

*Craig's Home Town*

Sample Chapter

Chapter 18

Craig parked the car in his driveway.

“We’ll just park out here. The weather is good enough, so I can spare you going into my messy garage,” he said.

He pulled the huge bag of take-out from the back seat and they walked along a wide rock and cement sidewalk leading to a huge covered front porch.

“This is a beautiful sidewalk,” she said.

“Thanks. I laid it myself. It was harder to do than I expected it to be.”

She said, “I love your porch swing.”

She sat down in the glider-style swing that was a few steps from the front door.

He opened the door. “You can sit here while I lay out the feast.”

“No, I’ll go in. Perhaps I can swing some other time.”

He put the take-out package on a table in the entryway. He helped Kathryn out of her jacket and hung it on an ornate brass coat rack near the door. Then he hung his black bomber jacket next to it.

Craig led the way into the living room where a large fire was burning. A tall Christmas tree against the wall to the right of the fireplace glowed with blue and white lights.

“I like your Christmas tree,” she asked.

He nodded and pulled a high-back wing chair closer to the fire and motioned her to it.

“I’ll stoke the fire up a bit before I take the food to the kitchen.”

“I can help with the food,” she said.

“Oh, no. Remember I am spoiling you tonight.”

He went back to the entryway and picked up the food package. As he passed by her, he stroked her cheek. “Just make yourself at home. This won’t take long.”

She watched him disappear into the kitchen, admiring his lean athletic body that his clothes did not disguise.

She looked around the room. The fire, the tree, and two lighted table lamps provided just enough light for a Christmas Eve celebration.

Wine glasses and a bottle of red wine in a silver wine chiller were already set on a low marble table in front of the fire. A festive patchwork quilt and red cushions lay behind the table.

Kathryn moved her chair closer to the fire and slipped out of her flats, stretching her legs and feet to meet the warmth of the fire.

Craig brought out beautiful blue and white china dinner plates and folded white linen napkin baskets holding sterling silver utensils.

Kathryn said, “Those are very cleverly folded napkin baskets. Where did you learn to do that?”

Craig smiled. “I worked at a fancy restaurant during my college days.”

“You’re a man of many parts,” she said.

He bent to kiss her. “I’m glad you think so.”

Next he brought out a matching china platter filled with currant glazed duck and a china bowl full of apple walnut stuffing.

A salad in a cut crystal bowl with salad tongs and a silver bread basket filled with rolls completed the table.

Craig motioned to the quilt and the two cushions behind the table. "We are ready. I'll take the cushion closest to the kitchen door."

Kathryn took her place. He poured the wine and sat down beside her.

He held up his glass. "To my special Christmas guest. How lucky I was to find you on the Clipper that day."

She raised her glass and said, "Tonight I think I am the luckiest one. Merry Christmas."

They sipped the wine.

"That's wonderful wine," she said.

"Wonderful wine for a wonderful woman."

He planted a kiss on her cheek and they dove into their firelight feast.

Kathryn had a second helping of the stuffing. "I can't afford this, but it is so good."

Craig slipped his free arm around her waist. "You can afford it. Go ahead."

She laughed. "I'm afraid I'll be waddling onto the Clipper at the end of this holiday, especially since I am staying an extra day."

At the end of second helpings they decided to have dessert after she opened her gift.

"Now you can help me," he said. "Let's get these dishes to the kitchen."

They worked side by side in the big kitchen clearing their plates and stowing leftovers.

“I love your kitchen,” Kathryn said. “I miss the big country kitchen I had in Peoria. The kitchen in my condo in Seattle is really too small. I am practically claustrophobic in it. If I stay in Seattle, I think I’ll have to get a house with a decent kitchen.”

“If you don’t stay in Seattle, where will you go?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t want to think about anything like that tonight.”

He nodded. They quickly finished and went back into the big living room. He put a Christmas CD into his player and the strains of Mannheim Steamroller filled the room. He dragged the colorful quilt over to the Christmas tree and motioned for her to join him on it.

“I love that album,” she said.

“I do, too.”

He reached toward the back of the tree and handed her a lavishly wrapped box with a bow that glistened like new fallen snow.

“Merry Christmas,” he said.

“This is too beautiful to open.”

“I hope you like what’s inside. Go ahead. Open it.”

She slid off the bow and unwrapped the paper, being careful not to tear it.

“At this rate, we’ll never get to the cake and hot chocolate.”

She slid the paper off and removed the lid of the box, pushing aside the remaining paper inside.

“Oh, my God. It’s beautiful.” She held up a blue pendant on a gold chain.

“I tried to match your beautiful blue eyes. Let’s see how I did.” He took the pendant from her and held it against her right cheek.

“Not as beautiful as your eyes, of course. But I did get the color right.”

He leaned over and kissed her gently.

“Here. Let me put it on you.”

She faced him and he reached around her, fumbling just a bit with the catch.

He sat back, searching her eyes.

“I love it,” she said, “but it’s too much. Way too much.”

He put his arms around her, and said, “You are an easy woman to spoil.”

He held her close for a moment.

“Now to the dessert,” he said.

“Not yet. There’s something under the tree for you.”

“What? Where is it?”

He sounded like a surprised little boy.

“I don’t see anything.”

She reached into the thick branches and brought out a box wrapped in green with a green bow which had blended with the tree branches.

“When did you put it there?”

“While you were in the kitchen working on our feast.”

“I was hoping it wouldn’t fall out of my handbag this afternoon.”

She handed it to him. “Merry Christmas.”

He ripped off the bow and tore off the paper. He looked up and grinned. “This is the way to open a Christmas present.”

He held in his hand a very old book about Scottish history. He opened it. “My God. It’s a first edition. Where did you find it?”

“I have my own sources for spoiling.”

He read the inscription aloud, “To Craig, a man who honors his heritages. Here’s to a trip to Scotland for firsthand exploration. Affectionately, Kathryn.”

He grabbed her and hugged her so tightly that she gasped for breath. She said, “We can have dessert now.”

“You know I want to give you much more than dessert tonight, don’t you?”

“I do,” she said.

“Are you sure we have to wait until the divorce is final?”

Kathryn hesitated a few seconds. “I know it’s old-fashioned. I know you think it’s silly.”

He stopped her with a kiss. “I am lucky to be with a very beautiful, old-fashioned woman who is worth waiting for.”

She returned his kiss, grateful for his understanding.

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