to feel with the girls sitting right there.

Watching Holly and Nick fall for each other burned through him like acid. Daniel didn't expect such a visceral feeling from that part of the play. It felt too real for him. The jealousy and insecurity brewing inside him were unexpected. He'd never experienced that before when jerking off to Claire's old sexy scenes, but he'd never been so close to it being real before.

He had expected the hard-on. He was hard through so much of the play that his balls ached by the intermission. He kept shifting in his chair to adjust himself subtly, and he kept his program on his lap.

Experiencing the jealousy and arousal together left Daniel confused and questioning everything. Pushing Claire into the arms of a hot young stud was a terrible idea. He felt foolish not to have seen it sooner. Ethan's going to fuck her better than I ever could, he worried. Once he makes her come like that, she'll want it again and again. Will I even be able to make her come after that? What was I thinking?

Daniel didn't think she would leave him for Ethan. The fucking couldn't be that good, could it? She loved him. She loved their life. But what if it unlocks something inside of her? I might not be enough anymore. She'll want to keep fucking him, obviously. Or look for it somewhere else.

He hadn't given their little game any thought past the Christmas show. He felt safe because Ethan would leave after the holidays. Maybe it would even be hot if the young actor kept fucking Claire through New Year's, until he left. But what if she wanted it after that? She could find another lover locally. Daniel didn't know if he could live with that, no matter how hard it got him.

What if she wants to visit Ethan in New York? The thought of it made his chest tight, but his pants even tighter. The anxiety might kill him, but the

forbidden possibility was so dirty and erotic that it might be worth it.

Daniel still had time to stop Claire from doing anything. She wouldn't fuck Ethan backstage the moment the play ended. He would see her before the wrap party and could tell her he'd changed his mind. She might be disappointed, but she would understand.

When he saw Claire and Ethan—Holly and Nick—kissing in front of that fireplace, his doubts evaporated. Ethan eased her back onto that bearskin rug in front of the fake fireplace, and his hand slid down to her hip before the scene faded to black, but Daniel's mind filled in the blanks. He knew what happened next as surely as if the couple had started fucking on stage.

Holly wore one of Nick's flannel shirts because her cold, wet clothes were drying after they were caught in the snowstorm. While they kissed, he eased the shirt up over her ass while pressing down into her. But it was Claire in his mind. Claire, caught up in the moment finally, and realizing how much she wanted him, lifted into Ethan. She got soaked when she felt how big he was—so big, it was impossible to miss.

Ethan unbuttoned the shirt, exposing her to him. Claire lifted her tits at him. Those amazing, soft tits. He couldn't get enough of them, kneading and devouring them, while she slowly lost her mind. With each touch and kiss on her naked body, she wanted him more and more. When Ethan buried his face between her thighs, Claire was ready to do anything he wanted.

Daniel was imagining her wailing orgasm when his brain caught up with the play. Holly was looking out on the snowy expanse of the Christmas tree farm the morning after, full of warm and fuzzy feelings because Nick fucked her so good. Daniel filled in that last part. In her contentment, she started singing Winter Wonderland. Shoehorning Christmas songs into the play was silly, but Claire had a lovely singing voice.

He wasn't thinking about his wife's singing. Seeing that kiss on stage was like a junkie getting a fresh fix. Daniel wasn't going to intervene. His heart might explode, but Claire could fuck Ethan if she wanted to. He was probably insane, but he wanted it more than anything else in the world.

fourteen

For the first time ever, the standing ovation didn't feel forced. Relatives of the performers always jumped to their feet at the end of the plays, but they weren't the first ones up this time. The show was good .

The applause grew louder when the cast came out for their curtain call. The girls ran forward and handed their mother the floral bouquets. Claire was so moved by the reaction that she looked like she was going to cry. Daniel was so proud and even more thrilled that she got to have that moment. He felt like he was seeing a glimpse of the woman she was before they met, when acting was her life. She caught his eye and blew him a kiss.

As the curtain closed, Daniel pushed through the crowd to get to his daughters. The moment was such a high that he forgot his kinky turmoil and was back to just being Daniel Weston, husband and dad. They'd make their way backstage, which was a hallway and some rooms converted to dressing rooms for the show, but he knew from past years to give the actors a moment before intruding.

The hallway was mobbed with crew members, actors, and their well-wishers. The jumbled din scrambled his brain. Daniel didn't like tight, crowded spaces, and he took a deep breath to steady himself. His daughters were on either side of him, and he kept a hand on both. They wouldn't get lost in the community center, but his anxiety was running high. At the far end of the hallway, he saw Paul stand up on a box and call out for everyone's attention.

"Everybody! Everybody, please! Just give me a minute, then you can all get back to what you were doing. I know everyone just wants to wrap this up and get to the party. Me, too!"

The crowd whooped and applauded. The theater company was a rowdy bunch, given that it was mostly local businesspeople, office workers, and

yes, teachers like Claire.

“We’ll do this properly with a toast at that party, but I just wanted to applaud everyone for their hard work. You’re all the ones who make this happen. I have to thank Kirsten, who wrote our play this year. I worship at the altar of your brilliance. Thank you for giving us something to be excited about.”

The writer, standing to Paul’s right in a cute, green velvet Christmas dress with faux-fur edging, turned red and curtsayed.

“And of course, our leads. We could have never pulled this off without two actors who could so perfectly inhabit Holly and Nick. Claire! Ethan! Where are you?”

“I’m here, Uncle Paul,” Ethan called out, waving from the middle of the crowded hallway. Daniel recognized the sleeve of the festive Christmas sweater he wore for the final scene of the play. The actor didn’t look so threatening in a Christmas sweater.

“Claire? I know you’re here somewhere,” Paul shouted.

“Can you give a girl a minute? I’m trying to get out of this dress,” she answered, ducking out of one of the side rooms.

Daniel’s breath caught when he saw his wife step out with her dress half off. She held the fancy red dress Holly wore at the end of the play up against her chest, showing only her bare back and lacy black bra straps. He was so erotically charged that, for him, she might as well have stepped out in front of everyone naked.

His eyes shot to Ethan, who was looking at her. Everyone else was, too, because Paul called their attention to her, but Daniel still imagined that her co-star was staring at Claire with lusty intent, like he wanted to just tear that dress away from her. Yeah, he wants to fuck her. Goddamn, what is wrong with me? Why do I like it?

“Sorry,” Paul replied with an exaggerated eyeroll. “I was just trying to point out how awesome you are. But if you have better things to do...”

“No, don’t let me stop you. Let the praise commence.”

The crowd around them laughed, including their daughters, who didn’t seem at all scandalized by their mother’s state of undress.

“Go on. Go back there and strip,” Paul said, waving her off. “I’ll take care of you later.”

“You wish,” Claire laughed.

The crowd kept laughing at their interplay, but Daniel was sure that Paul’s fervent wish was to get Claire in bed. It had never bothered him because Paul wasn’t remotely a threat to his marriage.

He’d never even incorporated the man into his dark fantasies about his wife, probably because he wasn’t a danger. Is the risk part of the turn on? Do I get turned on by the possibility that another man could take Claire from me? Daniel smiled at the irony that Paul had been carrying a torch for Claire since high school, but his nephew might be the one to bed her.

“Okay, everyone, let’s shut this thing down so we can start drinking!” Paul called out.

The crowd began to mill around again, and Claire ducked back into the room. Riley was still glowing because her mother was a star for a night, but Harper was a walking eyeroll.

“Do you think Mom is going to get drunk?” Riley asked.

“Mom? Yeah, right. She’s not that cool,” Harper scoffed. “She’s too old to party.”

“Hey, first, you’re never too old to party,” Daniel corrected.

“Says the old man. How do you party hard, Dad?”

He gritted his teeth and tried to remember this was normal teenager stuff, but he still hated it. Harper could be the poster child for bringing back old-school parenting.

“Don’t forget that your mom used to live in L.A. She’s might be the coolest person you know.”

“Yeah, used to. I bet she was a blast when she was young and going to clubs and doing coke...”

“Your mother has never done coke, Harper!”

“You weren’t there. How do you know? Wasn’t cocaine everywhere back then? If Mom was a TV actress back in the day, she probably did all kinds of stuff you don’t know. She’s not going to confess that to any of us.”

“How old do you think we are? Your mom wasn’t an actress back in the 80s. Cocaine was not everywhere.” It probably was, he thought. But your mom probably found shit like ecstasy and even more dangerous stuff back in the aughts. He was also well aware Claire had done all kinds of things she’d never admit to him.

“Mom’s not a druggie, Harp,” Riley interjected.

“Thanks, honey,” he said.

“Mom isn’t. She wasn’t a mom back then,” Harper insisted.

Is she rummaging around in my head?

Daniel cut the weird argument short by hustling the girls forward toward their mother’s dressing room. When they got there, he rapped on the door and asked, “Are you decent?”

“Gimme a minute,” Claire replied through the door.

A moment later, she pulled the door open and went back to tying the knot at the waist of her crimson wrap dress. It was adorned with a pattern of tiny white starbursts. Her sheer white tights had a subtle candy cane pattern. Once the dress was tied, she pulled at the neckline to keep it from revealing too much cleavage. She was dressed to get someone’s attention, and Daniel knew it wasn’t his. He’d never seen the outfit before.

“Wow, Mom you look pretty,” Riley said.

“Thanks, honey.”

“Yeah, you really look ready to party hard,” Harper deadpanned.

Claire gave Daniel a look. “What’s that all about?”

“Don’t ask,” he replied.

“Harp thinks you’re a druggie,” Riley volunteered.

“What? What happened while I was on stage?” Claire laughed.

“Nothing. Don’t worry about it. Harper’s being Harper,” Daniel said. “You were amazing, babe.” He kissed her.

“Thanks. I was a little worried it wouldn’t come together, but it worked out really well.”

“Whatever. I’m going to go find my friends,” Harper said.

“Don’t go far. We’re leaving for the wrap party soon,” Daniel replied.

Harper kept walking without looking back.

“I still need to get my things together. Meet you there?” Claire asked.

“I figured. We just wanted to come back and tell you how awesome you are.”

“You were amazing, Mom,” Riley agreed.

“Thanks, honey. Both of you. It means the world to me.” She kissed Daniel back. “Love you.”

“Love you more. Get your stuff done here. We’ll see you at the party.”

Claire smiled warmly. That was the woman he fell in love with. The mother of his children. Daniel had trouble wrapping his mind around the fact that

she was probably going to fuck someone else tonight.

The Connellys' massive house—Daniel considered it a mansion—was a gaudy Winter Wonderland. He always took in the house and thought that he'd gone into the wrong business. He had no idea there was so much money in selling cars, but Bob Connelly did own six dealerships. It wasn't like he ran a single grubby used car lot.

An inflatable Santa in his sleigh, complete with reindeer, adorned the soccer field-sized front yard. The decoration was as big as Daniel's car. The Restons lived in a nice house, but the girls' eyes were still wide at seeing the spectacle of how the Connellys lived. He tried not to feel inadequate.

As the theater company's principal patrons, the Connellys always hosted its parties. It was a step up from doing it at the community center. The couple's housekeeper took their coats at the door, and he followed his daughters through to the giant great room at the rear of the house. The girls moved to the music spun by the DJ their hosts had hired.

The ceiling looked higher than the peak of the Restons' roof, which was needed to accommodate a Christmas tree that would have been at home at Rockefeller Center. Daniel turned his nose up at the fancy, monochrome tree. It was obviously decorated by a professional, just like everything else in the Connellys' home, and he found it all sterile. He'd take their own tree any time. Maybe it was festooned with mismatched ornaments, but ones that all meant something to his family.

Circulating waitstaff offered snacks and champagne flutes on trays. Daniel gave the girls a disapproving look when they playfully reached for the bubbly. They'd have to stick to soft drinks. He turned it down, too. Daniel needed something stronger. He let them go off to where the other young people gathered in the gaming room while he looked for his wife.

Claire was in the middle of a large group, holding court, as she should have been after such a triumph. Daniel had never been prouder. He wished he knew a way to give her that feeling every day. For a moment, he even wondered if she should try to jump-start her acting career.

Ethan was on her left, and Paul on her right. Bob Connelly was just in front of her, and the burly man was practically drooling over her. The neckline of her wrap dress had slipped again, showing much more cleavage than Daniel knew she would be comfortable with. He was sure she'd be pulling it up all night. The men crowded around Claire, and jealousy burned in the pit of his stomach. The feeling was new, and he didn't like it much.

Although he was sure the other men would have loved a shot at her, too, it was all about Ethan. The younger man had his arm around her waist. Marci Connelly was at her husband's side, and she did not look thrilled that Claire was soaking up all the attention. Daniel could relate.

But he was feeling much more than jealousy. He watched Claire in that crowd, with those men fawning over her, and so much blood ran to his cock that he was dizzy, and he braced a hand on a column. What if she took all three of them? She has three holes. It was one of the darker thoughts Daniel had ever had about his wife, and he instantly regretted it. He wouldn't want to see her go that far. Right?

Pushing his way over to her felt desperate, like a cuck trying to remind everyone he still existed, so Daniel left Claire to enjoy herself and went to find the open bar.

Daniel savored Bill Connelly's Macallan Rare Cask because he had to drive the girls home and could only allow himself one. It was one of the rare times he chafed under parental responsibility because a few drinks would have settled his nerves. A large, comfy chair near the bar opened up while he stood there, and he dropped into it. Daniel just needed a few minutes to collect the wild thoughts pinging around in his head.

fifteen

“Y ou’ve got to do it.”

“I don’t know, Uncle Paul. She told me she didn’t want that because she’s married.” Daniel’s ears perked up at the words.

“And then she started flirting hard, like she’d changed her mind. She probably went home, thought about how that kiss made her hotter than she’d been in years, and realized she wanted more of that.”

Paul and Ethan were standing at the bar behind him, and they obviously hadn’t realized that Daniel was slumped low in the big chair. He sank even lower.

Ethan laughed. “I think you’re way over the top, as usual. This isn’t some soap opera. Claire isn’t some desperate housewife throwing herself at the first young dick that gets near her.”

“Hey, I know her much better than you do. We’ve been friends since high school.”

“We’re you a little more than that?”

“Yeah, Claire and I were an item. So, I know something about how hot she can be.”

An item? Daniel thought. Only Paul would put it that way. What does he think hooking up with Claire when she was sixteen or seventeen has to do with how she is now? That guy’s been thinking about her way too much since then.

“Wasn’t that a thousand years ago?” Ethan was laughing again. “She’s a grown woman now.”

“Yeah, she is,” Paul agreed. Daniel thought that no one who heard the director then would have confused his sexuality.

“Anyway. Yeah, I think she’s been flirting…”

“Throwing herself at you.”

“Flirting. I’ve got enough experience to know when someone is interested, I think. So, maybe Claire changed her mind. Shouldn’t it bother me that she’s married? She’s got kids. I don’t want to break up a marriage.”

Shit, do I need to pull this kid aside and tell him he has my blessing? Daniel wondered.

“I don’t want to hurt your ego, kid, but unless you’ve got a magic cock, she isn’t leaving Daniel for you. This wouldn’t be that. Claire just has an itch that needs to be scratched. An itch that I think you gave her.”

Glad he thinks I’m nice, but not so nice that his nephew shouldn’t fuck my wife. Sure, he fully supported Ethan fucking Claire, but Paul was annoying him.

“I can just fuck a married woman consequence-free? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Your mother would kill me for telling you this, but yes, Ethan. She’ll keep her mouth shut. She wouldn’t want it getting out. I think you and Claire can have your fun and move on.”

“Unless once is not enough, and she wants more.” Ethan sounded thrilled by the prospect.

Daniel’s body clenched. Ethan had spoken his biggest fear. But hearing him say it out loud made Daniel wonder if maybe that wouldn’t be the worst thing. He wanted Claire and Ethan to be together so badly that he might want her to get fucked over and over. What if insecurity was holding him back?

“You should be so lucky. If she does, more power to you. You’ll be in town through the holidays. I’m sure you can work something out.”

Daniel was reeling from the very real possibility that Claire and Ethan could become fuck buddies when the men got their drinks and walked away.

Daniel went and found Claire the moment he could stand without an embarrassing erection. He wanted her to do it. He didn’t want her to do it. He wasn’t sure where his head would be when he finally got her alone to talk.

Claire was in a corner talking to the playwright and Riki Ruskin when he found her. The buxom redhead was falling out of her green dress, and Daniel

saw her in a new light after his earlier conversation with her husband. Kirsten held a glass of wine and smiled like maybe she'd had a few of them.

“Here he is. I don't think you've met Kirsten, have you, honey?” Claire said, taking him by the arm and pulling him close.

Daniel just wanted to drag her away, but he plastered on a charming smile instead. “I don't think we have. I'm Dan, Claire's husband.”

“I figured. I didn't think she was just grabbing a random guy like that,” Kirsten replied, offering him a warm, lingering handshake.

“It's been a while, Dan,” Riki said, pushing her chest forward like she was always competing with the women around her.

A contest between those three women would have been something to behold. All three were beautiful and dressed to impress. He was partial to Claire, obviously, especially when her dress kept slipping lower like that. The lacy black fringe of her bra was showing. He couldn't believe she hadn't noticed, and he wondered how many drinks she'd had. Daniel was tempted to tell her about the bra, but he liked having her exposed like that.

Kirsten seemed to note Daniel catching Claire's exposed bra and leaving it. The woman had a knowing smile. He remembered that she wrote spicy romance—whatever that was—and wondered if she had one of those dirty minds that never quit. She certainly looked like she could be trouble.

Her long dark hair was teased, and for the first time, he noticed that it had pink streaks deep within the layers. The cat-eye glasses somehow made her eyes seem even more mischievous. She didn't have the assets that either Claire or Riki were sporting, but Kirsten had a great body and filled out her green, fur-trimmed elf dress nicely. When she moved, he noticed it sparkling. The writer seemed to be the perfect blend of quirky and sexy.

Daniel turned his attention back to Riki. It was easy with her tits right in his face. “Yeah, it has. I ran into Joel earlier, and he said we should all get together. I think we're going to set something up.”

Claire dug her nails into his arm. “We’ll look and see if our calendars sync up.”

“Yeah, it is a busy time of year,” he agreed.

“Guess what? Kirsten wrote *A Christmas Promise* as one of her books. I can’t wait to read it,” Claire said.

“I wasn’t going to, but watching the rehearsals inspired me. Honestly, Dan, your wife deserves all the credit. Watching Claire and her chemistry with Ethan is what really inspired me.”

“Wow, that’s incredible. Is it one of your, uh…”

Kirsten reached out and touched his arm. “You’re not going to embarrass me by talking about my work. Yes, it’s one of my spicy books. Think of the play as the edited-for-television version of the story.”

Riki seemed intrigued. “How spicy are we talking?”

The writer smiled enigmatically. “If you’d read any of my books, you’d know. I think I should be insulted. Let’s just say, you’re either going to want to lock the bedroom door or make sure your husband is available. That’s sort of the point of my books.”

Hearing Kirsten come right out and admit that she wrote smut was jaw-dropping. That wasn’t something that happened in Kingston every day. And somehow, hearing a woman talk like that was even hotter. The only thing hotter was that she claimed to be inspired by the chemistry between Claire and Ethan. He was relieved that it wasn’t all in his head, but he worried about exposure.

“I am definitely checking it out.”

“Of course you are,” Riki said. “It’s a book about you. What do you think, Dan? Are you ready to read a book about your wife hooking up with Ethan?”

“It’s not really about me…us,” Claire interrupted.

“I pull inspiration from everywhere. I’m sure it would be a different book without you and Ethan influencing it,” Kirsten said.

“I can’t wait to see what kind of trouble you find for Claire...I mean, Holly.”

Daniel hoped his plastered-on grin was convincing.

“Honey, your heart is pounding a mile a minute. Are you okay?”

Her husband did not look okay. He was flushed and a little sweaty. The house was warm, but not warm enough to account for that. When Daniel looked at her, it felt like he was looking past her instead of seeing her.

“I’m fine,” he said. “I just wanted to tell you I’ll be heading out soon with the girls. I know how these parties are when it gets later into the evening. It’s not exactly kid-friendly.”

Claire laughed. “Don’t make it sound like a party in the Hollywood Hills. I don’t think Bob is going to do lines on the coffee table, and it’s a little cold to strip and jump into the pool.”

Daniel allowed the quirk of a smile, but it wasn’t mirthful. At least it was something. “The pool is heated, isn’t it? Could be fun.”

“I think I’d freeze my tits off before I got across the patio, honey.”

“So you miss it? Those days with wild parties in the Hills, beautiful, powerful people all around you? The energy of it all?”

“More like the smell of desperation in the air, coming from the aspiring actors wondering what they might do for a chance at their big break—both the girls and the guys. And the desperation from the directors and producers wondering if their careers are on the upswing or the downswing. Wondering if they have enough juice to do the things they want to do to one of those aspiring actors.

“No, I don’t miss that at all. If I wanted that energy in my life, I would have stayed in LA. Even if acting didn’t work out, I could have found something in the business that would have kept me there. But I wanted a real life. A normal life. What is going on, Danny?” She squeezed his arm.

“Just thinking about...things. Watching you tonight...you were amazing, babe. I feel like you belong in that world.”

“I belong in this world. With you. You and the girls are my world. This play has been a great experience, but it doesn’t have me ready to run off and become an actress again. Is that what’s really going on?”

Claire knew this was not about her missed calling to the stage and screen. Daniel had something on his mind, but it was not her acting talent. This disturbance in the Force was about Ethan. Daniel did not look like a man who was okay with what he’d proposed.

“Nothing’s happened with Ethan,” she told him bluntly.

“I know that you wouldn’t hide something like that from me.”

He didn’t quite look like he believed it, and the implied distrust annoyed her. Daniel looked like he had something else to say, but kept it to himself.

“That’s right. I wouldn’t. Danny, you started all of this. If you hadn’t encouraged it…” Claire chose to forget that she kissed Ethan first. She’d stopped the kiss. She’d proved she could control herself. “I don’t need to do anything…”

He caressed her cheek, and the emotions passed across his face like fast-moving storm clouds. Daniel went from lost to wistful, to disturbed, to eager in the blink of an eye. She didn’t know how he had so much going on inside him without losing his mind.

“I know you haven’t done anything wrong. You’ve been great. It’s just… It’s been a long day. That’s why I need to get the girls home.”

“I can get my things and come with you guys, if you want.”

“No, this is your party. These are your people. Have fun, babe.”

They both knew what he was telling her, even if he didn’t say it—couldn’t say it.

Claire stared at him. She was sure he meant it, but that didn’t mean it was a good idea. Daniel looked like he could change his mind at any second. Wanting something didn’t make it a good idea. She took both of his hands in hers.

“I’ll stay if you really think I should,” she said.

“I do. It’s your night. Take full advantage. Be the star I know you are.”

Her heart softened. This wasn’t just about his kink. Daniel really wanted her to let go and enjoy herself. With another man.

“I guess I’ll stay a little while. Tonight was pretty incredible, and I feel like celebrating.”

His smile was genuine this time. “Do it, babe. Celebrate until you drop.”

“I love you, Danny.”

“I love you more, babe.”

sixteen

Claire stared out through the sliding glass doors at the light snow that had begun to fall. A dusting of it had already gathered on the patio. Improbably, there were people in the Connellys' pool. She didn't know if they were naked, as Daniel had suggested, because they were shadows in the backlit steam that rose from the heated water. They're insane, she thought.

Earlier, she'd downplayed her days back in LA to Daniel, like she always did, but Claire knew she likely would have been in that pool if she were twenty years younger. She would have ignored the cold, thrown her clothes off without caring who saw her, and jumped right into that water. And if it was too cold, she would have found someone to warm her up. In her twenties, Claire would not have hesitated to fuck Ethan. She would have done it already—multiple times.

Claire had always hidden the sordid details of her time as an actress from her husband—and everyone else in her life—because she didn't want to be judged by how she'd behaved. Claiming to regret the things she'd done would be disingenuous.

There were individual experiences that she'd take back, if she could, and insane risks she'd taken that she prayed her daughters had the sense to avoid, but she loved every second of her time as a young woman in Hollywood. Until the town took everything it wanted from her and tossed her out, leaving Claire tired and drained, like she'd lived an entire lifetime at the ripe age of twenty-nine.

She moved to LA to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts after high school and quickly settled into the chaotic, hedonistic lifestyle of an attractive young starlet chasing fame. A fresh-faced eighteen-year-old was catnip to that town.

Seeing the pleasures and thrills LA offered made her upbringing in Kingston feel very small. She happily, wantonly threw herself into everything LA had to offer. Some of those experiences didn't feel real when she looked back on them. She couldn't believe she'd done those things. But she had, she thought, with a smile.

Underneath her fear that Daniel would never look at her the same if she shared those stories, she had a new desire to open up to him. The kink he'd confessed to her seemed to have changed everything in their marriage, and she hadn't even done anything yet—not really. For all her fears about confessing to him, she saw Daniel differently now that she knew his dirty little secret. Not in a bad way. Just different.

He'd probably love her wildest stories, like the time a producer who was old enough to be her father paid Claire and Chase to fuck while he watched. She didn't consider it prostitution because the producer never touched her, and she was seeing Chase anyway. A question floated through her mind that both thrilled and frightened her. Would Danny want me to reenact any of it?

Whether he'd ever want Claire to reenact her wild past, he wanted her to do something tonight. Something she was still unsure about. Playing with the fantasy and wanting it was entirely different from going through with it. She didn't even know if she wanted to be the kind of person who'd do that. She thought about Riki Ruskin and wondered if that was her future if she crossed this line.

Will I start chasing every hot guy I meet?

The thought of it was absurd, but maybe she hadn't sealed her past in that box tightly enough. Perhaps the lid was coming off.

“I was wondering where you got to,” Ethan said. He held out a fresh champagne flute.

“I’m not even done with this one yet.” Claire laughed and showed him. Hers was about a third full. He kept the refill held out to her. “Seriously? I’m probably going to have to take an Uber home as it is.”

“I can give you a ride.” He gestured with the glass.

“How is that going to work? You’ve been drinking too. And it’s started snowing. I should probably leave now.”

“Marci said anyone who has too much is welcome to stay. It’s not like there isn’t plenty of room. This place is fucking huge.”

Claire could just imagine Daniel's reaction if she texted him that she was staying over. His blood would probably rush to his cock so fast that he'd stroke out. Or he'd panic and drive back to stop her. She still wasn't positive that he wanted what he said he wanted, but Claire could only take him at his word.

"You've had the grand tour then?" she asked.

"No, not yet."

That surprised her. Marci Connelly had watched Ethan tonight the same way Riki had been since the start of the play. It seemed like all the cougars in Kingston wanted him. And there he was with her. Claire was proud of that, even though she knew she probably shouldn't be.

Claire stared at the offered champagne and downed the rest of her flute, setting it down on a nearby table. She knew, because she had worked those jobs when she was younger.

"Well, then. I guess it's up to me to give you the tour."

Taking the offered champagne from Ethan, she looped her arm through his and led him away from the patio. It was another step toward making a decision.

The party had changed in the hour since Daniel left. All the families had drifted away, leaving just the cast and crew of the play, and a handful of friends and sponsors of the theater company. The DJ had read the room and changed it up to slow jams. It was the time of night when the effects of too much alcohol mixed with the high of closing night, and people got reckless.

Claire smiled at two people hooking up on one of the couches. They were married, but not to each other. Whatever happened with Ethan would not be happening out in the open like that. Although it was nice to know she wouldn't be judged for whatever she did. Still, she didn't want to be a subject for the rumor mill like all her neighbors were.

They wandered down a hallway that led to the east wing of the enormous house. Claire didn't think anyone noticed them slipping off. It was dim there,

quieter. Being so close to Ethan felt more dangerous.

To their right was the game room where the kids had been hanging out earlier. It held all of Bob's favorite arcade games from the 80s, a shuffleboard table, and a pool table. Next to that, across from a door that led to the garage, was his home office. The huge mahogany desk looked like it belonged to a man who thought he was very important. The door to their left led out to the four-car garage—one of two at the house. Ethan guided them into the office.

“What do you want in here?” she asked, a laugh in her voice.

“Just curious how the other half lives. That big room back there is like four times the size of my tiny walk-up apartment in Brooklyn.”

“Bob does like everything bigger. The Connelys are all about conspicuous consumption.”

Claire sipped her champagne while they perused the antlers and other hunting trophies on the wall. She hated them. Instead of books, the bookshelf was lined with photos of Bob and Marci with every local dignitary she could think of, plus some minor celebrities and a Hall of Fame football player. She wasn't surprised to see a photo of Marci draped on the owner of a certain country club in Palm Beach County. Of course, the Connelys would be members. Ethan smirked at it.

He slipped his arm out of hers and went around behind the desk, lifting papers, moving pens and a paperweight. She began getting nervous for a new set of reasons. Bob would not appreciate them poking around on his desk.

“What are you doing?” she hissed.

“Looking for stock tips? I'm not above insider trading.” He dropped into the high-backed, black leather executive chair and swiveled it so he could put his feet up. He sipped his champagne.

“Are you insane? We need to get out of here, Ethan. Come on, I'll show you his cars. Boys like that sort of thing, right?”

Claire came around the desk and tried to push his black engineer boots off of it. The shiny metal ring in the leather strap triggered a memory of an aspiring male model she dated who wore those boots to seem tough. That was an age ago, and it suddenly made her feel too old for Ethan.

“Boys?” He laughed. “I am not a boy, Claire.”

Then why are you acting like one? She wondered if dealing with immature bullshit was a side effect of spending time with a much younger guy.

“Whatever. Get your boots off his desk and let’s get out of here.”

“Why are you so nervous? What’s he going to do if he catches us in here?”

Claire tried pulling his arm, and between the heels she wasn’t used to and all the champagne, she lost her balance. Ethan caught her with the grace of someone who’d aced his stage fighting class, and when she landed on his lap, the only damage was a little bubbly spilled on her dress.

“Dammit, Ethan,” she complained, pawing at the spreading wet spot on the front of her dress. The thin, silky fabric clung to her chest even tighter.

“Don’t worry, it’s not going to stain,” he replied, keeping her in his arms and on his lap.

Claire laughed, feeling silly. “Everyone’s going to think I’m a clumsy lush.”

“Hey, I happen to think clumsy luses are hot.”

She pushed his hair back from his forehead and looked into his dark eyes. God, he’s handsome. What am I doing here? “Is that so?”

“Yeah. They lean on you a lot, so you get to touch them, and honestly,” he paused with a grin. “They’re kind of easy.”

“Are you saying I’m easy?”

“No, I think getting you requires a lot of effort, but you’re worth it.”

Daniel had to work for it because Claire was trying to be a different person then, but back in LA... You have no idea, she thought. "And how would you know?"

Ethan's thumb lightly stroked her soft hip. "It's just a hunch."

The ripe moment hung between them. She liked to think she was worth it, but fortunately for him, Ethan was not going to have to work for it. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears. Her chest was suddenly so tight it felt like she couldn't breathe. There she was, a married woman. Someone's mother. And she was sitting in a younger man's lap, getting hotter by the second.

Claire leaned in and kissed him. It was as simple as that. She'd spent the last week flirting, testing him. She'd been as obvious as she could be without simply throwing herself at him, but it all came down to her falling into his lap and just kissing him.

His lips were warm, and rougher than she expected. Daniel had very soft lips. Ethan's were chapped, like he'd been spending time out in the cold. When she touched his cheek and felt the constant three-day stubble he maintained, every nerve screamed that she was not kissing her husband. He tasted of champagne and spice. Even though they'd kissed before, every sensation was heightened. And really? This was their first kiss.

The low rumble in his chest did all kinds of things to Claire. It was more a growl of possession than a moan. Her core tightened the moment she felt it, her fingers tensed on his cheek, and her tongue slipped past his lips. His grip tightened on her hip, pulling her tighter against him. She felt something twitch and grow in his lap.

Claire expected an uprising in her soul when she kissed Ethan. Her vows had reverberated in her mind when she thought about it. Forsaking all others. She had strong feelings about cheating, and she didn't think she'd be able to get over them. Kissing someone who wasn't her husband felt strange, but she was not swamped with guilt. The guilt was burned away by the wildfire of her growing desire.

“Easier than you thought?” she asked, smiling as she peeled her lips back from Ethan’s.

His fingers brushed through her thick, chestnut hair. “What happened to I can’t do this because I’m married?”

Claire wouldn’t tell him that Daniel had encouraged this. He did not want his kink exposed to anyone, and she respected that. She playfully told him, “If you want me to stop...”

Ethan tightened his hold when she tried to push off his lap. “I didn’t say that. I’m down. I just don’t want you to regret anything.”

“I can feel how down you are.” She worked her ass against his thickening erection and grinned. It felt big in his jeans, making her wonder how big it would be once it was freed. “Let me worry about my guilt.

When Claire leaned in to kiss him again, she held nothing back. She pushed her tongue into his mouth without hesitation, channeling all her heat into that kiss so Ethan would have no doubts about what she wanted. He got the message because he found the edge of her wrap dress and slipped his hand inside it.

The touch on her bare skin under the dress was the first alarm bell Claire felt, but her heart pounded so hard, she barely heard it. Besides, the alarm was her morality trying to rear its head, not any real risk. Unless she was right, and Daniel didn’t want what he thought he wanted.

Ethan’s fingertips flirted with the lacy edge of her panties, tracing and flicking at it, like he was afraid to spook her by going further. She relaxed her thighs, removing any doubt about what she wanted. Claire knew that he had to feel her heat through the silky fabric.

She trembled when his fingers glided over the silk, tracing the outline of her cleft. But when he pressed, a deep throb rumbled through her body, and she moaned into their kiss.

“Ethan...” she gasped, her lips still brushing his. He rubbed little circles, pressing harder. “God...Ethan...”

He drove the next kiss. The sheer hunger she felt from Ethan was enough to make her want to fuck him. Having such a sexy, younger man be so into her was intoxicating. He twisted his hand, and instead of pressing, he gripped her mound, pressing the heel of his hand directly over her clit. Claire dug her nails into the back of his neck when the pleasure pulsed through her.

The way Ethan touched her was so different from Daniel. He wasn't just more aggressive, but he touched Claire like her body was full of new pleasures to discover. Her husband had mapped her body years ago and knew exactly what she liked, but sometimes that familiarity meant he rushed. As the passion in his kiss grew, Ethan showed that he took pleasure in learning how her body reacted to him.

Claire only hit the brakes when Ethan pulled at the knot holding her dress closed. She covered his hand with hers and reluctantly broke their kiss. She needed a moment to catch her breath. "Not here. Not in Bob's office."

"I'm staying with my mom, but it's late enough that we could probably slip in..."

God, I really am hooking up with a kid. Sneak in past his mom? What is wrong with me? Claire laughed at herself. It was a warm, playful sound.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"Nothing." She kissed him. "Just laughing at myself. I'm not sneaking past your mother. We'll find somewhere more private. Just not in Bob's office. You're not going to do me on top of his desk."

Ethan smirked. "That could be fun. I'd love to see you bent over it..."

Claire lightly bonked her forehead against his. "Okay, enough. Let's find some quiet corner of this giant house before I change my mind."

seventeen

“G od, I hate boots,” Claire complained, laughing while she wrestled with one of Ethan’s engineer boots.

He sat on the side of a queen-size bed in what had to have been the Connelly’s elder daughter’s room when she lived at home. Cristy Connelly had moved to Tampa after she graduated from college, and she now worked at one of the theme parks. Claire realized with some horror that Ethan was closer in age to Cristy, a girl she’d watched grow up, than he was to her. Cristy would probably crush hard on Ethan.

The bed had a white wrought-iron princess frame and canopy, with gauzy pink fabric draping down. I can’t believe I’m going to commit adultery in a princess bed, she thought, quickly reminding herself, It’s not adultery. Danny asked for this. The rest of the room confirmed that it had belonged to a teenage girl.

Pop star posters covered the walls, along with a couple of vision board collages. A small makeup table was cluttered with bright lipsticks and blushes and eyeshadows. When they entered the room, several stuffed animals had occupied the bed; they had all been shoved to the floor. Claire did not want a stuffed bunny pinned under her back when Ethan was on top of her.

“I can get that for you,” he offered, without moving. He seemed to enjoy the view from his perch on the bed.

Claire knelt on the floor in front of him. Her dress, untied as they’d fumbled their way toward the bed, hung open, exposing the lacy black lingerie she’d bought on a trip to the mall after work the other day. She’d gone lingerie shopping, even though she swore to herself that no decision had been made.

I'm not going to fuck him, she'd told herself as she'd swiped her credit card.

“I’ve got it,” she insisted. The boot finally released, and she nearly tumbled back onto her butt, catching herself with a hand thrown back. Crouching in those heels was a bad idea. Graceful, she thought. You’d think I’ve never undressed a guy before.

Now that she had the knack of it, the second boot came off much easier. She moved up between his thighs again and reached into his open jeans. His meat was still as hot and thick as the first time she’d grabbed it. Reaching for this cock—which did not belong to her husband—felt decadent. Claire hadn’t touched a strange cock in almost eighteen years. She purposely did not do the math on how old Ethan would have been then.

“Fuck...Claire...god that feels...”

She silenced him with a kiss and tugged at his jeans. That was where they’d been when she’d realized that she couldn’t get his jeans off past his boots. Ethan grabbed her breasts with both hands, roughly kneading them through her very expensive, sheer, black bra. Her nipples, barely restrained by the tight cups, burrowed into his palms. He mashed them upward, like he was trying to rip off her bra. Somewhere along their years together, Daniel had forgotten that she liked to be manhandled sometimes. Ethan’s eager hands were thrilling. She only reluctantly pulled away from them to pull his jeans and underwear off.

One hand was right back on his cock, slowly pumping, while she braced her other on his thigh for balance and knelt in front of him. She’d be down there too long to crouch again. He looked even larger when it was right in her face. He’s big. Thick. Thicker than Danny. That thought brought her first serious stab of guilt of the night, but she couldn’t deny the truth. It was obvious. She tried to reason that it just seemed that way because Ethan had buzzed down the hair around his shaft—something she’d never seen before, but liked—but her grip barely closed around Ethan.

“Claire...you don’t have to...” he helplessly moaned. Her hand on his cock had him fully under her power.

She ignored him and rubbed his blunt head across her lips, smearing his salty excitement. She flicked her tongue out to taste it and gave his cock a long, hard kiss on the tip. Did it occur to you that I want to suck your dick? Am I too classy because I'm a suburban mom?

She'd always liked going down. She didn't do it as much anymore in her marriage, but based on the things she heard from her friends, Daniel probably got more blowjobs than most of their neighbors.

Claire had sucked a lot of cock in her time in Hollywood. She liked to think she'd become an expert. And she liked it. She'd learned early on that she thrived on the power she had over guys when she took their dicks in her mouth. When so many girls did it like it was a chore, her enthusiasm had always helped her stand out.

With her eyes locked on his, Claire opened wide and took him into her mouth. Ethan looked like he was going to come in a second—or pass out. She felt so deliciously slutty. The poor guy looked like he'd never had a blowjob before, which she knew could not be true. But he'd probably never had a sexy, forty-eight-year-old wife on her knees in front of him.

As she kept stretching her lips wider and wider around him, the difference in size between Ethan and her husband became clearer. Daniel wasn't small, but the younger man was so much bigger. She took it slowly, giving herself a change to adapt to having a new cock in her mouth. Gripping the base tightly, Claire bobbed on him, working her tongue against his veiny underside.

“Claire...fuck...fuck...Claire...”

Her lips smoothly slid up and down his shaft. The more she took, the harder she sucked, her cheeks hollowing while wet, sucking sounds began filling the room. She didn't slow down when his blunt head pressed the back of her throat. Claire's nostrils flared when she sucked in a deep breath and relaxed to take him deeper. She was a woman with a mission. Despite his reaction to her, Ethan was a good-looking young man and surely received a lot of head, especially since he was an actor, and she was determined to prove she was the best. He was going to learn that experience had its merits.

Ethan ran his fingers through her hair, but he didn't try to take over. Claire wouldn't have minded, but she was happy to show off. She kept pumping his base, giving her grip a little twist when her lips descended. Alternating speed and depth was making him lose his mind. She went quick and shallow, attacking his head with her tongue, but then moved slowly and pressed deep. He looked stunned when her lips wrapped around his girthy base.

“Fuuuuck...Claire...how...sooo...in your throat...fuck...”

Claire drew back as slowly as she could stand it, forcing herself to slow down. She wanted everything, all at once. His cock slipped from her lips with a wet pop, but she held it in place and kissed and licked the head, sliding her lips up and down the wet sides.

“You're big, but don't tell me no one's ever deep-throated you,” she purred, smiling around his meat.

“Not many...fuck, Claire...not like you...” His hips worked at her like they had a will of their own.

“That's sweet of you to say.” Her voice was thick with breathy desire.

She paused and sucked his base hard, right above his balls. Ethan jolted and groaned, like he was about to lose it. Claire gripped him tighter. She wasn't ready for him to come yet. She kept kissing and licking, moving lower, focusing her attention on his heavy balls. It was musky down there, but not unpleasant. The grooming, however, almost made it a pleasure. She made a mental note to say something to Daniel about it.

Claire made a show of sucking his balls, making it as wet and sloppy and noisy as she could. Being the suburban sex kitten for Ethan had become just as much of a performance as her role on stage. But it wasn't only for him. The dirtier she acted, the dirtier she felt, and the hornier she became. Her pussy was drenched and throbbing. She needed him inside her.

Staring up at him, Claire drew the tip of her tongue all the way up the underside of his shaft, until she pulled his head back into her mouth and

intensely sucked and licked it. Ethan began squirming on the bed, twisting the comforter in his hands. He looked like she was straining to hold back from grabbing her head and shoving his cock down her throat.

“Claire...fuck...that’s...I can’t...”

When she was sure he was right on the edge, she stopped. He was panting, and she had to lick her wet lips when she pulled back once more and smiled. “Not yet, Ethan. Unless you can bounce right back, I need this for something else.”

He slowed his breathing. “I can recover pretty quickly, especially with inspiration like you.”

Ah, the cockiness and resilience of youth, she thought. “We’ll see about that.” What am I saying? I’m not staying here with him all night.

Claire pushed up from her knees and shrugged out of her dress, letting it float to the floor. She was so turned on that she did it and posed confidently without a thought. When she’d looked at herself in the mirror to check out the lingerie set with the thigh highs, she’d thought she was sexy.

But standing in front of a twentysomething guy, reality set in, and she hesitated when she reached back to unclasp her bra. She realized Ethan had probably never seen a forty-eight-year-old woman naked before. It was silly because she was mostly naked already, but she was suddenly self-conscious about how someone used to seeing girls in their twenties would react to her.

Ethan pulled her closer, hands on her round hips. He started kissing her soft belly. Claire was in great shape, but after two kids, she’d never again have the body she did when she was his age. He didn’t seem to care. She melted under his soft kisses, so distracted that she didn’t notice that he unhooked her bra and pulled it from her shoulders.

“Fuck, your body’s hot. So fucking perfect,” he whispered between kisses. He gathered her breasts when they tumbled free from her bra, eagerly kneading them like he couldn’t hold back another second. “You’ve got amazing tits, Claire. Fuck me, they’re nice!”

Claire tossed her head back, her fingers in his hair holding Ethan's face to her chest, and she soaked up the adoration. Her breasts were bigger than they'd been before kids, but they also hung lower, more like teardrops than the perky rounds she'd been so proud of when she had to strip down on camera. By the way he devoured her mature breasts, Ethan really did love them the way they were. His lips caught on her desire-thickened nipples over and over, until she couldn't take the tease anymore and pressed one into his mouth.

Ethan worshipped her breasts until she was weak in the knees and pushed him back onto the bed. He tossed away the rest of his clothes while they positioned themselves, and Claire shimmied out of her panties. He rubbed her smooth mound the moment she exposed it. Knowing that younger women got rid of everything down there, she'd done it for him—just in case. It would be a surprise for her husband.

Claire crawled on top of him, jumping his cock again while they kissed. He didn't need help staying hard during the transition, but she couldn't keep her hands off of it. Her nipples dragged through his hairy chest while her breasts dangled over him, and he teased them with his thumbs. She trembled and moaned his name against his lips.

Ethan was fit, with well-defined pecs, but he wasn't gym-sculpted with a six-pack, which she appreciated. He was ready for a shirtless scene, but he wasn't trying to look like a superhero. He stopped her downward progress when she licked his nipple, tightening his fingers in her hair. She grinned wickedly, teasing harder, enjoying the way his grip on her hair almost hurt. So far, she'd been in charge, and she liked seeing his fire. He grunted when she sucked his nipple and hissed when she nibbled.

“Hey, not too rough,” he complained.

“What? You can't handle me?” She grinned up at him and licked his chest.

Ethan moved so swiftly that Claire was thrown completely off balance. She was on her back on the fluffy pink comforter in the blink of an eye, and his weight pressed her into it. He kissed her, and she felt his length sliding along her slick slit.

“I’m ready for you, Claire,” he growled. “All your teasing has had me ready for weeks.”

“I am not a tease,” she protested, reaching between them for his cock.

He chuckled and grabbed her wrist, pinning it above her head. “You told me no...that you couldn’t...because you’re married. And then you teased the shit out of me. Why didn’t you tell me what you wanted?”

Claire gasped. Her hips gyrated up at him. “I meant it...when I said it...mmm...Ethan...”

He pinched her nipple harder than before. She yelped, but loved the throb. “Or you were fucking with me. I think you liked fucking with me. You liked the attention.”

“I wasn’t...ahhh...fucking with you...but...mmmm...I do like the attention...”

“It’s okay, Claire. You’re here now.”

“Which proves...god...Ethan...I’m not a tease...ohhh...fuck!”

The words were barely out of her mouth when Ethan buried himself inside her. His thickness took her breath away. Her co-star was huge, but he was thick enough to cause a pang of discomfort when he shoved it in with one deep thrust. She was soaked, but she still wasn’t ready for that. The difference between him and Daniel was night and day. It had been decades since something so thick had been inside her.

“How the fuck are you so tight, Claire? You’re fucking milking me...god...”

While Claire was trying to adjust to him, her body acted with a mind of its own. Her sheath rippled around him, and her hips urged him to get moving. What started as discomfort became a low throb as she adjusted. That throb moved out from her core to her entire body. Her nails dug into his shoulders when she began working his cock in earnest.

“Fuck me...Ethan...fuck me...please...god...so big...”

His hips started moving with her. Every motion sent a fresh jolt through Claire. Her pussy was tight around him like a second skin.

“You...ohhh...really fucking need it...”

“Yesss...yesss...fuck me...I do...god, yessss...like that...”

Ethan drew out until just his tip stretched her entrance, then he drove down into her again, punching a deep moan from low in her chest. Claire felt like he was turning her inside out. It still hurt, but it was worth it. If she was going to fuck another man, she wanted it to be like this—to feel a little like a punishment.

Claire wrestled her wrist free from his grip to grab him. She needed to anchor herself. Ethan was taking her with long, deep strokes, and it was scrambling her brain. How can I ever tell Danny that Ethan’s fucking me this good?

“I’ve got to...fuck...open you up...such a hot fuck...Claire...”

“Yesss...Ethan...open me...fuck me...god yesss...”

He pulled one of her legs back, pinning it to her chest to get it up over her shoulder. Her spiked heel bounced next to his ear. Claire felt the burn of a stretch in her thigh—good thing she did Pilates—but then she felt the good stretch, the real stretch, because Ethan could pump deeper into her pussy.

“Ohhh fuck...yesss...Ethan...yesss...ohmygod...”

The bed creaked under them. The contrast of the innocent princess decor with Ethan defiling another man’s wife was obscene. Claire felt it sear into her soul. Had boys pounded Cristy Connelly on that pink comforter, or was she the first one to give the bed a proper workout? God, I’m such a dirty slut! Claire reveled in it.

Their connection was not what she expected—Ethan jumping on and going like a jackrabbit. He didn’t just have a thick cock, but he knew how to use

it. Pulling back her leg and giving it to her with long, deep, powerful strokes was designed to maximize her pleasure. Claire felt him driving her to the deepest orgasm she'd had from sex in years.

“Feel how close you are...let me feel you come...let go, Claire...”

“Oh god! Oh fuck!”

His confident command pushed her right over the edge. Overwhelming pleasure surged through her and Claire went tight as a bow string, back arching up at him, while she surrendered to the orgasm. Her high-pitched cry was loud as a gunshot in the quiet bedroom.

“Fuck...yeah, Claire...that's it...fuck you're hot...” he moaned, fucking her through the climax.

Ethan tried to kiss Claire to silence her when she got too loud, but she twisted her mouth away from his. She needed to let it out. He clapped a hand over her mouth. Her nostrils flared as she struggled to breathe. Her pride hated the manhandling, but it brought a fresh pop of heat to her orgasm.

“Aren't you worried about getting caught? Fuck...it's like you're trying to milk the cum right out of me...”

Claire bit his hand and he yanked it back with a yelp. She sucked in air with a satisfied laugh. She was already building to another peak. “Don't stop... god help me...don't you fucking stop...”

Ethan let her leg slip from his shoulder and pressed his weight forward, one hand beside her head, the other gripping her ass. He drove it in harder and faster. His resolve was fracturing.

“You're fucking crazy...you're a wild goddamn fuck...”

“Yesss...ohhh god...Ethaaan...”

Claire hooked her legs over his, digging her heels into the bed and locking them together. She used the leverage to pull her pussy back at him, making

their bodies crash together with every thrust. At first, she wasn't sure if she could take Ethan, but now she wanted to feel every thick inch of him. The sheer force of their coupling tore another orgasm out of her.

“Ohmyfuck...yesss...yesss...ohmyfuckinggodd...yesss...”

Her second climax was so loud, even Claire knew it was a problem. The last thing she wanted was for her sin to be exposed. She clamped her mouth onto his arm, trying not to bite too hard, and screamed into his flesh.

Ethan helplessly cried out her name, and she realized he was right there with her. A moment of clarity shown through her orgasmic bliss. He was not wearing a condom. Daniel was fixed, so they did not use any birth control. She could not let Ethan come inside her with his potent, youthful seed.

“Ethan...wait...you can't...”

Claire used every ounce of core strength she'd developed in Pilates to turn them and push Ethan off her. He grunted with shock—and maybe some anger—when his cock slipped from her and waggled free. She felt it slap wetly against her thigh. Acting on pure instinct, she slid down between his thighs and pulled him right into her mouth.

“Fuuuuck...”

Ethan was barely in her mouth when he erupted. The tangy taste of her own orgasms clung to him. When the first salt shot hit her tongue, Claire started sucking and swallowing as quickly as she could, like she'd been dying to drink his cum. There was so much! Daniel certainly didn't deliver loads like that anymore. It was like Ethan hadn't gotten laid—or even jerked off—in all the time he'd been in Kingston.

She'd always prided herself on not wasting a drop when a man finished in her mouth. One man she was seeing back in her LA days—he was an older producer she saw when he needed a break from the pressures of work—used to tell Claire that she was his perfect cocksucker because he never had

to worry about ruining his pants before they got out of his car. But Ethan was a challenge. A line of his thick release dripped down her chin.

Claire finally let him slip from her lips, with a long, slow lick up the underside of his shaft. Even though he just came, Ethan twitched. She kept planting little kisses on his head and slowly pumping his shaft. That cock made her feel incredible, and she didn't want to let go of it. Her body buzzed like it hadn't in ages, and Claire wanted to feel it a bit longer.

eighteen

“Wow, Claire,” Ethan sighed like he was completely drained. “You’re a wet dream.”

She smiled against his cock. “Why do you sound so surprised? I think I should be offended.”

“No, it’s definitely a compliment.” He stroked Claire’s hair back from her forehead. “You’re a marvel, like every dirty fantasy I had about a friend’s mom back in high school.”

Claire opted to take the intended compliment and not think about it more. Pointing out that she wasn’t actually old enough to be a friend’s mother would ruin the mood. Besides, she probably was...

She’d told herself that he hadn’t noticed the age gap if he wanted her this badly, but that was silly. How could he not when she felt every second of it? But if the age gap was a feature and not a bug? She could embrace it.

“Did you have a lot of those? Crushes on your friends’ mothers?”

Ethan grinned. “A couple, but they weren’t as hot as you. Not by a long shot.”

God, that smile is addictive. It makes me want to pounce on him, she thought.

“So, was this a fantasy for you? Did fucking me check a box?” She kept her tone light and kept stroking him.

“Being with a woman like you could never be checking a box, Claire.”

“Don’t get all sappy on me. Remember what this is. Maybe I bent my morals for you, this once, but I meant what I told you that night. I love my husband.”

Ethan looked perplexed, like he couldn’t square a woman who loved her husband with the one who couldn’t stop touching and kissing his cock—but he didn’t make an issue of it. He grinned. “Did the way I just fucked you make you sappy?”

“It was amazing.” She showed her appreciation by softly sucking his head again. The taste of their combined essence was an insistent reminder of how dirty she was with Ethan.

“Fuck...what are you doing to me, Claire?”

She gave him a thorough licking and answered, “Isn’t it obvious? Hasn’t anyone really enjoyed your cock before?”

“Fuck...you don’t stop...”

“That’s because you’re bringing it out in me. God, you don’t stop either. How are you getting hard again?”

Claire was amazed. He was already plumping in her grip, even though she was still feeling rippling tremors from how hard he had made her come. His youthful cock was a wonder. Not only was it thick enough to make her feel things she’d never felt before, but it was ready to do it all over again.

She knew she should leave and go back to Daniel. The longer she was in that bedroom with Ethan, the more likely it was that they’d be caught. But she was greedy. She wanted to fuck him again, and she wouldn’t apologize for that. Daniel wanted this for her. If she was going to break her vows, she was going to do it right.

“I think it’s been too long since you had a man who could really take care of you.” He chuckled. “Give me the chance, and I’ll show you everything I can do for you.”

Claire ignored the shot at her husband. Ethan didn't know that Daniel was the only reason he was getting lucky, and she would keep it that way—for him. She opened wide and stretched her lips around him. She went down and down, until he was in her throat and her nose was pressed to his shaved pubes. Her loud, hungry sucking sounds filled the room. She hadn't pulled out that trick in so long. She loved cutting loose and just feeling.

“Ohhh fuck yesss...fuck...this is wasted out here in the suburbs...fuck... you are not a middle school teacher...oh my fuck, Claire...”

Claire kept him embedded in her throat until her lungs burned for air, driven by his praise. When she finally pulled off of him, she was coughing and had to wipe the spittle from her lips. Her face was flushed. She hoped he found the mess sexy.

“It's time to back up that boast, Ethan.”

“Let's go.”

Ethan reached for her, but Claire pushed his hands away and crawled over him, her hanging breasts brushing over his cock. She swore it was even harder than the first time, giving her a wild, forbidden thought: I need to fuck more guys in their twenties.

“Oh, you're gonna...” he murmured, loving the view when she moved over him.

Claire grabbed him with a switch grip to get him in place and slowly sank onto his shaft. The stretch was even more incredible than the first time. Ethan had simply buried it in her, but she was in control now, and she felt every inch as he filled her. Going slow made the discomforting throb last longer, but she wanted to feel all of it.

“Still can't...fuck...believe how tight...ohhh...you are...”

“No...it's you...so thick...Ethan...”

His hands gripped her hips, helping to guide her down until he was fully sheathed. He was so much bigger that way. The ache was profound, but every tiny shift sent a jolt through her. The aching stretch was not supposed to feel like that—so good—but god did it feel good. Claire braced her hands on his firm abs and slowly rolled her hips. It was incredible. She was going to miss being so full when Ethan went back to New York.

“Like that...don’t you?” His voice was strained, like he was fighting melting in her intense heat.

“Yeah...oh god yesss...”

“Fuck me, Claire...ohhh...show me how much you like it...how you want it...”

The roll of her hips shifted into sliding, pulling back just to shove back down onto him. She cried out with each movement as they jolted ecstasy through her. She pulled back all the way to the tip—she didn’t have to worry he’d slip out when she was stretched around him—and plunged down his shaft, unraveling as he filled her.

“Yesss...yesss...yesss...”

The rhythmic chant made Claire sound possessed. Her eyes were closed so she could focus everything on just feeling him. The bed’s creaking formed a chorus of pleasure with her chants.

“Yesss...yesss...yesss...”

Ethan’s fingers dug into her hips. He read her perfectly, and the more she lost herself in the ride, the harder he pulled her back and forth on his cock. Her tingling nipples dragged through his chest hair as she rocked harder on him. His thick cock wasn’t just turning her pussy inside out. It was turning her brain inside out.

“Yesss...yesss...yesss...”

“You’re gonna come again, aren’t you?” he grunted.

“Yeah...oh god, yeah...I am...”

“Do it...feels so good when you come on my cock...”

“Oh god...yeah...Eeethaaan...”

Claire shattered. She laid her head on his shoulder and let the ecstasy rule her. It felt so good to give herself over. Ethan kept his hold on her hips, and he kept her pussy moving on his cock. The pleasure burned through her, and just as she thought it would subside, it ignited again. Claire shrieked. She felt like she had no control over her body.

“Fuck...you can't stop...you just keep going and going...”

“Yeah...ohhh fuck...can't stop...”

Improbably, she rolled into a third orgasm. Or was it all just the same one? Claire couldn't tell. Ethan was doing things to her that no man had done since she was on *The Edge of Desire*. She'd learned early that she was multi-orgasmic, but few men could make her come like that. In her younger days, Claire became dangerously addicted to men who made her feel like that.

“I...I... need a break...oh god...too much...it's too much...”

“You can...fuck...have anything you want...ohhh...when your pussy is working my cock like this...”

Ethan stopped pulling her hips, but Claire didn't stop moving. She couldn't. Her body had a mind of its own. She just wanted to keep feeling him.

“You want to stop, but you can't...” he moaned.

“I want to...but I can't...” she echoed.

“You need that cock...you need to fuck...”

“I need it...oh god, Ethan...I need it...”

“You’re gonna come again, aren’t you?”

“Yeah...”

“Yeah?”

“Oh god...yeah...”

Claire pushed up off his chest. Thanking her past self for all that Pilates, she pulled a leg forward and got a heel down on the bed, and bounced on his cock. Each hard jolt punched a deep moan out of her. What had come before was sensual, their bodies pressed together, moving as one. This was fucking. She stared down at him with naked hunger. Ethan watched her tits bounce with every thrust like they were hypnotizing him.

That was when she caught the motion in her peripheral vision. Claire was so consumed with Ethan’s cock that she almost dismissed it, but it was there. Her eyes flicked over to see Paul standing just inside the doorway, fisting his cock.

Under any other circumstances, Claire would have scrambled off Ethan and covered herself, but all the orgasms had melted her brain, and she was so close again. Stopping was impossible. She wasn’t thinking clearly because of all the orgasms she’d had, and because she was close again. Stopping wasn’t on the menu. She pretended she didn’t see Paul and kept bouncing on Ethan’s cock.

She watched him out of the corner of her eye. She couldn’t resist. It had been years since she’d let anyone watch her have sex—but Paul was her friend and her husband, and feeling his attraction was just more heat in the boiling pot of her passion. Right now, she was the woman she thought she’d left behind in LA all those years ago.

“Fuck! Oh god! Fuck...Ethan...ohhh god...fuck meee...”

The next orgasm wrecked her. Her mind blanked out, and her cries sounded like they were coming from someone else. She would have slid off Ethan’s cock, completely limp, but his powerful hands kept her moving up and

down on him. He used her like a fucktoy to finish, and it made her shriek louder with a renewed pulse of pleasure.

“Fuck...Claire...that pussy...ohhh fuck...”

Ethan jammed her onto his shaft, and Claire felt his thick, powerful seed pulse deep inside her. She wasn't in control to stop him, and she was too far gone to tell him to pull out. His seed flooded up into her, bringing a wave of primal satisfaction. She might regret it later, but right now, the feeling of Ethan coming inside her was worth it.

Her young co-star eased her down to lie on his chest, and he held her while they both panted. The room was chilly, but their bodies stuck together with a fine sheen of sweat. His semi-soft cock was still inside her, sealing his seed deep in her, and she still twitched around it. She sighed contentedly and squeezed Ethan, but thought, He'd better not get hard again. I can't take any more.

Claire forced her eyes open, and Paul was gone from the doorway. I hope we pretend this never happened, she thought. There was no reason to discuss it unless he forced the issue, and she couldn't imagine why he'd possibly do that. The thought of it pulled her back into reality. The last thing she wanted to do was move, but she couldn't stay in bed with Ethan all night—especially not in the Connellys' house.

“I need to go,” she said, pushing off his chest with a groan.

“Do you need to rush off?”

Ethan watched the sway of her breasts as she sat up, like he wanted to memorize her body to lock in the memory. He still wanted her, and that made Claire want to pull his cock back into her mouth and get him hard again. But she meant what she said. She had to get home to Daniel.

“Do you think we should spend the night in Cristy's bed?”

“Who?”

“Bob and Marci’s daughter. This is her old room. She doesn’t live here anymore, but someone might notice we’re in here having sex.”

He caressed her thigh. His touch was an anchor, trying to keep her in bed. She was tempted. “We’re not having sex right now.”

Claire leaned down, kissed him deeply, and grasped his spent cock. It was slick from their union, and as she pumped it, she was sure she could get him hard again. The action was impulsive. Every cell in her wanted to stay in bed with Ethan, but she couldn’t.

“How long do you think we could stay in this bed before we were at it again?”

“I can make myself behave,” he replied, caressing her breasts.

“Can you? I can’t.”

Ethan grinned. “Maybe not.”

Claire dragged herself out of bed with a groan. Every joint was sore from their energetic fucking. She couldn’t believe the way she’d ridden his cock at the end. She smiled, impressed with herself.

Her thigh highs were ruined by all the friction, but she left them on. Hopefully, no one would notice when she slipped out the front door. Her pussy was a mess, and she left her panties off, but she put her bra back on. Skipping that would be obvious in the wrap dress.

“Will I see you again?” he asked.

His hopeful look broke her heart. She didn’t know if he was nursing a full-blown crush or just wanted to fuck her again, but both made her want to promise they’d get together again.

“I don’t know,” she truthfully answered, before wavering into excuses. “It’s so busy with the holidays, and I have work for another week. There’s so much going on with the girls.” She wound back to the truth. “I don’t know

if it's a good idea, Ethan. It's probably smart for us to let this just be one night."

"Do you always do the smart thing?"

"I try to."

The tension in that pink bedroom dialed all the way up. Claire felt a magnetic pull toward Ethan in that bed. He hadn't covered up, like he knew the effect his cock had on her. He made her want to be reckless.

"I'll text you," he said.

"Okay."

Claire finished tying her dress and grabbed her phone off the dresser, clicking it off before slipping out of the bedroom. She wondered how Daniel's present came out. She almost got away clean, but another couple slipped out of the game room as she walked down the hallway. They gave her a look like they knew exactly what she'd been up to, but they weren't married to each other either, so she just smiled and kept going. Her hand was on the front door when Riki called out to her.

"Leaving without saying goodbye?" Riki asked.

"It's late. I really need to get home to Danny and the kids." Claire refused to make eye contact.

"Yes, I'm sure they miss you as much as you've obviously been missing them."

Riki's appraising look said it all. Dirty whore. You're just as nasty as the rest of us.

"The girls are in bed, but Danny probably waited up," she lamely replied.

"Oh? That will be fun. Be safe, Claire."

"You too, Riki."

As Claire stepped into the freezing night, the full reality of what she'd done hit her. It had been a night to remember, but it might also change her marriage forever. She had to get home to Daniel and find out if their games had ruined everything.

nineteen

The waiting was so much worse than Daniel anticipated. The girls went straight up to their rooms when they got home, which was a relief. He'd expected it to be exciting, filled with sexy visions of what his wife was doing with Ethan while he waited for her to come home. The fantasies came, but anxiety turned them into nightmares as often as not.

Mostly, he thought about Claire fucking her young lover at the Connellys' house. It was a big place. There was no reason to go anywhere else. He tried to think about Ethan taking her to some sleazy roadside motel that rented to prostitutes and adulterers by the hour, but Daniel just couldn't imagine his wife in a place like that. Maybe they would fuck in Claire's SUV—that was hot, but too limited.

He considered whether Ethan might take her to his place, but he might not actually have a place of his own. The young man had to be staying with his mother or Paul. Thinking about his wife trying to sneak past Ethan's mom like a horny teenager was funny, but he couldn't see Claire doing that either.

The scenarios always started hot. Ethan couldn't keep his hands off Claire while she encouraged him to keep going. Daniel thought she would be so horny for Ethan's cock that she'd go right to her knees. The image of his wife on her knees with her co-star's cock in her mouth made him woozy. He pictured Ethan holding Claire's head and fucking her mouth. It was shameful, but he didn't just want her to fuck someone else. In the darkest version of his fantasy, he wanted her to be used.

His fantasies of Claire with Ethan took a turn when the younger man started fucking her too good. She begged for it, which was hot, but then Ethan started taunting, telling Claire she needed to be fucked by a real man. She moaned her agreement. He asked if his cock was bigger than her husband's, and she moaned yes. And when Ethan made Claire come harder than Daniel

ever had, she enthusiastically told him so. Claire moaned that Ethan owned her pussy now.

But even as he imagined that he was losing Claire to her young lover, he was painfully hard. His chest was so tight that he couldn't breathe because he thought he'd made a huge mistake, but his cock was screaming for more.

His heart was telling him, Call Claire, and tell her to stop this! Tell her you love her! But his cock shouted that down. Let him destroy her pussy. A piece of ass like Claire needs the kind of fucking only Ethan can give her. It must be so fucking hot to see her come like that. Daniel tried to block out both voices. All he wanted was for his wife to come home and tell him everything was okay—and tell him all about how she got fucked. He was losing his mind.

Daniel fought the urge to drink and calm his nerves. He wanted a clear head when Claire came home—whenever that would be. He didn't masturbate either, despite an urgent need to come. Claire would need to be reclaimed when she came home, and he wanted to give her everything he had.

As the hour got later and later, he worried that he'd never be able to match what Ethan was doing to Claire. I'm never going to be able to fuck her for hours and hours. Maybe when I was his age, but trying to keep up now would probably give me a heart attack. What the fuck was I thinking?

Daniel was wondering if he could live with Claire's body being owned by another man if he got to keep her heart—when she came home. Their doorbell cam alerted him to her motion. He stayed in the bedroom rather than rushing downstairs to meet her. He had to be cool, no matter how much he was freaking out inside.

She took an agonizingly long time to make her way upstairs. His mind went to all the worst places, like Claire trying to figure out how to tell him she was leaving. Or that she was staying, but he was a cuckold now, and only Ethan could touch her. The scenarios were crazy, but he couldn't keep from going there. And yet, he still wanted every detail.

“Oh, you’re awake,” she said, coming in and quietly closing the bedroom door behind her. She conspicuously locked it before setting her phone on the dresser.

“Did you think I’d be able to sleep?” Did that sound like I was snapping at her? I can’t be angry. This was all my idea.

“Are you okay? Danny...”

Claire came toward the bed, but stopped when she saw the way he was looking at her. Daniel was glad he couldn’t see the look on his own face. He had no control over his emotions. His wife stood in front of him looking like she’d spent the last few hours fucking, but she hadn’t been with him.

Her hair was a mess. She’d obviously been on her back, but it looked like someone might have been pulling on it as well. He liked the idea of Ethan fucking her from behind and pulling her hair. Claire didn’t have any hickies that he could see, but she had red marks on her neck and where her cleavage was exposed—signs that she’d been manhandled. He could only imagine what she looked like under that dress.

“Danny,” she repeated.

“Let me see, Claire. Please. I need to see.”

She nodded and bent forward to step out of her heels. Her tits nearly spilled out of her dress. Ethan must have loved that view, he thought. When she hesitated after untying her dress, he tensed. How bad is it?

“Are you sure, honey? I could go take a shower, and we can pretend this never happened.”

“I don’t want that. Show me.”

Claire pulled the wrap dress from her shoulders and let it drop to the floor. The move was so smooth, so terrifyingly sexy, that he knew she’d come back a changed woman. She didn’t present herself to him like that—not anymore. What he’d thought were cute, festive winter tights were thigh

highs, and they were destroyed. Did he demand that she keep them on while he fucked her? Before he noticed anything Ethan had done to her body, he saw that she wasn't wearing panties. She really did it. She fucked him. Goddamn!

Daniel was so stunned at the lack of panties that he didn't immediately realize: she'd shaved her pussy. She did it for him. The thought was acid in his gut. In their eighteen years together, he'd never seen her pussy smooth like that. It felt like a creepy thing to ask for, but she could have just surprised him with it. Claire was doing it now, after all. But Ethan had seen it first. Was he impressed that a mature mom like her shaved her pussy? That bastard must have loved it. He burned with jealousy.

Once the first two shocks wore off, he finally zeroed in on her pussy. Her whole mound was puffy, like it had been through a thorough pounding. Her labia were red and inflamed. Ethan must have a huge damn cock. It looks like he turned her inside out. Jesus! Claire noticed where his attention was focused and adjusted her stance, parting her thighs wider. She looks so well-fucked. Is that cum leaking from her? Jesus, did he come inside her? They hadn't discussed that. Maybe he didn't think they needed to.

Claire slipped out of her bra while his eyes were fixed lower. He barely noticed the obvious signs that Ethan had been all over them. Daniel's mouth went dry. He was sure he was having a heart attack. Decades of fantasies about this had not prepared him for how real it would be when it was finally in his face.

"Danny, say something." When he didn't, she added, "Please."

"Claire..."

He came off the bed and went to her. His hands moved over her body without touching, like he was suddenly afraid to touch his own wife. Claire took his hands and pressed them to her chest. Her warm, supple flesh filled his hands. She was real. What he was seeing was real. And his weren't the only hands that had been on her tonight. He couldn't quite believe it.

"Mmm, not so rough, honey."

Daniel didn't even realize he was mauling her tits. He was kneading them, imagining how Ethan had touched her. Did she complain that he was too rough, or did she beg for more?

"Sorry. I'm, uh, a little carried away, I guess," he murmured, staring at his hands on her tits. He knew they were his hands because he recognized his wedding band. "I'm just..."

Claire took his face in both her hands and forced him to look at her. "It's okay, honey. I'm here. I came back. I'm still yours. I'm just a little sore..." She saw what washed over his face and added, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I asked you... I wanted..."

Now that she'd done it, Daniel found it even harder to say the words. He'd been worried she'd reject him for his kink, but now that it had happened, he found it even harder to relate to Claire. Is she still really mine when someone else has had her? That was silly. Lots of men had taken her before him. Well, not a lot...or maybe there were... She'd always been frustratingly vague on that aspect of her time in LA.

Instead of speaking, he kissed her. It was a possessive, hungry kiss. Claire was so minty that she must have sucked on an entire tin of Altoids. Daniel knew what that meant. She'd sucked a lot of Ethan. He appreciated that he didn't have to taste another man's cock in his wife's mouth. Did she swallow his load? How many times did he come? Did he fill her mouth and her pussy?

"Honey...slow down...we have all night if you want that," she moaned, tearing his lips from his.

Daniel still mauled her tits and tried to get his tongue back into her mouth. He was a man possessed. Claire pulled his t-shirt, and he reluctantly broke away long enough to let her yank it off. He was right back on her, but she pushed at his arms. She reached into his sweatpants next. He'd been so hard for so long that the brush of her hand against her balls made him ache.

“Slow down, Danny. What’s gotten into you? Don’t you want to hear about it?”

“I do...but I need you, babe...I need you now...”

Between kisses, Daniel steered her toward the bed. His scrambled thoughts coalesced around a single idea: I have to fuck her. I need to take Claire back. They bumped into the bed, and he spun Claire, bending her over the side of it with a shove. When she tried to push back upright, he planted a hand in the middle of her back.

“Danny...wait...talk to me...I don’t think we should...we shouldn’t...”

The words were barely out of her mouth when his cock was inside her. He shoved it in as hard as he could. He knew just by looking at her pussy that she was ready. Her sheath locked around him, and Daniel groaned.

“Fuck...Danny...ohhh fuck... Please. Fuck me...”

Claire stopped struggling. She went limp under him, like all of her energy went into working his cock with her pussy. He waited a beat, just to make sure he wasn’t going to come the second he entered her. His chest felt fizzy like a poured-out soda, and Daniel thought he might just empty everything he had into her. But then it all locked together, and he was energized. He started fucking his wife with quick, powerful strokes.

“Did he...fuck you...like this...” The words came out in a growl.

“No...god...Danny...no...”

“No...he didn’t fuck you?” He turned red hot with anger. She’s not going to try to lie to me, is she?

“Danny...slow down...I...”

“Did he...uhnnn...slow down...”

“Ahhh...no...he...”

“He gave it to you nice and...uhnnn...hard...”

“Yeah...yesss...ohhh god...”

“You begged for it...harder...begged him...goddamn it, Claire...to fuck you...”

“Yesss...is that...ohhh...what you want to hear...”

“Goddam...shit, Claire...”

“How hard...he fucked me...fucked your wife...while I begged for his big cock...”

“Shit...fuck...goddam it...Claire...”

Daniel swatted her ass as hard as he could. She yelped and tightened her sheath around him. He did it again, and again. Claire wasn't limp anymore. She was shoving back at him. Suddenly, she was pounding back at him even harder than he thrust into her.

“You need to...punish me...for being a dirty slut...”

“Dammit...Claire...I...”

“Punish your whore...Danny...I let him use me...however he wanted...”

Daniel spanked her round rear so hard that his hand hurt. She shrieked and held onto the bed for leverage so she could drive her pussy back onto his cock even harder. He didn't know what was going on, but he didn't love this turn. What had started as a primal need had turned into something else—something he wasn't sure he liked.

She was a whore tonight, but I don't want to hurt her. She was my whore. I wanted this. All of it was true. Daniel pointed Claire at Ethan and told her to fuck him. He didn't want to stop. Hearing his wife call herself a dirty slut was the drug of his kink mainlining right into his veins. I begged for his cock. He pounded into her so hard his lower back hurt, but it wasn't out of malice. It was raw need.

“Ohmygod...oh fuck...Danny...fuck me...fuck your dirty slut...god...I... I...”

The stream of filthy words from Claire’s mouth ended with a soul-deep moan when she was overcome with an orgasm that stopped her in her tracks. She froze, trembling. She rhythmically moaned to match his thrusts, like she was in a trance. But then, as suddenly as she came, Claire was shoving him away. This time he listened. His cock slipped out of her with a slick sound. Knowing Ethan’s cum coated his cock sent a shiver up his spine.

“No...Danny...not like this...not...ohhh god...gimme a sec...just a minute...”

Daniel froze. He’d never seen Claire like that. She looked like she was coming apart. He laid a hand on her back, but she smacked it away. He waited, asking, “Are you okay? What happened tonight? Babe, are you alright?”

Shaking, she pushed up off the bed and raked her hair back out of her face before she looked at him. She managed a weak smile.

“Get on the bed,” she commanded.

twenty

Her thighs ached from riding Ethan just forty-five minutes earlier, but Claire climbed astride Daniel and settled onto his cock. Two dicks in less than an hour? She smiled. Never thought that would happen again .

Claire had no idea what to expect when she came home to her husband, but Daniel punishing her was not an option she'd considered. He may have had second thoughts, but he had no right to be angry about something he'd asked her to do. It was the second time in weeks that he had bent her over their bed—after years of no such thing between them—but he was different this time. She didn't know how to square the rough treatment with the loving husband she knew.

The shock didn't stop Claire from enjoying being manhandled and punished. She missed a man taking charge like that. Daniel was the perfect husband in every way, and a considerate lover, but he'd always been a little too precious with her. At first, she'd appreciated that after the assholes she'd been with in LA, but she didn't want to be put on a pedestal. Sometimes, it seemed like Daniel didn't feel like he deserved her. She wanted him to be more confident than that.

“Shit...Claire...you're torturing me...” Daniel moaned.

She worked her hips on him just as she'd done with Ethan earlier. Claire wasn't impossibly full as she'd been with her lover, but she couldn't tell Daniel that. He didn't want to hear that, did he? He still felt good inside her, even if he didn't fit quite the same after Ethan had stretched her open.

“Tell me, Danny. Tell me what you want to know,” she cooed, eyes smoldering down at him.

“Everything... Where did he take you?”

“I took him upstairs at Bob and Marci’s. We fucked in Cristy’s room.”

“Shit...you’re such a dirty girl...”

“A dirty whore?”

“Claire...I’m...”

She flattened her hands on his stomach—softer than Ethan’s—and rolled her hips harder. “Your whore got on her knees and sucked his dick. I had him all the way down my throat, honey.”

“Fuuuck... Babe...www...”

“Why? I wanted to impress him. I wanted to be dirty for him. Ohhh...”

“All the way...down your throat...shit...”

“I...ohhh, honey...struggled...”

“He’s big...isn’t it...you...shit...wanted his big cock...”

“Yesss...Danny...he’s so big...I barely...barely got my mouth around it...”

The words just slipped out. Daniel asked. He wanted to know. Claire still felt like it was meant to tell him, but the way his cock twitched inside her said that he loved it.

“No one sucked his cock...uhnnn...good as you...bet he came right down your throat...”

“Not...ohhh god...yet... I wanted...needed...him to fuck me... I’m sorry, honey...”

“Shit...I fucking love it, babe... Tell me...tell me how he fucked you...”

“Danny...god...he put me on my back...bent my leg back...fucked me so hard...”

Claire rocked harder on her husband. Sharing her experience with Ethan brought every detail back, and she reveled in it. Daniel's enthusiasm for it was shocking, but she didn't need to understand it. She accepted her husband for who he was.

“He opened you right up...shit...I fucking feel it...”

“Danny...”

He roughly grabbed her ass, pulling her harder against him. Daniel huffed like he was running a marathon. Claire knew he was close. She was almost there, too. It inflamed them. She didn't care how twisted it was.

“Fucking filled you...came so hard for him, didn't you?”

“Yesss...oh god yesss... I came so hard, honey... So many times...”

“And then he fucking filled you...filled your pussy with cum...”

“No! Not then... Pushed him off...finished him with my mouth...”

“Shit...no...that's...”

“Yesss...so dirty...like a dirty little slut...ohhh fuck...so much cum, Danny...still taste him...”

“Fuuuck...Claire...shit, babe...”

His fingers dug into her round ass like he was trying to rip her in half. He was definitely going to leave marks. Daniel seized hard and came, pumping his load up into Claire to join Ethan's.

Two men filling her pussy in under an hour, three loads in one night—it was all too much for Claire to comprehend. Playing the slut lit up parts of her that had been dormant for so long, and it made her climax right along with Daniel.

Afterward, she lay in his arms, reassured by the familiar warmth of his embrace. She believed they'd find their way through this. Running her

fingers through his chest hair, she asked, “Are you okay with all of this? Really? When you’re not thinking with your dick?”

“Yeah, the sex part of it is incredible. I thought about this for a long time, and the reality is so much hotter than I could have imagined. Seeing you come in after...being with him...I don’t know if I was prepared for how vivid it would be.” He traced the dimples on her lower back.

“I could tell,” she chuckled warmly.

“I’m sorry about...how I was.”

“It’s okay, Danny. I’m sure it was a lot, even if you wanted this. How can you really be ready for it?”

“There’s a huge difference between fantasy and reality.” He took a deep breath. “I don’t think you’re a whore, Claire. Or a slut.”

“I know. At least, I hope not. Besides, pretty sure I called myself those things.” She kissed his chest. “And honestly, I think I wanted to be punished. Don’t get me wrong. I liked...doing it. But it still felt wrong.” She twisted to look up at him and smile. “I think you should put me in my place if I fuck someone else. Remind me who I belong to.”

Daniel laughed. “Oh, you belong to me now? I thought you were your own woman.”

She stuck out her tongue. “You know what I mean.”

They sat in the quiet. There was still so much to talk about, but Claire didn’t want to push it. They could take their time unpacking it. Daniel broke the silence.

“Was that all of it?”

“All of what?”

“You sucked his cock, he fucked you, and he finished in your mouth?”

Daniel didn't sound quite suspicious, but eager.

"No. That's just where you and I ran out of steam. When we finished, we were still in bed, and he started getting hard again..."

"Of course he did. I'm surprised he still doesn't have you there."

Ethan would have liked to, she thought. "The second time, I was on top."

"The second time? How many times were there? I miss the days when I could get hard over and over again. I bet you do, too."

"Stop it," she chided.

Claire held his spent cock. It twitched with life, but remained soft. It wasn't shooting right back up the way Ethan's did.

"It's okay, babe. I know I'm not twenty-five anymore. But a woman as sexy as you deserves that. I'm glad he...gave you what you need."

"You're what I need, Danny."

"So, you got on top and fucked again? That must have been good."

Claire couldn't read his tone and asked, "Do you really want to know that stuff? I don't want to hurt you. I couldn't hear about you fucking another woman."

Daniel raked his fingers through her hair and pulled Claire up to kiss him. "Babe, I want it to be good for you. There's no point if it's not. Ethan making you come like crazy doesn't mean I can't do it, too." His tone wasn't as confident as his words, but she didn't question him.

"It was good. It was... I came really hard with him. It felt like I wasn't in control."

"That's amazing, babe." He sounded even less enthused, but kept stroking her hair.

“That last time... I was so carried away...” Claire paused to force it out. She didn’t like having to admit the last part. “I let Ethan come inside me. It was just happening before I realized it, and then it was over.”

She didn’t quite remember it that way. It felt like Ethan pumped his cum into her forever, and Claire ground down on him, milking out every last drop, but she didn’t need to tell Daniel that part. He was wrong. He didn’t need every detail.

“I’m sorry,” she continued. “We didn’t talk about it, but I know it was reckless. I’m sure he’s clean. I’ll take care of the other part in the morning.”

“It’s okay. People get carried away, and things happen. Don’t feel bad. I don’t know if this helps, but it’s kind of hot—knowing you were so into it that you just didn’t care. You loved his big cock so much that you would have let him do anything.”

“It wasn’t just his dick. Big dicks don’t hypnotize women in real life,” she defensively replied. After a beat, she asked, “Really? That turns you on? You want me to...lose control...with someone else?”

“I think it’s more complicated than that, but yes? I want to see that unlocked in you. I want you to be so free that you just let go.”

“That’s...very generous. Thank you?”

“Just let go, babe. No guilt. Just roll with it.”

Claire laughed. “You’re making it sound like there’s going to be a next time.” Daniel didn’t answer. She sat up and turned all the way around to really look at him. “Do you want there to be a next time, Danny?”

“If you want to...”

She shook her head. “Don’t play that game. You know how I feel about that. Say what you want. Do you want me to fuck Ethan again?”

“Sure, if you’d like another chance. He fucked you so good, I don’t know why you wouldn’t. Or if you want variety...someone else.”

Claire stared. She'd accepted fulfilling his fantasy as a kinky one-off, but she'd never considered whether it could be more than that. That's insane, she thought.

“Are you telling me you're good if I just go out and fuck random guys?” She tried to keep the surprise out of her tone because she didn't want to shame him. She didn't quite succeed.

“Not random guys. Do you want to do that? No, not like you see a guy you like at the grocery store, and you go home with him. Not like that. But if I think this is hot, and you think it's hot, is there any reason to stop? We could do something like date nights.”

“Except you're not the one I'd be dating?”

“I'd be there, hopefully. Please don't think I'm weird... Hearing about it was amazing, but next time I'd really like to see it.”

Daniel finally said something she understood—in the context of his kink, anyway. It all started from watching her on screen in love scenes, so he knew he wanted to watch. Claire didn't understand what he got out of it if he couldn't watch. Could I do that in front of him? A threesome is one thing, but if Danny is just sitting back and watching... Paul sneaking in and jerking off wasn't the same as her husband watching her fuck someone else. It doesn't matter. We can't keep doing this. Married people don't do this, do they?

“Would that make us poly? Are we in an open marriage now? I don't think I want that. I don't want to share you, Danny. I don't want us to lose our connection to each other.”

“I don't want an open marriage either, babe. I don't want anyone else. This is all about how sexy you are for me—not other women. And I don't want you to date anyone. That feels wrong.”

“But having sex with other men isn't?” She laughed. “Sorry.”

“No, I get it, and it’s a weird distinction. Don’t worry, I know how fucked up I am. Normal men don’t want this.”

Claire grabbed his hand. “Stop it. You are not weird. I love you. You’re just into something different. Normal is overrated.”

“Thanks.”

“I had a lot of fun tonight. A lot. But I don’t want to do this all the time. I feel like it would be dangerous, not to mention exhausting. I don’t want this to become a lifestyle. It’s supposed to be you and me against the world, Danny.”

“It is. I swear, it is. It’s just about sex. I don’t want to invite anyone else into our lives.”

“But things happen. Being intimate with someone else... It would be weird if I didn’t develop feelings at some point. I’m not just some slut who wants to sleep around.” Not anymore, she added in her head.

“I know. I’d never even mention this if I didn’t trust you completely. You didn’t fall in love tonight, did you?”

Claire laughed. “No. I could see getting attached to the things Ethan did to me, but love? No. I am not leaving you for him. He’s not even a real grown-up yet. He’s still working catering jobs to pay his rent. Our lives are completely different.”

“So, if we’re careful, and we choose right, there’s no threat to us.”

“We’re good if we just keep it to young guys who don’t have their shit together? I’m some horny cougar now?” Claire laughed, but she felt an embarrassing flash of heat at the thought of it. Maybe Ethan did unleash something in me.

“I think it’s hot to have a sexy cougar for a wife.”

“You’re not weird, but you are crazy.”

“Just think about it, Claire. We don’t have to decide tonight. We probably shouldn’t. But I’d love to explore this if you’re open to it.”

“I’ll think about it, but no promises.” What are we getting into? She was excited and terrified by the possibilities.

Everything had moved so quickly from the moment that she’d stepped into the bedroom that she’d forgotten her surprise. That would tide him over and give Claire time to think.

“Stay here,” she said, rolling off the bed to retrieve her phone from the dresser. “I had an inkling that you might want to watch. That seems natural. So, I have an early Christmas present for you.”

Claire crawled back onto the bed and unlocked her phone. Daniel was tense with anticipation. “I only looked at a few seconds of this on the way home to make sure I got something. I had to put it down quickly so Ethan wouldn’t notice. I couldn’t frame the bed.”

“Babe, did you...”

“I hope it got something for you.” She pressed play on the video and handed her phone to him.

Daniel sat up on the bed and eagerly took the phone. The screen showed Claire walking away and Ethan standing by the bed. He was cut off at mid-chest, and her head was out of view when she melted into his arms, but most of the bed was in the shot.

“Wow, Claire. This is... Wow.” He couldn’t take his eyes off the screen. “You are the most amazing wife ever. How did I get so lucky?”

“I’m the lucky one. I love you, kinks and all. Don’t forget that.”

“This is the best Christmas present ever. Are you going to watch it with me?”

Claire made a face. “I don’t know. That might be weird.” She only hesitated for a second before curling up under his arm. She wrapped her hand around

his cock, which was pulsing back to life. It had been a long time since she'd seen herself on screen. She hoped her performance was good.

On screen, Claire pushed Ethan down to sit on the bed crouched to pull his boots off. She cringed and said, "Don't laugh at this next part."

"Trust me, babe. I won't be laughing at any of this. This is the best Christmas present ever."

"I hope you feel that way after you've watched it. Oh, speaking of watching... Paul spied on us. I caught him jerking off."

Daniel paused the video. "What the fuck? That motherfucker! I'll..."

"Calm down. I don't know how much he saw. He might have just walked in on us by accident. Well, he was jerking off, but don't go crazy. I'll handle him if I have to."

He took a deep breath and said, "The way you're handling me? The way you handled Ethan?"

"He'd love that, but I don't think I could fuck Paul. It's Paul. I don't think we should ever do this with people from our real lives anyway. We need to keep it separate. And I don't think Paul knows I saw him. I doubt he'll say anything, so I'd rather just pretend it never happened. No one would be comfortable with that conversation."

"I trust you to handle it. But wait a minute. No people from our real life? Does that mean we're doing this?"

"Calm down. It means I haven't ruled anything out. Now shut up and watch your video."

Daniel hit play and laughed when she nearly toppled backward pulling off Ethan's boot. Claire slid down and took him in her mouth. She was beginning to remember how much she liked sucking a cock after it had been inside her and tasting the mingling of her taste and her lover's. In this case, she tasted herself, Daniel, and Ethan. God, I'm a slut!

Claire listened to the tinny sounds of her fucking Ethan from her phone while Daniel grew hard in her mouth. She'd been serious when she said she had to think about it, but the fresh throbbing in her pussy told her that she wanted this. It was crazy and dangerous, and would probably end in disaster, but she wanted to explore it. She hadn't felt this excitement in years. She paused with his cock against her lips, just as she'd done with Ethan.

“You know, Ethan is in town through New Year's. I didn't make any promises, but I said he could text me...”

Daniel grinned at her over his phone. “That's my dirty little slut wife. God, I love you, babe.”

“Just remember that when you're watching Ethan make me scream.”

Claire pulled Daniel back into her mouth, taking him all the way to the root. It was much easier after stretching to fit Ethan. Her husband's eyes rolled back into his head. Being his slut was fun. But his pubes tickled her nose. She was going to have to get him to groom like Ethan.

Claire didn't know what the future held, but 2026 was going to be a very interesting year.

undercover wife



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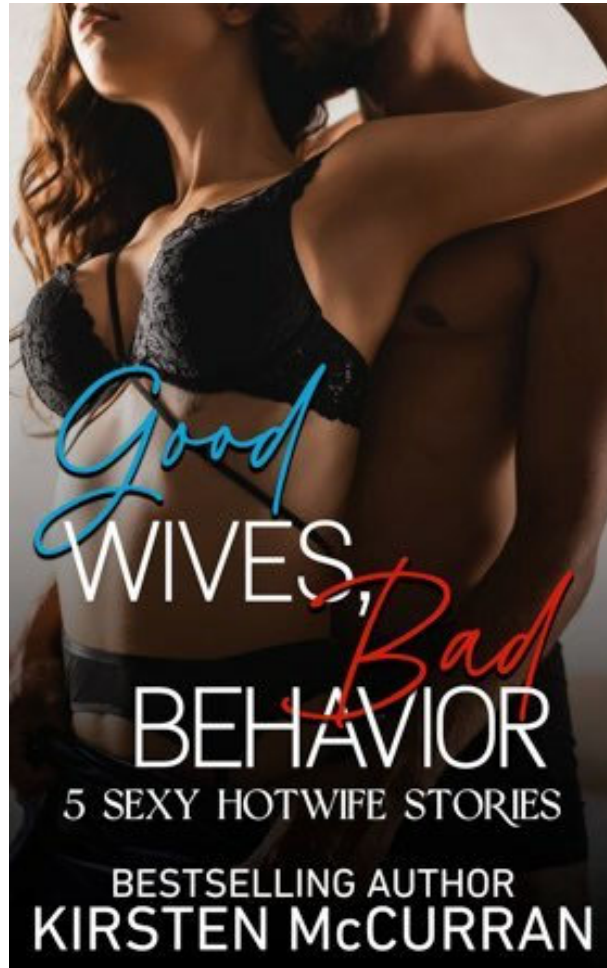
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picking forbidden fruit



Lauren Curry is a skilled massage therapist who finds joy in relieving her clients' pains. If anything, she's too giving, putting her clients first whenever she can. When a longtime family friend, Dylan, injures himself working for his father during college summer break, Lauren offers to treat him without hesitation.

Lauren is always the consummate professional, even when an attractive man is on her table—not that she sees Dylan as attractive. He's just a family

friend. She's known the young man for ages. But once she gets her hands on the college athlete's body, Lauren discovers just how sculpted it is. Lauren admires his physique with professional detachment until Dylan turns over, and she discovers that he's enjoying her treatment a little too much.

Can Lauren do the right thing and keep it professional? Or will a hot college baseball player help this suburban wife find her inner cougar? Dylan is a family friend. He's forbidden fruit. Can she resist picking it?

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tara's homecoming



Tara usually passes on her husband's bro weekend with all his buddies at the Lockley University homecoming game, even though she knows all of them from their college days. She was a staple in their apartment when she started dating Mark. But it's their 20th year of tailgating, and she decides to see if the boys are as wild as they used to be.

The boys, Austin, Danny, and Shaun, were always like family to her, but Tara learns they see her very differently when their old drinking game,

Heads or Tails, gets going. It doesn't matter that they're in the middle of a parking lot filled with tailgaters. The challenges keep getting wilder and more daring. Next thing she knows, Tara is crossing lines she never imagined and experiencing things she didn't think possible for a 44-year-old married woman from the suburbs.

A weekend away can change everything. Tara and Mark will be tested like never before. Can their marriage ever be the same after all their limits are shattered? Tara's Homecoming is another pulse-pounding shared wife adventure from celebrated author Kirsten McCurran!

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about the author

“Kirsten McCurran” is the pen name of a wife and husband team exploring the sexy secrets of middle-class, suburban couples. This couple has their own dirty little secret: they have lots of fantasies about what all their friends and neighbors are up to behind closed doors, and they turn those sexy fantasies into the stories they love to share with the world. The Mrs. could be the sweet mom you see in the stands at the soccer game or the pretty woman at the supermarket you wonder about as she's squeezing the melons. The Mr. could be your kid's little league coach.

Most of their stories are about married women looking to bust out and explore their wild side, often with the encouragement of their husbands—and sometimes without it. The strength of the couple behind Kirsten McCurran is that husband and wife writing together can uniquely capture the feelings of both partners in their couples as they explore their most forbidden desires. The Mrs. is all about exploring stories of daring women of a certain age exploring their sexuality, and the Mr. captures the feelings of the men who love them.

Kirsten McCurran has written over 60 books, which can be found at major booksellers. You can reach Ms. McCurran by email at kmccurran@gmail.com.

If you'd like other ways to support Kirsten McCurran's writing, visit her website for links, books.kirstenmccurran.com.