

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Katherine Cross

Nutcracker Prince

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies
Wild Winter

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Nutcracker Prince

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NUTCRACKER PRINCE



Katherine Cross

Chapter One



Claire Jacobs came to the ballet every Christmas Eve and this year was no exception. She glanced up at the ornate gold clock as she made her way through the marble-floored lobby, ticket in hand. Fifteen minutes until curtain.

The wide double doors had been thrown open already, worn gilt glinting from the merry dazzle of Christmas tree lights. The vestibule was large, matching staircases curving up to the promenade. Three heavy oak doors stood open and ushers were stationed along the wall, dressed in familiar black-and-white uniforms.

Claire checked her ticket and made her way to her seat amongst a small trickle of theatergoers. Several minutes passed until the warning bell chimed and the trickle of patrons became a flood. Claire opened her program and glanced through the advertisements. It was a touring company, but the programs were locally produced. She skimmed the acts, reading the familiar titles, then flipped through glossy pages absently, frowning when she reached the end. She flipped the booklet open to the front page and read through the program again, this time more carefully.

There were no cast biographies. In fact, Claire realized as she scanned the program a third time, there was no cast listed at all.

“That’s odd,” she murmured, but she put it out of her mind when, moments later, the lights began to dim. The room was filled with a low buzz then went completely silent. Claire sat back in her chair and closed the program over her thumb.

Act One came and went in a dazzle of color, movement and music. She knew the story of the Nutcracker by heart. It was a Christmas staple—a tradition as vital as decorated trees and colorfully wrapped presents. There was something different about

this performance, however – something almost magical about the dancers that kept her attention riveted and her pulse racing.

The Nutcracker Prince shone beneath the high wings of the proscenium. Golden hair reflected the colored lights as strongly muscled thighs bunched and moved. Claire found her gaze drawn again and again down a powerfully muscled chest and narrow hips. Halfway through the second act, she began to fan herself absently with her program. Strong legs lifted the Nutcracker Prince neatly through the air as muscled arms guided his delicate partner through the intricate steps of their dance. She could almost imagine herself as Clara, moving within the circle of his arms. She could feel strong hands at her waist and a warm breath ghosting over her cheek.

Claire drew in a breath, hands pressing against her stomach as her heart sped with the music. She felt as if she were a part of the dance. She felt as if she was being watched, the company's attention focusing on her again and again as she sat in the audience. The hair on the back of her neck and arms prickled with the uneasy, electric sensation.

The end of the ballet came as a shock to Claire. She shook herself out of the warm haze and stood, clapping enthusiastically. The Rat King took center stage, never once removing his costume head. The Sugar Plum Fairy bowed elegantly and moved aside, making way for Clara and her Nutcracker Prince.

Claire's pulse leapt as she clapped harder, fighting the urge to whistle in approval. Already men and women were making their way out of the crowded room, but Claire kept applauding, eyes hungrily drinking in the brilliant sets and gorgeous dancers until the curtain closed for a final time, golden tassels whisking across the stage floor.

The ballet was over.

Claire was almost to the taxi stand before she realized she'd left her purse. "Damn it," she sighed, turning and heading back into the theater. The lobby was emptying

rapidly, rich patrons making their way to exclusive cast parties as the rest of the theatergoers headed out into the night, buzzing with excitement.

The theater lights had already been dimmed and the large auditorium was eerily silent. Claire hurried down the aisle and fished her purse out from under her seat, checking to make sure nothing had fallen out. There was a soft noise, like the whisper of snow, and she once again felt the electric shiver of eyes on her. Claire whirled around, purse clutched to her stomach, but there was no one there. She glanced at the stage, certain for a moment that she saw the heavy velvet ripple. She waited, breath held and heart pounding.

The curtains remained tightly shut.

Shaking herself firmly, Claire turned and made her way down the aisle. She was almost to the vestibule doors when she heard someone calling to her.

"Fraulein." The voice was so soft, Claire almost missed it. "Fraulein, if you please."

She turned, startled, and looked toward the far wall. There, standing in the shadows was a strangely dressed man. Everything about him was unusual, Claire mused as she took a step closer. His hair was a mass of grey and silver, frizzed about his head in a halo. He wore a dark, fine suit in an old-fashioned cut, tails of his jacket brushing the high tops of his polished black boots. A black eyepatch bisected his weathered face.

"I'm sorry," Claire said, moving toward him slowly. There was something oddly familiar about this strange man. Something compelling. "Were you talking to me?"

"If you would," he said, giving a short half-bow. "Fraulein, if you would follow me."

He became clearer as she neared him. "You're Herr Drosselmeyer!" Claire said in surprise.

"Please," he said in his heavy accent. "There is not much time."

Claire hesitated. “There’s not much time for what?” she asked before it suddenly dawned on her. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m not a patron. Whatever event the cast is hosting, I wasn’t invited.”

He studied her from beneath craggy, crazy brows. His single eye was a brilliant blue and unnervingly bright. Claire started when his hand thrust out to grab hers, cold white fingers contrasting sharply against her darker skin. “What are you—let me go,” she said, trying to tug away, but he was turning from the shadow of the stairs and pulling her toward a door marked Staff Only. “You’ve got me mistaken for someone else,” she tried again, pulling at his grip, but he held tight. The grizzled old man was remarkably strong, Claire thought with a faint tinge of panic.

She searched about her as he pulled her through winding halls and a series of doors, but the ushers who had seemingly flooded the theater minutes before were long gone. “What do you want?” she asked, hurrying after him. She stumbled and dropped her purse as the dancer led her through a final door to the theater backstage. Claire wrenched at his grip, struggling to turn back, but he would not stop.

“I want you to follow me,” he said gruffly. The backstage was nearly pitch black and appeared to be abandoned. His heavy boots thudded against the floorboards as he led her through the wings.

“Thanks, I managed to figure that part out,” she said, trying to yank her hand away again. He glanced over a shoulder at her, lips quirking in amusement, and led her into a cramped tunnel between heavy black curtains.

The thick velvet brushed against her arms as they made their way through what seemed like an incomprehensible maze of darkness and fabric. *How big is this place anyway?* Claire wondered, trying to orient herself. The air was filled with the overwhelming scent of pine and wood smoke. Goose bumps shivered across her skin as she looked up at the distant catwalks and hanging sets. There was something off about everything—the silence, the darkness, the sheer size of the stage. She had a sudden moment of feeling out of place, as if she’d stumbled somehow into another world.

She brought herself up short when the old man finally stopped, turning to her and letting go of her wrist. Claire rubbed it absently as she glared at him. They were sandwiched between thick curtains, lost in an oppressively dark maze in a theater that appeared to be roughly the size and shape of the Roman Coliseum. "Thanks for the tour," Claire said sharply, moving a wary step away from him. He remained where he was, watching her with an enigmatic expression. *Crazy old bastard.* "But I have to go home. If you'll excuse me."

She turned and resolutely began to stalk away.

"The other will come when the grandfather clock strikes midnight," the old, heavily accented voice said from behind her. "Guten Tag, Fraulein."

Claire turned back, frowning. "What are you—" She stopped when she realized she was alone. "What the hell?" she muttered, taking a step forward. She brushed her fingers over the curtains, but she couldn't find where he must have slipped through.

The scent of pine was even stronger now. Somewhere nearby, Claire could hear the faint ticking of a clock. "Hello?" she called, moving along the curtains, searching for a part. The stage couldn't really be all that large, she rationalized. All she had to do was find a way out onto the apron and she could go down the aisle and back outside. Simple. "Hello? Hello?"

Were there *no* stagehands? Propwomen?

She nearly crowed in triumph when her hand finally pushed through a part in the cloth. Claire slipped through, letting the curtain fall back heavily. She made her way around the back of a set piece, barely able to see in the darkness, and grabbed for a doorknob jutting out from the plywood. She twisted the knob and muffled a curse when she stepped through the set door and out onto the stage.

Onto the brilliantly lit, fully decorated stage.

"Strange," Claire muttered, glancing at the darkness of backstage before shrugging and shutting the door. She moved out onto the stage and looked around, curious despite herself.

To the left was a surprisingly realistic hearth fire, delicate furniture arranged in a cozy semicircle. To the right was the family Christmas tree. She knew she should leave, but Claire couldn't resist the temptation to take a closer look. A gleaming ornament caught her attention and Claire walked to the tree, reaching out to brush her fingers over the white crystal globe. Snowflakes danced across it in swirls of iridescence, catching the oddly natural stage lights and bouncing them back at her. It was mesmerizing, nearly hypnotic. Briefly, the entire world seemed to tilt, catching in the distorted reflection of the Christmas ornament.

The clock chimed the half hour.

Shaking her head, Claire pulled her hand away. "Time to go," she said firmly, moving away from the tree and heading toward the orchestra pit and main auditorium.

She froze before she even made it a step. The house curtain, the pit, the opera boxes, the plush red chairs and the aisles were gone. In their place was a high wall, ornate gilt picture frames twinkling faintly in the light of the dancing fire.

Claire stood still for a long minute, shocked. She took a shaky step back, looking around her wildly. She was in a long, rectangular room. The walls were a yellowish-gold, the trim white. Everything looked authentic, down to the candelabra on the mantle.

It didn't look like a stage set at all.

Claire whirled around and strode back to the upstage door, turning the handle sharply. She frowned when it appeared to be locked and tugged again. "Oh, hell no," she said, grabbing the brass knob with both hands and wrenching it. The door remained firmly shut. "Damn it!" Claire kicked at the door before slapping her hand against the wood. "Is anyone out there?" she called. She looked up at the catwalks, but all she could see was a high, white ceiling.

I'm dreaming. I'm obviously dreaming, she thought, crossing the room and trying the opposite door. Nothing. She ran her hands along the wall, pushing with all her strength. Someone must have moved another set piece to box the room in. That was the

only explanation. Only the wall didn't rock back like she expected and the corners were perfectly seamed. The fire crackling in the fireplace was giving off realistic heat and the floor beneath her feet was not the scuffed, painted black wood of the stage.

"I probably fell asleep in the theater," Claire rationalized, trying to calm her racing heart. This couldn't be happening to her. "This is a dream. I'll wake up any second now. This is a — this is a damn realistic dream."

"This isn't a dream," a low, male voice said from behind her, "and you're not going to wake up anytime soon. You're here with us now."

Chapter Two



Claire whirled around, heart leaping even as she lifted her hands in defense. A man stood before her, watching her with strangely intent, eager eyes as he stepped closer.

He was the most handsome man she'd ever seen in her life.

"What the hell do you mean by that?" she tried to bluster, body tensing. His hair was golden-blond and fell nearly to his shoulders, the long, curling strands brushing the fine wool of his red uniform jacket. His eyes were a warm brown in a classically handsome face, patrician nose shadowing a full, sensual mouth. His jaw was strong and his shoulders broad, his muscular chest and arms filling the gold-piped jacket to perfection. Claire's eyes dipped lower and she could feel her cheeks heating as she took in the leather belt strapped around a trim waist and white military breeches that clung to strongly muscled legs. Black boots finished the ensemble—one that looked just a bit too familiar. "Wait a minute," Claire said, eyes snapping back to study his face. "You're the Nutcracker!"

His mouth curved into a slight smile and he bowed formally in acknowledgement.

"I just saw you dance," she added. "You were good."

"Thank you," he said with a laugh. He had a pleasant tenor voice, as warm and rich as his eyes. Claire shivered, stomach muscles clenching as she found herself reacting. *Stop that*, she told herself. He reached out to take her hand, lifting it palm-up and kissing the inside of her wrist. His breath was hot against her skin, his lips faintly damp as they brushed the curve of her palm. Claire's pulse leapt, fire racing through her body at the slight, teasing touch. She could feel the heat unfurling low in her belly and she squeezed her thighs against the sudden, sharp throb in her pussy. "I'm glad you

enjoyed me.” His words gusted across her skin and her nipples tightened as another wave of heat nearly overwhelmed her.

Claire snatched her hand away. “Obviously not that much,” she said, trying to hide how flustered he’d made her with one simple brush of his lips. “Not if I fell asleep halfway through the performance.”

“What makes you so sure this is a dream?” His eyes were dancing in amusement. He knew full well the effect he was having on her, but Claire fought not to let on, gesturing casually about the room.

“It’s a bit too Alice in Wonderland for it *not* to be a dream,” she said, edging a step away from him. Just to be safe. She could smell the musky, heady blend of woody cologne and skin. It seemed to waft about her, making her breasts feel fuller, riper. Making her pussy pulse. He was watching her with such frank admiration that she couldn’t seem to help but respond.

Cool it, girl, she told herself firmly. Dream or not, you have to keep focused.

She shook her head, trying to force herself to wake. It was difficult to think with him so near. There was a magnetic pull about him that both unnerved her and made her hungry for more. She wanted to touch him everywhere. She wanted to know all about him. She wanted to offer herself to him, to let him claim her in such a basic, primal way that she felt raw inside just thinking about it. She felt off balance, as if he were the sun exerting an undeniable tug, gravity making her sway toward him. Her body ached and her heart was pounding. Cream slipped between her thighs.

Claire had never felt like this before—not so quickly nor so violently. She imagined reaching out to tangle her fingers in his golden hair. She wanted to pull him down to her, wanted to thrust her tongue past his tempting lips to stroke deep into his mouth. She wanted to feel his hands on her, pale thumbs brushing over the dusky peaks of her breasts. She wanted to reach into tight breeches and pull out his erection, to see the contrast between their skin tones as she stroked her fingers down his cock and guided him into her body.

What was it about this man, she wondered desperately, that seemed to defy all reason?

What *wasn't* there about him?

Claire edged back again and stifled a pleased-disgruntled noise when he followed, keeping the space between them minimal. She could feel the heat coming from his body. She could see his eyes darkening as he responded to her, pupils dilating sharply. "Herr Drosselmeyer is a strange White Rabbit," Claire said, trying to distract herself. She moved to step around him and made a sound low in her throat when one of his strong arms shot out, blocking her. He stepped in again, herding her back against the wall, his other arm rising to rest his palm next to her shoulder. She was caged in, Claire realized, trapped by muscular arms and a broad chest. She licked her lips, acutely aware of the way his eyes dipped hungrily to her mouth, following the slow progress of her tongue. Her entire body ached as her pussy grew slick and swollen. Her panties were soaked. *Oh God*, Claire thought, panicked. *Keep talking. Keep him distracted.*

"I suppose that makes you the Cheshire Cat," she babbled inanely, voice distressingly husky. She cleared her throat, then bit back a moan when he dropped one hand to her waist. His thumb stroked the gauzy material of her skirt, circling her hipbone and rucking up the hem slowly. Claire shifted her stance, widening it as he moved to rest in the valley of her thighs. He rocked forward, driving her back against the wall, and there was no controlling her sharp cry as his erect cock rubbed against her throbbing cunt through layers of material. He was so hot it almost stung, but Claire matched him heat for heat, hips undulating naturally even as she reached up to brace her hands against his chest as if to push him away. "I don't even know your name!" She was panting, hands sliding up to broad shoulders. His hair was just as soft as it looked, like spun silk shining between her dark fingers.

He leaned in, hands gripping her waist, face hovering close. The heat of his breath fanned over her cheeks, making her moan again. Claire arched toward him, loving the

way her impossibly tight nipples scraped across his muscular chest. She felt lightheaded and heavy-limbed. It was as if she were under some spell.

“Adam,” he murmured, and she could almost taste his name, his mouth was so close. “My name is Adam.”

Claire capitulated with a soft sigh. She closed her eyes, face tilted up, and waited for the kiss. Her parted lips tingled and she gripped his hair tight. Her entire body felt frozen in anticipation, caught in a forward sway as his breath teased over her skin and his hard body rested against hers. She drew a shaky breath, waiting for the claiming hunger of his mouth.

But the kiss never came.

Claire opened her eyes, dazed. He was frozen over her, mouth a breath away from hers, dark eyes watching her with a hunger that made her entire body flush with need. Claire pulled back, leaning fully against the wall and watching as he licked his lips. His Adam’s apple bobbed with a swallow and she dropped her fingers from his hair, slowly coming down from the rush of sensation.

What the hell was she doing?

“This is definitely not happening,” Claire said firmly, grabbing his wrist and breaking his hold on her. He let her — she wasn’t sure she could have done it if he *hadn’t* let her — and Claire moved from the cage of his arms, pacing away. His eyes followed her and she rubbed her palms against the skirt of her dress, trying to still her racing heart.

His boot heels thudded against the hardwood floor as he took a step behind her. “Clara,” he said, tenor voice low and intimate.

“Claire,” she snapped, turning to face him. “My name’s Claire. Claire Jacobs. I’m a copy writer for TechResults. I do web design on the side. I have a very boring life that involves power lunches and a Betta fish named Stanley but does not typically involve fantasizing about white ballet dancers no matter how sexy they may look up on stage in their tights.”

“Clara,” he said, and his tone was firm and almost hard. She drew a deep, sharp breath as he started toward her, lips drawn in a line. There was something almost frightening about him—powerful and focused and a little overwhelming. Claire moved back as he drove forward, aware he was herding her toward a wall again. “Juliet. Giselle, Cinderella, the Swan Princess. You are all of these and more. We have been searching a long time.” His voice lowered as he stopped in the center of the room, hanging chandelier casting reddish light through his blond hair. “I thought we’d never find you.”

She shook her head, pausing by the Christmas tree. “No,” Claire said, “that’s insane.”

“It’s not insane. It’s the truth. The Company has been touring for generations,” he continued. His voice was mesmerizing and Claire found herself following the rich dips and sways of his tone more than his words. *It’s like being hypnotized*, she thought, dazed. Meeting his eyes, she once again felt that overwhelming rush of heat. *Hypnotized and seduced all at once.*

“Many of us have been with the Company far longer than we thought possible. I’ve been here thirty-six years, Erik twenty years longer than that and both of us are considered newcomers. The Company’s existed as long as there’s been creation, Fredrick claims.” His voice was a low, soothing murmur. “He’s been here one hundred and sixty years. Rebekah, our lead, has been here even longer. She wants rest. She needs a replacement. We chose you. We need you.”

She shook her head slowly. “That’s not possible,” Claire said. “It’s ridiculous.”

“It’s why you responded to us so strongly. It’s why Frederick sought you out. We watched you through our performance and we knew.”

Claire’s head was spinning. She refused to believe it was anything more than a dream. Stages that shifted into the rooms their sets represented, men claiming to be near ageless... “There’s no way what you’re telling me is real,” she said firmly. “No company could live that long or tour together for so many years.” He simply watched

her impassively. "All right," Claire said. "If you do live so long, *why*? Why perform, why tour with the Company? What are you?"

"Why did the Greeks have the Muses? Erato ruled erotic writing. Calliope governed epic song. Terpsichore oversaw the realm of dance. Gods have been charged with the guidance of creative thought for ages. Is it really so difficult to believe that muses truly exist?"

"Actually, *yes*."

He opened his mouth to argue then shut it again. "All right," Adam said. "What if this is a dream?"

Claire rubbed her hands over her face. She still felt restless from frustrated arousal and dizzy from everything he had said. Muses and inspiration and companies performing for centuries...none of it made sense. "*If*?"

Adam began to move forward again. Claire lowered her hands and watched him in wary excitement, heart beginning to pound in her chest. His eyes had gone warm and heavy-lidded. His mouth was curved into a sensual smile. "What if I am a figment of your erotic imagination?" The way he said the words sent jolts of electricity through her body. Her clit throbbed sharply, falling into rhythm with each step he took. The tremors raced up her body. It took so little for him to send her spiraling apart, it seemed.

"What if none of this is real?" He was close—close enough that she could see the flecks of gold in his chocolate brown eyes. Close enough that she could see the pale dusting of freckles across his cheeks and nose. "What if," Adam said, reaching for her again and Claire couldn't help but lean forward into his touch, letting him draw her into the circle of his arms, "you are sitting in a dark auditorium, lulled to sleep by the music and merely imagining I am touching you? Holding you?" His head dipped close and Claire lifted her face helplessly, needing to feel his mouth against hers. Her entire body ached with desire and she rocked her hips forward, undulating against the hard line of his cock. His voice was a whisper against her lips, more felt than heard. "If I am only a dream, if none of this exists, then what's the harm in giving in to your fantasy?"

Claire drew a sharp breath. His mouth was hovering so close. His hands were on her hips, stroking her through the fabric.

“You’re right,” she said, sliding her fingers up into his golden hair. She gripped the silky strands tight. “What’s the harm?”

Claire closed her eyes and pulled Adam down for an explosive, hungry kiss.

Chapter Three



She was on fire. It licked through her body with shocking speed, flames burning deep in her stomach as Adam responded to her kiss with a low, primal growl. Her pulse raced. Her breath came in pants. Claire gasped against his mouth and swayed forward, weak-limbed. Strong arms wrapped around her waist and Claire let herself be drawn close to the muscled wall of his chest, thankful for his strength.

Her lips parted and Adam stroked his tongue into her mouth, claiming with a kiss. The exploration was brutal, consuming, and Claire moaned as broad hands slid down her spine to cup her ass, pulling her tight against the hot pulse of his erect cock. Strong fingers massaged the rounded curve of her behind, thumbs dipping into the slight indentation at the apex. Claire broke the kiss briefly, drawing in a shuddery breath. Adam's face was flushed. His lips were parted and wet.

"If this isn't a dream," Claire said, hands sliding down to cup his jaw. Fine golden stubble raked across her palms, lightly scoring the sensitive skin. She wondered what it would feel like rubbing across her inner thighs. "If all of this is real, what will you want from me?"

He squeezed her ass gently, gathering the filmy material of her skirt in his fingers. She could feel the cool air against her upper thighs, contrasting sharply with the roar of the hearth fire warming her face. "Just you," he said. His voice was a low, seductive purr. Adam began to move against her, deliberately rubbing his cock between her thighs. She could feel him against the heat of her sex and she bit her mouth, eyes going heavy-lidded at the sensation. "When we saw you in the audience, we knew you were the one."

"How?" Her voice trembled as she moved with him, rocking in a slow, sensual counterpoint.

Adam leaned forward to kiss her throat, tongue brushing over tendons before swirling absent patterns along the curve of her shoulder. "You shine. Even from the stage, we could see it. God, we were so hungry for you."

Claire dropped her head back, chest heaving. He bit lightly at her skin before kissing a warm trail across her collarbone to the valley of her breasts. "We?" she said. She could hardly concentrate on his words.

"Erik."

She shuddered hard, a darker sort of pleasure shooting through her body at the name. "Erik," Claire echoed, testing it, tasting it and Adam moaned against her breasts, sliding up restlessly to kiss her again. The kiss was desperate, hard, and Claire arched into him as she thrust her tongue deep into his mouth. She had the sudden sense of being watched, of dark eyes sliding over her skin and that only drove her higher, made her cry out into Adam's mouth.

Adam growled again, nails digging into her skin. "Hold on," he said, muscles bunching.

"Oh God," she said. Her thighs tensed as he effortlessly lifted her. Claire dropped her hands to his shoulders and wrapped her long legs around his waist, ankles locking at the small of his back. Her breasts were crushed against the fine wool of his uniform top, the gold buttons digging into her skin as she arched against him.

Adam took a step forward, hands bracing her body. He pulled away from the kiss, drawing her tongue after his, teasing her. He stroked the sensitive underside with the tip of his own tongue, brushing and twining them together in the cool air. Claire trembled, gasping in breaths as he wrapped his lips around her tongue and suckled hard, pulling at the root. She could feel the sharp tug echo throughout her body, throbbing in time with her impossibly tight nipples and aching clit.

Claire shifted, struggling to feel more of him. She rocked her hips in a twisting circle, rubbing the heated folds of her cunt against his trapped erection. Trembling fingers pulled at regimental buttons as one of Adam's hands slid up, drawing the hem of her gauzy skirt along the curve of her spine. She shivered, breaking the kiss to bite at his jaw, tongue tracing the faint red marks. She could feel cool air against her lower back as Adam shifted her, tugging the dress up higher.

"Let go," he murmured, and Claire lifted her arms, trusting him to keep her balance. He yanked the dress the rest of the way off, tossing it aside with a pleased noise. She arched, arms still twined above her head, and thrust her breasts forward in invitation. Adam laughed quietly and dipped his head, tongue tracing down the dark line of cleavage before swirling across the satin and lace cups of her bra. Claire watched him from beneath hooded eyes, biting her lower lip as he kissed along the curve to mouth her nipple through the pale cloth.

"Fuck," she said, jerking in his arms. Adam shifted her carefully, lifting her until the sopping heat of her pussy rubbed against his stomach. His large hands cradled her as he took the puckered tip of her nipple between his teeth and tugged sharply, earning another cry. "Adam." Her voice was throaty, her hands restless as they smoothed over his shoulders, gripped into his hair, moved down again to unfasten buttons. Claire slid a hand into his uniform jacket as he shifted from one breast to the other. The satin was discolored from the wet heat of his mouth and her swollen breasts heaved against the cups, nearly spilling over.

Adam reached behind her and, fumbling briefly, snapped the fastenings of her bra. Claire arched again, back bowing in an exaggerated curve as the straps slid down slender arms. Dusky nipples peeked over the lace cups, drawing his mouth again and Claire ground her soaked pussy against the hard planes of his body as she twisted the bra off and tossed it aside.

He cupped her breast in his palm, pale fingers contrasting sharply against the rich cocoa of her skin. Adam began to move as he flicked his tongue over the puckered flesh

before drawing the peak into his mouth and suckling. The solid tread of his boot heels rocked through her body and Claire cried out as she gripped his shoulders, thankful when she finally felt the solid comfort of a wall behind her. She relaxed against it, riding up his body, guiding him from one breast to the other with panting cries.

When he tugged her aching flesh with his sharp, white teeth, she moaned. When he pulled away to look at her, eyes nearly black with arousal, she gasped his name. "Adam, Adam," she said again, encouraging. Strong hands gripped her hips and lifted her from him. Claire unhooked her ankles, letting herself slide down his body as he gently lowered her to the ground. She kicked off her shoes blindly.

He took a half-step away, pushing back his hair as he hungrily studied her body. "You're so beautiful," Adam said, voice catching on the words. She leaned back against the wall, breasts heaving. Claire could feel the heavy swing of them and watched as his eyes latched onto her glistening, wet nipples. His gaze dropped as her hands moved to her waist, thumbs hooking in her hose and panties. Slowly, hips swaying, Claire tugged down the thin cloth. She pushed it over her thighs and down her calves, loving the way he stared hungrily at her as she bent to tug the hose from her feet. When she stood, completely naked, she cupped her own breasts before sliding her hands down her belly to her aching cunt.

"You're so wet for me," Adam said, watching her fixedly. He licked his lips as she dipped her thumbs into the slick folds, opening herself to him. She leaned her shoulders against the wall and spread her feet wide, offering her dripping sex. Her thighs were slick, her dark curls glistening in the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree. "I want to slide my fingers deep inside you. I want to spread you open for my cock, then push deep into your body, driving you higher, harder."

"Yes," she gasped, thumbs brushing her clit. She could feel moisture dripping down her thighs. She could feel cool air gust against her exposed pussy.

"I want to flip you over and grasp your gorgeous breasts in my hands as I take you from behind. I want to feel your body clench around me, impossibly tight."

“Adam, please,” Claire said, hips arching sharply. She moaned when he leaned forward, breath fanning across her face. His mouth found hers, hot and hard, and she kissed back desperately, fingers still curled in her sex, breasts heaving against his fully clothed chest. When he dropped down her body, brushing kisses over flushed skin, she almost screamed aloud. When he fell to his knees in front of her and lightly bit at the folds of her pussy, her trembling legs nearly gave out. Claire pulled her hands away as Adam’s tongue dipped into her molten heat, the very tip teasing from bottom to top with quick swirls.

“No,” he said, warm breath gusting over swollen, aching skin. “I want you to hold yourself open for me. I want him to be able to see you as he waits.”

Claire’s head shot up, her eyes wide. “Wh—Erik,” she said, gaze raking across the room quickly. It was exactly as before—nothing had changed.

“Claire,” Adam said, grasping her wrists and pulling her hands back down. Claire focused on him quickly, meeting his warm eyes. She drew in a shuddery breath and nodded, widening her stance even further as she hooked her slick fingers into the dripping folds of her pussy and opened herself wide for him.

Adam nosed against her dark curls, pink lips brushing the dusky skin. Claire bit her bottom lip hard as she watched him, more aware than ever of eyes on her. She quickly scanned the room before focusing on Adam again, crying out when his tongue curled against her aching clit.

“That feels so good,” she said, fingers tightening against the heavy outer folds of her sex. Adam made a low noise of approval, tongue sliding deep into her cunt. He speared her with it, thrusting into her slit before laving over the engorged nub. Claire dropped her head back, sobbing in breaths. She jerked against his tongue, pleasure spiking, careening out of control. “Adam,” she warned, feeling the heated flush of orgasm. He moaned approval, lips wrapping around her clit, tongue pistoning against the tender bud.

“Adam!” she cried as she came, thrashing with a strangled moan as waves of sensation rippled through her body. Adam remained buried between her thighs, broad hands reaching up to grasp her waist and steady her as Claire shuddered with the force of her orgasm, slowly relaxing against the wall. Slowly going boneless.

He rubbed his cheek against her thigh and Claire shivered at the brush of golden stubble, legs quivering. “You’re so beautiful,” Adam murmured, looking up at her. Crouched before her, lips glistening with her come, he looked like a supplicant at the altar of a goddess.

Claire reached down to stroke her fingers through his hair, enraptured again by the warm red and gold glow. She twined a loose curl about her finger. Loud and solemn, the clock began to chime midnight.

“So this company,” she teased, tugging at his hair. Adam stood, moving back into the circle of her arms. She moaned when she felt his erection against her thigh—a firm reminder that their evening was far from over. “Do you mean to tell me that as the female lead, I get to spend my nights with you?”

“Every night,” he murmured.

“Does this qualify as a duty or a perk?”

His grin was incandescent, a dimple flashing in his right cheek. “Definitely a perk,” he said, kissing her forehead, her cheeks, her nose. Claire turned her face to catch his mouth and laughed when he evaded her, lips twisted into a wicked smile.

“Don’t you want more?” she teased, sliding a leg between his muscular thighs. Adam moaned, cock jerking hard, and Claire gave herself over to his hungry, claiming kiss. His tongue stroked into her mouth, still salty-sweet from her come and she suckled it greedily, rocking her thigh against his erection. She was still unsatisfied, excitement shuddering through her body as she raked her tight nipples over his uniform jacket.

Adam pressed her firmly against the wall, hands moving to cup her breasts. Calloused thumbs brushed over the peaks, sending shock waves of sensation through

her body and Claire cried out in appreciation, breaking the kiss to let her head fall back. Her hands slid over his strong, broad shoulders.

“Well,” another, deeper, far darker voice said. Claire jerked her head up, startled, and met aching blue eyes over the red frame of Adam’s jacket. The man stood next to the grandfather clock, black brow arched sardonically. “It appears you’ve already begun without me.”

Chapter Four



Erik.

He had the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. They were cold and clear, like a winter's morning before the ice melted and the sun fully rose. His face was strong, almost harsh, nose hooked and jaw square. There was something almost terrifying about him, Claire thought as she stared at him over Adam's shoulder. Dark hair fell across his brow and his black and silver military uniform did nothing to hide his powerful body.

This was a predator. This was not someone to be taken lightly.

Erik moved forward, each step as quiet as a whisper. Adam pulled away from her, turning to meet the other man's eyes, and Claire could feel the electrical awareness between them. It was part aggression, part passion and she shivered lightly as the two men faced off. She crossed her arms over her breasts, aware of her nudity in a way she hadn't been before. Blue eyes flickered to her and she felt a rush of heat at his gaze.

"Erik." Adam's pleasant tenor was pitched low, almost wary. It struck Claire as odd before she realized the source of his discomfort.

Of course, she thought. The Nutcracker and the Rat King. Romeo and Tybalt. They always stand opposed.

She wondered briefly when she had begun to believe.

"Enjoying yourself, Adam?" Erik asked smoothly. Firelight flickered over his face, but instead of making him seem warmer, like Adam, it merely highlighted the shadows and sharp planes. The two men were a study in opposites, it seemed. Fair and dark,

warm and cold, familiar and alien. Tension crackled as they slowly, deliberately began to circle one another.

The corner of Adam's mouth lifted into a mirthless smile. "I am," he said, eyes never leaving Erik. Claire moved along the wall, giving the two men space. She felt uneasy and excited. There was something unquestionably erotic about their aggression—their power play that lacked a neutral ground. She could feel the erotic tension between Erik and Adam, building with each step they took. It hovered there, couched in masculine aggression and competition. Claire found herself wishing they would reach for one another, fingers curling in hair, mouths meeting. Anything to quiet the frenetic buzz of need that swirled between their powerful bodies. "Enjoy watching?"

"Never."

They were closer now, each careful step bringing them together. They were like prize fighters or two sticks rubbing together to create a spark. Her heart was pounding in her chest and Claire drew a shaky breath as she watched the deliberate way Erik and Adam moved. It was almost like a dance, she realized. Their eyes were locked, brown and blue, and their muscles were tense. Together they formed a perfect picture and Claire fully understood why these two men could inspire creation. Their magnetism on stage translated perfectly to life as if there was no difference between the two.

She wondered if, to them, there was.

The tension was almost unbearable. It thrummed through the room and hung around the two men in an almost visible electrical cloud. She wondered if they would fight or fuck. She imagined it was nearly the same thing for them, mouths tearing, hands bruising, battle for dominance consuming them completely. There was nothing soft between them. There was nothing to balance them out—hero and villain—and nothing to keep them from tearing one another apart.

It was then that Claire remembered the shoe.

In the ballet, the Nutcracker Prince and the Rat King battled to the death, strength nearly matched. It was Clara throwing her shoe that disrupted the balance and decided the victor. It was the feminine presence that ended the fierce, bloody war.

We need you, Adam had said.

Claire stepped between the two men.

"Stop," she said, holding out her hands. She pressed a palm to each chest, feeling the electric jolt of contact. Both pairs of eyes were on her as the men froze in place. She could feel their hearts racing against her fingertips. Their breaths were ragged, strongly muscled chests rising and falling against her touch.

"Clara," Adam began.

"Stop," Claire said, looking from him to Erik. The corners of Erik's mouth slowly turned up into a secretive, maddening smile. He watched her from beneath lowered lashes, heat spreading through her body as his gaze dipped across her bare shoulders, her breasts and down her flat stomach to the nest of glistening curls. She drew a sharp breath, aware of the dull ache growing within her, throbbing in time to her pounding heart.

"Whatever the lady says." His voice was a silken purr, intended to seduce. Erik lifted a hand to touch her shoulder, calloused fingertips brushing across her chocolate-rich skin. On her other side, Adam reached up to cover her hand with his, thumb tracing the web of her fingers. They moved from aggression to a focused, cooperative seduction within moments. Claire wondered briefly whether that was just a part of the dance as well.

She wondered what else they were willing to do together.

The tension ebbed, evolving and focusing entirely on her. Gooseflesh sped over her bare skin as she felt their gazes rake her body in a near-physical caress. She felt heavy and wanton. Her breasts were swollen, aching, and she shivered against the demanding throb between her thighs. She wanted them, Claire realized. She wanted them one after

the other, mouths tearing at her skin, cocks driving into her, muscled bodies cradling her close. She wanted them more than she'd ever wanted anything in her life.

She also wanted to bring them together the way they were meant to be. It didn't have to be an endless war. Erik and Adam didn't have to face off each evening on the stage and bring that focused passion back into their lives as eternal animosity. She could see where she fit between them, where they needed her to soften their hard edges, but she didn't want to be their no man's land forever.

There had to be a way.

Trembling, Claire turned her hand against Adam's, lacing their fingers together as she moved closer to Erik. Her palm remained pressed to his chest as if to ward him away even as Claire lifted her face helplessly, seeking his mouth.

This was no delicate kiss. His lips moved against hers in a sudden, hungry rush, tongue thrusting deep. Claire moaned and swayed forward, feeling Adam move behind her. She raked her teeth along Erik's tongue, biting the tip as he slid his hands down to frame her hips, pulling her against the hard planes and angles of his powerful body. Claire settled between his thighs, moaning when she felt the scalding heat of his cock press against her belly. She moaned again when Adam moved to sandwich her close, erection rubbing along the curve of her ass. He untangled their fingers and slid his hands up to cup her breasts, rolling her tight nipples, plucking them delicately even as Erik dug his nails into her hips.

Gentle and rough. Their conflicting touches sent shudders through her, making her jerk and moan.

Adam pinched her nipples and Claire gasped, arching between two hard bodies. She broke the kiss and turned her face to Adam, biting at his mouth. He tilted his head and deepened the kiss. Another hot mouth pressed kisses along her shoulder and Claire moaned, arching her neck to Erik.

This was how it was supposed to be, Claire realized as she twisted between them. Adam and Erik may have been opposites, but with her to balance them out, they were

merely part of a continuum of longing. She suckled roughly at Adam's tongue, fingers working at his red jacket again. She moved her other hand up Erik's chest to pull at silver buttons, nails digging into the fine wool. Around her, they nearly touched, hands reaching and then skittering away to caress her dark skin again.

"You belong to us," Erik said quietly. His strong hands stroked over her, thumbs skimming low to tease at sopping dark curls. Adam's fingers moved in a deliberate counterpoint, nails brushing the tight nubs of her nipples.

"Erik," Claire moaned, breaking the kiss. She rubbed her face against Adam's jaw and turned her head to look at the other man, caught again by the brilliant blue eyes. She leaned forward to touch her mouth to his but he tilted his chin away, watching her intently.

"You belong to us," he said again. His voice was like cold steel. He rocked his hips forward, rubbing his cock against her stomach and, behind her, Adam did the same. "You will stay with us."

"Say yes," Adam urged, kissing the nape of her neck. His hot breath sent shivers racing down her spine.

She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. Everything was moving too quickly. "I barely know you," Claire said, shuddering as Adam's teeth brushed over her skin. Erik was watching her fixedly, hardly blinking.

"You know us. You've always known us."

"I have a life. I have a job."

"This is your intended life, Claire," Erik said. "You belong to us."

She half laughed, half moaned. "I don't even believe this is real," she lied, twisting in their arms.

Blue eyes locked with hers. A warm breath fanned across her cheek.

"We're more real than anything you've known before," Adam said quietly, kissing her earlobe, agile tongue running along the delicate shell.

"You believe it," Erik added firmly. "You believe us."

Time seemed to slow as Claire drew a shaky breath, caught between these two powerful, compelling men. The crackle of the fire and the tick of the old grandfather clock were underscored by their panting breaths. Her body was a tangle of need, breasts and cunt aching, limbs impossibly heavy. She squeezed her thighs together, stimulating her clit, and moaned when Erik slid his hand firmly down her stomach, large palm cupping her sex. He slid one finger deep inside her cunt, thrusting it past her inner lips to press deep into her core. When he shifted his hand, the heel of his palm rubbed her tortured clit.

"Erik," Claire said, head falling back against Adam's chest. Adam's thumbs circled her nipples maddeningly, teasingly, before plucking at the distended flesh. "Adam."

"Say yes," Erik commanded, watching her intently. His hard face had softened somewhat, expression bordering on tender as he slid his finger out and rubbed it over her clit. The slick, sweet brush of skin was overwhelming. A circuit connected between her breasts and pussy, sparking through her entire body. She was shuddering on the edge, held there by strong arms and compelling eyes. She was quivering between their muscled bodies, aching to be claimed.

What do I want? Do I want this for the rest of my life? Forever?

Sandwiched between Erik and Adam, body jerking as heat shot through her in pulsing waves of pleasure and need, that suddenly seemed like such a foolish question.

"Yes," Claire said, briefly shaking away the fog of lust.

"Say the words. Say the words and mean them." There was something frightening about Erik's intensity as he watched her, raw hunger clear in his too-blue eyes. Behind her, Adam kissed down her shoulder, warmly encouraging. She could sense his need too—his sudden, desperate hope.

Claire licked her lips. Somewhere along the way, this had become more than a fantasy or dream. It was *real* and she was being asked to leave her life for them forever. Could she really give up everything?

But what was there in her life worth keeping? A job she didn't enjoy. A small, cramped apartment. Bills she could barely afford to pay. Hours of her life lost in endless commutes, going from nowhere to nowhere. Frustrated day after frustrated day when all she could do was remember the dreams she had in youth and compare them to the dull monotony her life had become. Her family was gone and even her friends would move on without her.

There was nothing there. There was nothing compared what she felt coming from these two men—need and longing and the rapidly growing ache of love. She had to smile at that. Hours before, she would have been so certain love could not come so quickly. Barely a handful of words exchanged and already she was willing to tie herself to them for centuries.

Her decision was made.

"Yes," Claire said. She pulled away from them carefully, untangling their limbs and stepping back. The two men turned to face her and stood shoulder to shoulder, their heights the same. Everything else about them, however, was diametrically opposed, like the rippling reflection in a blackened mirror. "Yes, Adam, Erik. I'll stay with you. I'll join the Company." She drew a deep breath. "I'll be yours."

"Swear it," Erik said, voice gruff and Claire smiled. He was trembling. She could tell that he was close to losing control.

Good.

"I promise," she said, looking from one man to the other. Adam's mouth was parted, lips damp. Both men were strongly aroused, erections straining against the tight clasp of their military breeches. Black and red, fierce and tender. They were hers. They should be each other's as well. "On one condition," Claire added, holding up a hand. The tension ringing the room was palpable.

"What?" Erik demanded.

"Anything," Adam promised.

Claire's full mouth curved into a slow, wicked smile. She could think of only one way to force an end to their eternal war. "I want you to undress each other," she said, eyes scanning over broad shoulders, narrow hips, muscular thighs. Desire was strong – she was playing a dangerous game.

She didn't care.

"I want you to strip naked so I can see you. Then I want you to fuck one another while I watch."

Chapter Five



There was stunned silence for a full minute before Erik began to laugh. “Is that all?” he said, blue eyes dancing. Adam was staring at her, expression caught between admiration and shock, but his eyes cut immediately to Erik when broad hands touched his shoulder.

“Erik,” he said, turning to the other man and lifting his palms as if to ward him off. Erik dropped his head to kiss his fingers, white teeth flashing as he bit at the tips. His earlier aggression toward Adam resurged, changed and turned to another kind of focused attention. Claire wondered how long he had wanted this.

“You heard her,” Erik said, voice low and gruff. He glanced at Claire again, meeting her eyes. The warmth in them was unmistakable.

Claire moved around them, slowly circling. Adam turned his head to follow her progress, then sucked in a breath when strong, calloused fingers gripped his jaw, drawing his attention back to Erik. Claire watched as Erik brushed his thumb against golden stubble. The soft scrape, echoing in her ears, sounded three times as loud as it should. Her heart pounded hard against her breastbone as she watched Adam’s tongue dart out, brushing over his mouth. He leaned in slightly, swaying toward Erik’s magnetic pull as Erik smiled again and brought their lips together.

The kiss was gentle for only a moment. Adam melted forward even as Erik’s arms went around him, yanking him closer. Their lips parted together, tongues stroking out and tangling wetly. Claire could see the slick, hot battle play out between them as Erik thrust his tongue deep into Adam’s mouth and Adam bit at him sharply, struggling for dominance. Fingers fisted into black hair as palms rubbed possessively over red wool.

Erik turned his head, deepening the kiss further, fucking his tongue past Adam's wet, swollen lips.

Claire and Adam moaned together as Adam pressed forward, struggling for control of the embrace. His slim hips fit against Erik's, rubbing up with sharp, aching thrusts. They were wild, violent, and Claire bit at her lower lip as she slid her hands up her belly to cup her swollen breasts, thumbnails raking over the sensitive nubs as she watched the two men. Erik's fingers fisted in Adam's jacket, ripping at the closure. Golden buttons scattered across the floor with a sharp rata-tat-tat, like rain on a tin roof. Adam broke the kiss, panting, and dropped his head back as Erik bit down the column of his throat, thumbs hooking into the collar of his jacket and shoving it down.

The brief battle was decided.

Claire began moving back, pinching her nipples tight. Erik growled and turned Adam in his arms, making him face Claire. He reached around his broad chest to tear open his crisp, white shirt, revealing tanned skin and a golden trail of hair spanning down his belly. Claire reached behind her and turned one of the winged chairs flanking the fire. She sank back into it and spread her dark thighs, sliding one hand to her mouth to press two fingers inside. Adam's hips jerked, eyes wide as he watched her hungrily. She suckled her fingers, tongue laving between them, spit making them slick as she watched Erik slide his arms around the other man's hips, one hand moving to cup his erection.

Adam cried out, hips jerking forward as Erik rubbed his cock with his palm. Claire echoed Adam's moans, cries muffled by her fingers. She arched against the slick upholstery as she slid her fingers from her mouth, gasping in deep breaths. Erik's eyes were black rimmed in brilliant blue, his lips swollen and red as he began to flick open the buttons fastening Adam's breeches.

"Do you enjoy watching this?" he asked, voice heady and dark. Claire slid her wet hand down to her soaked pussy, fingers hooking deep into her body as she ground the heel of her palm against the dark nest of curls.

"I do," she gasped, thrusting deep. Her channel clenched around her fingers, milking them, and she lifted her other hand to tug at her nipples one after the other even as Erik popped open the last of Adam's buttons.

He nuzzled golden hair and Adam turned his face for a deep, wet kiss as Erik hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his breeches and tugged them down. Adam's cock sprang free, glistening with pre-come and flushed an angry red. "Touch him," Claire said, rubbing her thumb against her clit. They all hissed in a breath together as Erik reached around Adam to grasp his cock. Pale, broad fingers wrapped around his length and paused there, waiting.

"Erik," Adam murmured, breaking the kiss. Their lips were a breath away and glistened with spit. "Please."

Claire rolled her hips forward, sliding a third finger deep into her body. "Stroke him," she said. The sight of the two men kissing, touching, was hotter than anything she'd ever seen before. She felt close to orgasm, body humming sharply in anticipation. Claire shuddered lightly, feeling the tremors start to echo through her core and clamped her legs tight around her hand, forcing back orgasm. Not yet.

Not until she saw Adam come.

Erik's thumb brushed over the glistening head of Adam's cock, spreading pre-come over the tip before he shifted his grip and slid down the shaft. Adam arched and moaned, cock jerking in the other man's broad palm. He rocked his hips up hard and Erik slid his other arm over his chest, keeping him still. He stroked him again, sliding up before pulling down again, fingers twisting against his swollen flesh.

They were a picture of eroticism standing before Claire—Erik behind Adam, one arm crossed over his chest, the other around his hips as he jerked him off. Adam's breeches were caught in the high crests of his boots and his jacket and white shirt were open and half-shredded about his body. His face was flushed, mouth swollen and open on cries and moans as he twisted against Erik's grip, nearly breaking away. The way Erik cradled him suggested tenderness. The way his muscles tightened suggested

strength. The way his eyes glowed, darting between Adam and Claire, showed his growing desire. He rocked up against Adam's lower back and ass, grinding his erection demandingly even as his hand's strokes grew harder, rougher. Claire began to fuck her fingers deep into her body again, watching the wet slide of Erik's hand, watching the way Adam shuddered and pushed up into the ungentle strokes.

When he came, his back arched into an impossible bow and his head fell back against Erik's shoulder. Claire gasped, fingers jabbing against her clit and came moments after, breasts shaking as her entire body undulated. The ripples of her orgasm exploded out again and again, seeming to last for ages as Erik stroked Adam through his orgasm, eyes glued hungrily on her.

Finally Claire collapsed back into the chair. Adam fell into a boneless sprawl against Erik, head lolling to the side. Claire rested her own head against the backrest and licked her dry lips as Erik tenderly turned Adam in his arms and cupped his jaw. This kiss was soft and nearly sweet. Loving. Claire smiled, eyes going heavy-lidded, as she watched Erik bundle the other man into his arms and stroke his hair.

But it wasn't over.

"Adam," Erik murmured, drawing the other man's face up to look at him. Claire couldn't read their expressions, but she could practically feel the waves of heat radiating off Erik. Adam shivered, nodding. He shifted away to tug off his boots, kicking his pants aside. Erik began to undress himself, tossing his boots and unbuttoning his black military jacket.

"Wait," Adam said, dropping the last vestiges of clothing and moving into Erik's arms again. He glanced over at Claire, lips curved into a wicked smile. "Claire said she wanted us to undress one another. That was her condition."

Claire brushed her wet fingers over her stomach, smiling. "My very important condition," she agreed, shifting in the chair. She wanted to kiss them. She wanted to feel their hands on her.

That will come later, she promised herself. First, I want to see Erik's eyes when he comes.

Erik spread his arms wide in invitation, jacket half-opened, boots and socks off. Adam grinned and began working on silver buttons. He twisted one between thumb and forefinger, wrenching it off the jacket. "Turnabout's fair play," he said when Erik arched a brow. Adam dropped the button to the floor and Claire watched as it rolled against one of the many golden disks scattered across worn wood.

Adam made quick work of Erik's jacket, pushing it down his shoulders and arms, followed quickly by his shirt. His chest was broad and defined, skin milky pale. Claire wondered how she would look pressed against him, cocoa-dark in contrast. She licked her lips, feeling the resurgence of arousal as she pressed her legs together. Adam licked a wet path down Erik's chest, tonguing and biting his nipples even as his hands fumbled at the clasp of his dark pants. Erik drew in a sharp breath and rocked his hips forward. A large hand settled into Adam's hair as Adam knelt before him, tugging aside the flaps of material to finally release Erik's erection.

Erik's cock sprang from the restrictive material and Claire gasped quietly. Adam murmured approval, tugging dark breeches down muscular thighs. There was a strange blend of familiarity and awkwardness to his touch, as if he had done it many times in wishing but never in fact. He turned his face to rub his jaw against the erect shaft. Claire leaned forward, watching intently as Adam brushed his lips along Erik's erection. His tongue stroked out, brushing the sac and curling at the tip, hooking along the undercrease. Erik's cock jerked, spitting pre-come as he growled, strong fingers fisting in golden hair.

Claire's breath was coming quickly again, her breasts heaving as she watched Erik pull Adam back toward his bobbing cock. Adam laughed low under his breath and rubbed his lips over the slick, flat head, mouth opening wide as Erik guided his cock slowly, carefully down his throat.

There was nothing more erotic than the choked-off noises Adam made. Erik's face was twisted in need, his expression frightening in its intensity. Claire shifted, fighting against the renewed throbbing of her cunt. God, they looked so perfect together. She

imagined the three of them curled in a tangle of limbs and come. She could almost feel Erik's tongue dipping inside her pussy to lap at her clit as Adam sucked on her nipples one after the other. Heat flared through her body, escalating sharply when Erik moaned and rocked his hips forward. Adam's jaw was working, widening, and he swallowed noisily as he reached up to cup Erik's balls. He stroked them between his fingers as he took more of him into his mouth, head bobbing along the length of Erik's cock.

"Faster," Claire gasped, hand straying between her thighs again. "Harder." She jerked her fingers away quickly, moaning, and gripped the arms of the chair. She wanted rough, calloused hands on her. She wanted tongues and lips and teeth.

Adam made a low noise of agreement, cheeks hollowing as he suckled harder. Erik's hips moved in quick, jerky hitches as he thrust past eager lips, body trembling. Sweat broke over his brow, dampening his hair. A lock of black hair fell into his eyes and Claire wanted to brush it away, wanted to kiss his mouth as he panted and bucked up with sharp, needy thrusts.

"Adam," Erik warned, knuckles going white in Adam's long hair. Adam moaned encouragement, swallowing hard around him, jaws stretching to take more. Erik sobbed in a breath before he came with a shout. His hips surged forward, tremors shuddering through his body. Adam moaned, swallowing what he could before pulling his face away, one hand reaching up to stroke Erik through the aftershocks. His lips were swollen and wet, his tongue glistening as he sucked on Erik's hipbone, licking over the crease of his thigh and shivering.

Claire dug her nails into rich upholstery and drew in heavy, shuddery breaths. Erik's large hand stroked over soft hair before he tugged Adam to his feet, wrapping him in surprisingly gentle arms. When he looked up to meet Claire's eyes, heat shot through to her core. When he reached out a silent hand to her, she rose to her feet and stumbled forward, dark fingers curling around pale.

Erik drew her close, wrapping Claire in their warmth. She turned her face and caught Adam's mouth. He tasted salty-sweet.

"Ours," Adam said, voice husky. He slid an arm around her waist, drawing her between their bodies and Claire shivered in surprise when she felt renewing erections brush her slick thighs.

"Yes," she said, dropping her head back against Adam's shoulder and watching Erik with hooded eyes. He was studying her face intently. The look in his eyes made her shiver again and shift between them. "So," she said, reaching up to rub her palms over Erik's broad chest. Adam was kissing her shoulder, leaving hot, wet trails that sparked through her entire body. "What does it mean to belong to you?"

"It means we take care of you," Adam said warmly, hands sliding up her thighs.

"It means you stay with us always," Erik added, leaning in to kiss her jaw.

"It means you dance with the Company, every performance."

"Clara. Juliet. Gisella."

"It means —"

"It means," Erik interrupted smoothly, pressing forward. His rapidly hardening cock rubbed against Claire's belly, "that we're going to show you exactly what it means to belong to us."

Chapter Six



Claire shuddered and rocked forward, rubbing sinuously against his erection. “Will you?” she asked, voice low and husky. She lifted her chin, giving them both better access to her neck. Erik kissed one side while Adam sucked gently on the other. Each move of her hips, each shift of her body moved against their hard cocks. She hadn’t realized a man could grow hard again so soon. Adam’s hands tightened on her hips as he pushed forward, slick cock head rubbing against the curve of her ass.

“Yes,” Erik said, voice drawing out the s in a hiss. He bit at her earlobe, tugging it roughly between his teeth. His chest hair was coarse against her nipples, maddening. “Adam and I will take you one after the other. We’ll lay you out before the fire and kiss your heaving breasts, your slick thighs. We’ll lick our way into your body, then slide into you as you move above us, around us.”

She made a soft noise, eyes closing. Adam’s hands slid down her hips to the apex of her thighs, clever fingers dipping into the heated folds of her cunt.

“Tomorrow,” Erik continued, trailing kisses across her collarbone and down to the tight, chocolate peaks of her breasts, “we will introduce you to the Company and you will learn everything you need.”

Claire bit back a moan, melting back against Adam. The rough pads of his fingers brushed over her clit and labia as Erik’s lips closed around her left nipple, tongue swirling out to torment the tight bud. “God,” she gasped, twisting in strong arms. Sandwiched between them, there was no escape.

Not that Claire dreamed of escaping.

"How will I dance with you?" she managed, hips moving in a sharp, needy circle. Adam laughed quietly and took a step back, letting her collapse bonelessly against him. Erik's strong hands caught her thighs, mouth trailing from her painfully tight nipple as he lifted her between them. "I don't—" Claire cried out when Erik stepped between her spread thighs and rubbed his scalding, slick cock along her pussy. She was suspended between them, legs dangling, completely at their mercy. "I haven't danced in years."

Adam sucked on the sensitive skin between neck and shoulder, teeth lightly raking it as they began to move. Claire felt a flash of heat and thought for a moment that her body was literally combusting—but no, it was only the hearth fire. "You'll know," he murmured as they gently laid her down before the fire. There was a soft, white rug stretched out over the hearth. Claire rubbed back against it, undulating her hips and loving the hedonistic sensuality of it. She knew her skin was dark and rich against the white sheepskin, her body glistening. She spread her thighs as the two men knelt on either side of her and she reached up to tangle her fingers in their hair. "Once you are on the stage, you'll know the steps. Your body will follow the music as if you were born to it."

"You were born to it," Erik added, eyes glittering. He leaned in when she tugged on his black hair, hovering over her. Adam moved forward as well, obedient.

"Kiss," Claire said, voice a husky murmur. Adam lifted his face as Erik caught his mouth, tongue stroking gently past his lips to dip inside. Claire shivered and arched beneath them, watching the erotic play of lips and tongues and teeth as the kiss deepened. She dropped her hands from their hair, fingers trailing down their bodies to grasp their erections. Both men moaned, noises muffled in each other's mouths.

Claire rubbed her thumbs over their cock heads, nails lightly teasing the slits before she adjusted her grip and stroked down. She moved her hands in rhythm, stroking each cock in tandem, fingers tightening. Erik growled into the kiss and bit at Adam's mouth, tugging sharply at his lower lip before pulling away to look down at her. Their

expressions mirrored their twin desires, going darker as she stroked down to the base again, twisting slightly.

Adam was the first to lean in, catching her mouth in a brutal, hungry kiss. Erik slid out of her grasp with a low noise, hands moving down her belly as he shifted position. Gentle palms cupped her thighs, carefully urging them apart as Erik settled between her legs. Claire dug her heels into the sheepskin rug and arched her hips wantonly. She could feel the come dripping from her body, could feel the sharp throbs of her clit radiating in hot waves.

She nearly screamed when Erik's tongue brushed her clit. Adam swallowed her cries with an eager, open noise, tongue dipping further into her mouth. One large hand moved to cup her breast as Erik licked deep into her body again, tongue curling maddeningly and teasing at the hood. He used his fingers to spread her open and brushed his lips across her swollen flesh again and again. His teeth lightly raked her inner folds at the same moment Adam pinched one of her tortured nipples, twisting it gently.

"Please!" Claire sobbed, jolts of pleasure rushing through her. She felt as if she were on fire, as if she were flying apart like shattered glass, each fractured inch of her catching and reflecting the light. She nearly wrenched out of Erik's grasp when he pressed his pursed lips to her engorged clit and suckled on the throbbing flesh. Adam leaned down to take the peak of her right breast into his mouth, fingers rolling the taut nipple of the left in a slow, rhythmic tug.

Claire hung painfully close to orgasm, body racked with fine shudders, breath coming quick and hard. She moaned and twisted and pleaded, hypersensitized by mouths and hands and lips and tongues and teeth. When two of Erik's fingers speared into her body, she howled. When a third pressed in, spreading her wide, she rutted hard against his hand. The quick throb of her clit escalated, spiraling faster and faster as she undulated beneath the two men. She cried out for them, calling their names as she felt a blinding white heat flash through her body and explode out from her in endless

waves. Claire convulsed as she came hard, shuddering and jerking with the explosion. Her pussy spasmed, muscles clenching, and she sobbed in broken, aching breaths as orgasm seemed to go on and on, consuming her, leaving her empty and boneless and sprawled before the hearth fire. Her warm, dark skin was flushed and glistening with sweat and come.

And it wasn't over yet.

Erik kissed her thighs softly as Adam licked a trail up to her mouth. Erik's lips were wet from her come, gliding over her chocolate skin as he turned his face and gently nibbled her outer folds. Careful thumbs hooked inside her again and Claire whimpered, cunt sensitive.

"Shh," Adam murmured, kissing over her cheeks. His lips brushed her closed eyelids softly, tongue tracing the dark fan of her lashes. "Shh, love, it's all right."

"Love," she said, jerking again when Erik brushed a thumbnail over her clit. She cried out quietly, thighs spread wide as he drew a breath and blew cool air over the throbbing skin.

"Love," Erik echoed, lips brushing her inner folds. She could feel her body responding again. Her hips rode up as Adam shifted behind her, hands carefully cupping her shoulder blades.

"Erik," Claire said, caught somewhere between pain and need. "Adam," she whispered as he drew her up slowly. Her head lolled back for a moment, body boneless, but then Claire rocked forward and allowed herself to be pulled up, muscles tensing.

Erik crouched back on his heels, watching her. His erection stood out proudly, cock jerking hard between his muscular thighs. The head was slick and flushed an angry red. Pre-come was gathered at the tip, catching the light from the fire.

Adam nuzzled her shoulder as his hands moved to her waist, lifting her. "You're so beautiful," he said. Erik reached out to place his hands over Adam's, gazing past her

shoulder at the other man as they lifted her hips easily. Claire arched with the movement, trusting, and moaned as Adam seated her gently, firmly, on his erection.

Her abused body ached in complaint but she shifted to take him, hips nudging back as she opened around him. His shaft pushed past the inner folds of her cunt and slid down her soaked passage, filling her. Claire shivered and reached behind her, fingers cupping the back of his skull as she rocked against him, taking him deeper.

Adam's fingers tightened on her waist, nails cutting into her skin as he hissed. Erik's eyes were on her now, hot and demanding as his hands slid up and down her body. Adam's muscles tensed as he shifted, finding the perfect position, and tugged her up his shaft before letting her slide down again. Waves of pleasure broke through Claire at the movement and she found purchase on his lap, shuddering. When he lifted her again, she helped, body opening. She rocked back hard on his cock, driving him back with the movement.

Claire reached forward instinctively, hands leaving Adam to grip Erik's shoulders. She used him for leverage, gaze dropping between his eyes, his mouth and his swollen cock as Adam thrust into her open body. She gasped on each downstroke, feeling pleasure radiating through her, and shuddered when his cock rubbed against her clit. She was balanced on the knife point of almost-pain, listening to Adam's increasingly desperate cries with a half-smile. When he tightened and came within her, Claire gripped her body hard, trapping his cock deep inside her passage as she milked him. Adam cried out, nails leaving paler half-moons on her flesh as he jerked and spasmed and finally went still.

Claire drew a shuddery breath when he finally relaxed. Her pussy clenched around his cock and her clit still ached. She shivered, shifting, and welcomed Erik's arms when he drew her gently off the other man's softening cock. Claire could smell the mingled scent of come and sweat hanging heavily in the air. It made her shiver even as Erik's fingers parting her cunt made her moan. She moved onto her knees, straddling his hips, and allowed him to shift her body and draw her down onto his own erection.

She was filled again, body stretching to accommodate his size. She tilted her head back and moaned, breasts thrusting forward in invitation. Erik urged her into an exaggerated arch and took the peak of one breast in his mouth, teasing at the puckered nipple. It ached dully, ultrasensitive.

Erik remained still in her body for a few moments, allowing her to adjust. Then he began to thrust, using Adam's and her mingled come as lubrication. Her pussy clenched around him, her clit still aching from before. She moved in an elaborate counterthrust, head tossed back, body arched in his arms, hips moving hard and fast as he took her deeper, more forcefully. She moaned when Adam's hands slid up to help hold her steady and she reached back for him, grabbing his hand as she moved.

When Erik slid a hand between their bodies to brush his fingers over her clit, Claire came with a howl. She jolted in their arms, pussy clenching rhythmically around Erik's cock. Erik drew in a sobbing breath, fingers still jabbing at her tortured clit as he came. Hot come rushed through her body, filling her, making her moan and collapse forward in a boneless, aching sprawl.

Claire drew in hard, shallow breaths, face pressed against Erik's chest, eyes closed. Adam's hands soothed up and down her spine as she was slowly lifted and laid to rest on the warm sheepskin. She reached up, blindly seeking the two men and sighed in contentment when they settled around her, sandwiching her between them. Claire wrapped one arm around Adam's waist as she settled back into Erik's arms, body still jerking and shuddering with the aftereffects of orgasm.

They were silent for a long minute, breaths slowly evening out, bodies going heavy and languid. Finally Claire spoke, voice barely a whisper. "So, when do I start?" she murmured, lips curved into a slight smile.

"You already have," Erik said, cupping her breast gently before stroking her belly.

"Every moment is a performance," Adam yawned, nuzzling back against her.

"Every breath is a show," Erik echoed, voice drifting.

Claire sighed lightly, feeling the swelling in her chest. Happiness. She was happy.
“Sounds fair enough to me,” she said, settling between the two men.

Slowly, the three drifted off to sleep.

Epilogue



Claire woke slowly. Her entire body ached and she groaned as she stretched, feeling the languid pull of muscles. She was cold, gauzy dress riding up around her thighs, fake fire offering little warmth.

Wait.

She sat up with a start, looking around her. She was sitting on a sheepskin rug before a set fire, black hair a mess and cream-colored dress rucked around her body. Before her were the opened house curtains, the wide apron and the rows of empty seats.

“What the *hell*?” Claire said, quickly smoothing back her hair. Something clattered to the ground as she struggled to her feet and she looked down, frowning. Next to her high-heel clad foot was a toy Nutcracker, red coat gleaming under the house lights.

She frowned as she crouched to pick it up, fingers ghosting over the soft, feathery hair. She looked around the stage, disoriented, but there was no sign of her eager lovers. There was no sign that any of it had been real at all.

“No,” she said firmly, wrapping her arms around the Nutcracker and hugging it to her breast. Her body ached, her skin felt ultrasensitive and there was no way it had all been a dream. “No,” she said again, closing her eyes and wishing herself back to the warm drawing room.

Drifting around her was the scent of pine and an elusive, woodsy perfume.

The clock began to chime and Claire turned, startled. Five o'clock. The theater crew would be there soon. She looked longingly toward the upstage door. Her eyes scanned over the Christmas tree with its glittering lights. It had seemed so *real*.

"Clara," a soft voice called and Claire's head jerked up. Standing at the back of the auditorium, wearing khaki pants and a pale blue shirt, was Adam. His face broke into a wide smile at the sight of her.

"Are you coming?" Moving out of the shadows next to him, dressed impeccably in a tailored black suit, was Erik. He arched a sardonic brow, but his eyes were warm. Inviting.

Adam held out a hand for her.

Heart racing, Claire started toward them. She paused after three steps and looked down at the Nutcracker doll still clutched in her arms. His warm brown eyes stared up at her from a face of carved wood.

Carefully, tenderly, Claire laid the doll on the scuffed stage, fingers brushing its fine military jacket. Then, smiling broadly, she hurried down the stairs and along the red-carpeted aisle, past rows upon rows of theater seats to her two lovers and her new life in the Company.



About the Author

A lifelong friend of fantasy and romance, Katherine Cross enjoys stories with rich world histories and characters with a touch of the exotic. She has traveled to Egypt, Morocco, Spain and Italy (among others) and is constantly inspired by different cultures and ways of life. She considers the Appalachian Mountains her home and finds the rich fall colors the perfect spark for her imagination.

Katherine welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.



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