

MOCHA MONDAYS SEASON 2

SEASON 2—WHITNEY G. BLOG

WHITNEY G.

WHITNEY *G.*

NOTE: THIS IS NOT A NOVEL

(IT'S NOT A NOVELLA EITHER :-)

Dear Awesome Reader,

I wrote this serial for fun on my former blog some time ago.

This continuation was originally published as a series of blog posts on Mondays, so this *won't* read like a novel or novella, but each episode does pick up where the last one ended.

(You can access Season One here.)

Since I wrote this for fun and am compiling it in its original form, there may be a few typos I missed. If you see anything super glaring, please reach out to me via email at whitg-books@gmail.com and let me know so I can correct them on the blog.

Happy Reading,

Whit

P.S.—Thank you to the original F.L.Y. crew. I owe you everything.



EPISODE 1

CLAIRE

A few days after the envelope

“Do you, Claire Alicia Statham, take Jonathan Carter Statham to be your lawfully wedded husband? Do you promise to—”

I paused our wedding DVD, ignoring the tears that fell down my face. This was the third time I’d watched it today, and I knew that a fourth viewing was inevitable.

“Should I be worried about the SWAT team showing up to my house today?” Helen walked into the living room. “How far away do you think they are?”

“There’s no SWAT team looking for me, Helen...”

“Are you sure?” She handed me a glass of orange juice. “You haven’t been home in three days and your husband has just called me for the twentieth time today.”

“Did you answer?”

“Of course I answered him.” She scoffed. “He’s concerned.”

“He should be.”

“*What?*” She sat across from me. “Where is the Claire

who's over the moon in love with her psycho and over-the-top husband? What happened to her?"

I picked up my purse and pulled out the envelope from Gwyneth, tossing it to her. "She disappeared when she saw that."

She opened it and took her time reading it. The moment she finished, she rolled her eyes and tossed it back to me. "Go home, Claire."

"No, thank you," I said. I knew that Jonathan would probably be knocking on her door soon, but I didn't care. The second I read that letter, I left him an "I ran out for a minute, I'll be back" note.

I just didn't go back.

Helen stood up and sighed. "I'm sure there's an explanation. He loves you way too much for that to be true."

She said something else, something about believing that Jonathan was pretty much perfection on earth, but I tuned her out. I focused my attention on the black and silver tie that was dangling from her couch.

"I got Greg that same tie for Christmas this year." I strained to get a better look. "It was supposed to be custom made, or so I thought. Where did you buy it?"

"Nowhere." She shook her head. "It is Greg's tie."

Oh god... "You're sleeping with Jonathan's driver?"

"I prefer the term 'fucking' but yes, I am sleeping with him." She paused. "I think I like him, actually. He's definitely able to keep up with me in bed, and he has one hell of a mouth."

"You're ridiculous."

"No, I have *needs*." She smiled. "Don't start judging me."

"I never do. How long has this been going on?"

"A couple of weeks. Or, is it months? I've honestly lost track of time. Good sex does that to you, you know?"

I prepared to pepper her with more questions, but the doorbell sounded.

I didn't make a move to answer it. I relaxed against the pillows.

"Do you want me to answer it?" Helen asked.

"Do you have to?"

She gave me a blank stare, and the doorbell sounded again.

"Fine." I got up. "I'll get it."

I took my time walking to the front of her house—letting Jonathan ring the bell a few more times, before opening the door.

My eyes immediately went to his, and neither of us said a word.

He looked beyond worried—beyond concerned, but even in this moment, in nothing but lounge pants and a thin white shirt that clung to his muscles, he looked absolutely irresistible.

"*Claire...*" He wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me close, now looking angry as hell. "You haven't been home in four days."

"I'm aware."

"You haven't answered any of my fucking phone calls or text messages, and I've had to reach out to your best friend to make sure my own goddamn wife was okay."

"I'm aware of that, too."

He clenched his jaw. "You are fucking *married*, Claire. To *me*. Which means—"

"Which means that you're responsible for being the man I said my vows to."

"I have been, *Mrs. Statham*," he said, his voice tinged with rage. "The question I need answered right now though, is why are you treating me like I've done something to you? Why haven't you told me what's bothering you?"

"I'm the only one who deserves to be asking questions right now."

"After you answer mine." He narrowed his eyes. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Me? What the hell is wrong with you?" My voice cracked, and I stepped out of his reach. "What else are you hiding from me?"

"Excuse me?" He glared at me. "What did you just say?"

"Do I need to talk staccato like you to get my point across?" I felt my cheeks heating. "*What. Else. Are. You. Hiding. From. Me?*"

"*Nothing.*" He pressed his finger against my lips to silence me. "I have no idea what the hell you're talking about, Claire, but if you want to continue this ridiculous discussion, you'll need to come home with me. Now."

"Did you get Gwyneth pregnant when you two were together?" I couldn't hold back anymore. "Did you force her to give it up for adoption just so you could protect your image?"

"What the hell are you talking about, Claire?" He seethed. "Where is this coming from?"

I threw the papers at him. "*Read it.*"

"I'd rather not." He stepped closer, looking as if he was trying his hardest to stay in control. "But just so we can be on the same goddamn page, I've only gotten one woman pregnant. Period. She happens to be standing right in front of me."

"You were going to marry her, weren't you?"

"Out of friendship and an old pact we made, yes." He pulled me into his arms again, running his fingers through my hair. "But all bets were off when I found someone I actually fell in love with. How many times do I have to tell you this, Claire? Do I have to etch it onto my forehead so you can look up and see it as a reminder every day? There's nothing there."

"Jonathan, I just—"

“There’s *nothing* there.” He stared into my eyes, looking a little hurt. “Please don’t do this to us.”

“I’m not doing anything,” I said. “But I’ve changed my mind.”

“About what?”

“About wanting to know everything about Gwyneth. I want to know what she has on you that makes her think she still has a chance. I want to know everything.”

He sighed as he kissed my forehead. “Okay.”

“And I want you to read those papers she gave me so—”

“I’m not reading that shit,” he said, tightening his grip on me. “If the question you just asked me had anything to do with what’s on those papers, then they’re all full of shit...Are you going to come home with me now or do you plan on staying here for another month?”

“It hasn’t been a month.”

“It feels like it.” He walked me toward the town-car. “I need you to never leave me like that again...And I need you to trust that I don’t have feelings for anyone else.” He kissed my lips softly before opening the door. “No one else, Claire...I made you a fucking promise, and I meant every word of it.”

I nodded and slipped into the car, letting Jonathan pull me into his lap right after he got in. I avoided saying anything further as Greg pulled the car away, but I didn’t have to.

“I want to make you the happiest woman on earth,” Jonathan whispered into my ear. “I never want to hurt you, or see you cry, and I definitely don’t want to be the reason why you’re ever upset...I love you much more than you’ll ever know...If you had any idea how much I loved you...”

“I do...” I murmured as he kissed my neck.

“I’ll answer every question you have tonight, under two conditions.”

I turned my head around to face him. “What conditions are those?”

“One, is that we never have to have that conversation again.”

“Fine.” I tried to turn back around, but he held me still and claimed my lips.

“And two,” he whispered, sliding his hand under my shirt, “Is that you let me show you just how much I’ve missed you over the past few days...”

CLAIRE

Later that day

We were still in the town car, kissing recklessly—still exploring each other as if we were having sex for the very first time.

“Fuck, Claire...” Jonathan slid into me one last time, making me scream as I scratched my nails across his back.

“*Ahhhh.*” I shut my eyes as he kissed me again and again. And before I could completely relax, he pulled me up and repositioned me on the seat.

He sent Greg a quick text, and minutes later, the driver’s door shut, and we were moving again.

Breathless, I leaned against his shoulder, and his hand moved down to my stomach—softly caressing it.

“You know, we’re not going to be able to have sex so often when we become parents...” I smiled.

He rolled his eyes. “If you actually believe that, you don’t know the man you married at all.”

“Do you want boys or girls?”

“It doesn’t matter. What do you want?”

“One of each.”

“Hmmm.” He kissed my neck and continued rubbing my stomach.

I turned toward the window, watching the city pass us by. As we pulled onto an exit ramp, I spotted a CVS.

“Greg?” I pressed the intercom button. “Can we stop at CVS, please?”

“Of course, Mrs. Statham.”

Jonathan kissed my cheek as he steered the car over. “What do you need out of here?”

“Pickles.”

He smiled.

“And I’m still mad at you, so—” I kissed him as Greg opened the door. “I’m going alone.”

He narrowed his eyes at me, but he didn’t follow.

I walked inside and headed straight for the food aisle. As I passed by the chips, my phone vibrated. Jonathan.

“*Hurry up. :-)*”

I smiled and put my phone away, grabbing a jar of pickles from the bottom shelf.

“Well, well, well...” a familiar deep voice said. “Never thought I’d see you again.”

I immediately looked up, finding myself face to face with Damien Edwards.

“It’s been a long time since you humiliated me on that stage and ran off with Jonathan...” He smirked. “How’s the married life?”

“None of your business.” I started to walk away, but he grabbed my elbow.

“He’s not who you think he is, you know...”

“Are you the one who left that note on my napkin at dinner?”

“And if I was?”

“Then you should grow the hell up.”

“Or maybe I should tell you what you don’t know.”

“I’m not interested.” My phone vibrated. Jonathan, *again*.

Two minutes... his text said.

“Come on, Claire.” Damien smirked. “I see the intrigue in your eyes.”

“It’s not intrigue. It’s annoyance.”

“I only need two minutes....Just give me that.”

*****End of Episode 1*****



EPISODE 2

CLAIRE

“What part of ‘I’m not interested’ don’t you understand, Damien?” I took another step back. “From what I remember, you’re highly intelligent, so I wouldn’t think you need me to spell it out for you, but I can, if you want.”

“Still witty as ever, huh?” He smiled. “Are those the type of jokes you tell Jonathan at all the affairs he takes you to? You’re always smiling in the pictures the press takes.”

I raised my eyebrow.

“What?” he asked. “It’s not like your marriage to him is a secret. And it’s not like he doesn’t say your name at every conference he goes to.”

“I really don’t have time for you right now.”

“Of course, you do.” He stepped closer, gently placing his hand on my shoulder. “I’m actually quite concerned about my former protégé. And you, too, Claire. I still think you have no idea—”

“Get your fucking hand off my wife.” Jonathan’s deep voice broke our conversation short.

“See?” Damien smirked, backing away with his hands up in a playful surrender. “Good to know you haven’t changed a bit.”

“Do you have a death wish, Damien?” Jonathan slipped a protective arm around my waist. “Would you like me to fulfill it?”

“I was just saying hello to Claire.” A smile was still on his lips. “I was just telling her that it’s been a long time since the Juniper Conference, and she may be interested in knowing what I and a select few people really know about you.”

I glanced up at Jonathan and he looked completely unfazed.

“Is that a yes or a no to the death wish?” he asked again. “I can make the phone call right now.”

“You’d have me murdered for touching your wife’s shoulder?” Damien laughed. “Are you being serious right now?” He put a hand on his chest, still laughing, but he quickly stopped once he saw the dead serious look on Jonathan’s face.

“I’ll take that as a no,” Jonathan said in a low voice. “And if I were you, and you want to keep it that way...” He didn’t finish his sentence. He simply pulled me closer to his side and walked me down the aisle and to the register.

“Here.” He placed a fifty on the counter for the cashier and escorted me back to the town car.

I expected him to glare at me and ask why I didn’t immediately text him about Damien, but he didn’t. Instead, he pulled me into his lap and kissed me, running his fingers through my hair the entire ride home.

JONATHAN

“So...” I handed Claire a glass of orange juice. “Are you going to ever ask me the questions you want answered about Gwyneth?”

“Right...” She took a slow sip and nodded, looking into my eyes.

Since we’d arrived home, it seemed as if she’d been avoiding this moment: She’d asked me to make her dinner, insisted that we take a bath together, and now she was sitting next to me on the couch—on the verge of asking if I wanted to watch our wedding for the umpteenth time.

I wasn’t having it.

“Claire?” I narrowed my eyes at her. “Are you going to ask me the questions? Or, do I have to deal with you leaving me again because you’d rather not?”

“There were emails from her to you...” she said. “And from you to her...*After* we were married, Jonathan...”

“I haven’t emailed her in years.”

“It was from your personal email address...” A tear fell

down her cheeks. “The one that only me and a few other people have...Or so I thought.”

“*Claire...*”

“She asked if you were still waiting for her, if you still loved her and you said yes.” More tears fell.

“You said yes...And I’m not sure if someone is playing one twisted game on us, but the very thought of you not being faithful to me—”

I kissed her, preventing her from ever finishing that sentence. “I love you too much to hurt you, Claire...I haven’t promised anything since I met you.”

“She said that—”

I pressed my finger against her lips. “I’ll have Corey look into the emails. I promise that I never said any of those things. I fucking promise, Claire.”

She looked at me, still teary-eyed. “She said there was a video of you two together...That ‘your wife’ would understand how temporary our marriage is, if I saw it.”

I sighed and grabbed my tablet from the coffee table. “I think she holds this in higher regard than I ever did...” I logged into my years-old archives and filtered through the last email exchange Gwyneth and I had. It was literally days before I met Claire.

“You want me to watch it?” She looked down at the screen.

“Yes,” I said. “So you can see how insignificant she is to me.” I pressed play and she leaned on my shoulder, watching as a much younger Gwyneth and I stood in Central Park amidst fireworks.

With wine glasses in our hands and the most recent Wall Street Journal stuffed into our pockets, we danced under the flashing sky.

“I was serious about our promise, Jonathan...” She said as she looked into my eyes. “You’ll marry me when I come back

from my startup overseas, if neither of us have found other people.”

“I doubt I’ll find someone else...”

“And you really do love me, right?”

I kissed her. “I do. Always have.”

“Always will?”

“That’s implied.” I kissed her again. “I’ll wait for you.”

“Wait...” she said, pausing. “On the rare occasion that you do find someone else. Like if you’re casually dating or even if you think it has the potential to get serious someday, will you let her go for me? Immediately? As soon as I come back?”

“I will.”

“You promise?” She looked hopeful. “Even if you get tired of waiting for me and somehow propose to her first?”

“I promise, Gwyneth. I promise...”

And with that, we kissed underneath bursts of fireworks.

I stopped the video and looked at Claire. “This was all before I met you, before I fell for you.” I pulled her into my lap and trailed my fingers against her lips. “I should’ve never made that promise to her, and I’m not sure where the emails you’ve seen have come from, but I’m in love with you and only you...”

She nodded and briefly shut her eyes as I kissed her lips.

“Are there any other questions?”

“Yes,” she said. “But I need time to think of them.”

I rolled my eyes and gently lifted her from my lap, leading her into the kitchen. “Dessert?”

“Yes.” She took a seat on a barstool. “Actually, I need to ask you a question about something else.”

“Anything.”

“Why do you have a closed settlement with Ryan? I got an email about it weeks ago and I can’t find it for the life of me. What’s that about?”

“I’ll answer anything but *that*.”

“Jonathan—”

“Claire,” I said, setting a slice of cake in front of her. “I can’t talk about that with you. Ever. But trust me, everything I’ve done is for your own benefit.”

“I’m not a child.”

“I’m aware.” I sat next to her and felt my phone buzzing. A text.

Corey: ***Come to the office now. It’s important.***

“Corey?” Claire stuffed some of the cake into her mouth.

“Of course. He wants me to come to the office for a second. Would you like to come with me?”

“I’d love to.”

Corey: ***DO NOT BRING CLAIRE.***

*****End of Episode Two*****



EPISODE 3

CLAIRE

I stepped onto a private elevator at Statham Industries, smiling as Jonathan pulled me close.

“Do you think this is really important or another conspiracy theory he wants to tell you about?” I asked.

He smiled. “Probably both. You interested in coming back here to work for me?”

“Never.”

“You sure? We don’t do Zen sessions anymore...”

“That’s still not enough to make me come back.”

“What about the free Starbucks cafes I installed just for you?” He kissed my hair. “They’re going to waste, now that you’re not here.”

“From what I’ve heard from my old co-workers, I know that’s not true. Everyone loves them, and they actually think it was their *brilliant CEO’s* idea...” I shut my eyes as he leaned closer for a kiss, but the elevator doors suddenly opened.

Red faced and teary-eyed, Hayley stormed in—frantically pressing the down buttons.

“We’re going up,” Jonathan said, startling her.

“Oh, I didn’t...” She wiped her face. “I’m a little out of it and didn’t even see you two... I’m sorry.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” He dropped his hand from around me and stepped in front of her.

“Why are you crying?”

“I’m just having a bad day.” She forced a smile. “That’s all. How are you two? Still excited about the babies? I know I am...I love babies. Can’t wait to meet—”

“Stop bullshitting me, Hayley.” He clenched his jaw as the elevator stopped at the top floor. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

She shook her head and glanced over at me, giving me that “Please...I can’t talk to him about this...” look I’d learned to easily read.

“You know what?” I stepped between them and kissed Jonathan on the cheek. “How about you go talk to Corey, and me and Hayley will go down to one of the free Starbucks. Can I have your key?”

Without taking his eyes off Hayley, he handed me an access card and slowly backed off the elevator.

“I’ll be down in twenty...” he said before the doors closed.

“Hayley?” I hit the down button. “You know your brother is going to ask what’s wrong, so why don’t we—”

“Corey is an asshole.” She hissed, fresh tears falling down her face. “He is a fucking asshole.”

Okay... I waited for her to finish.

“I cannot believe I ever liked him,” she said. “He’s such a fucking—” She stopped herself and looked at my stomach. “Can they hear cursing? Do they know what it is?”

“I doubt they know any words--let alone curse words, Hayley.” I smiled.

“Good.” She looked at my stomach again and stepped closer; she was definitely out of it. “I want you both to know

before you get here, that your *Uncle Corey* is a douchebag, and if your mom lets me, I'll be teaching you to call him Uncle Asshole whenever you see him."

"Okay..." I pushed her forward as the doors opened at Starbucks. "Why don't you take a seat and I'll make us some coffee, and you can tell me what's going on. Okay?"

She pulled me close for a hug instead. And then she began to cry. "I should've never fallen in love with him, Claire...I should've never...I really wish I could take it all back..."

JONATHAN

“Any particular reason why I just saw my sister in tears?” I stepped into Corey’s office. “You want to explain that to me?”

“She’s still here?” He stood up from his desk. “What floor was she on?”

“That doesn’t matter. Why was she crying?”

He said nothing, and to prevent myself from punching him, I stepped back.

“Why did you call me here, Corey? What’s going on?”

“It’s...It’s actually about Hayley.”

“*What?*”

“Hayley. You know? The woman you were just talking about? The woman that happens to be your little sister?”

I crossed my arms. “You called me in the middle of the night for a therapy session?”

“I used to talk to you about Claire...”

“Claire is not your *sister*, Corey,” I shook my head. “It’s not the same thing. And—regardless of me being more accepting of whatever the hell it is that the two of you have together, my promise to hurt you, if you ever hurt her, still stands.”

“It’s not like that...” He handed me a folder and sighed, smartly changing the subject. “But in other news, I’m not sure what you did to rattle Damien Edwards again, but he hates you even more now. He’s been hacking into our mainframe for weeks.”

“And you’ve just been letting him?”

“Yeah. Just to see what he’s taking: very basic things, stuff he could’ve easily gotten off the Statham website.”

“And you didn’t want me bringing Claire because?”

“Because need I remind you that Claire hired a private eye to get information on you weeks ago....Do you not recall that or are you so blindly in love that—”

“Get to the point, Corey.”

“She just wants to know what’s in your settlement with Ryan.”

“And with her investigator, are there any chances of her finding out?”

“No.”

“Good,” I said. “And, thank you again for this conversation we could’ve had over the phone...Or were you going to suggest that I sleepover in your office tonight as well?”

He rolled his eyes. “You also need to talk to Gwyneth face to face.”

“I have. We’re over. She should get the point by now.”

“She doesn’t.” He opened a drawer and pulled out a sheet of paper. “She forwarded this to my office today, assuming I would read it. She wants to go public.”

“About *what*?”

“Did you hear me say the word *assuming*?” He scoffed. “I didn’t read it. I’ve been too busy—”

“Making my sister cry?” I cut him off, raising my eyebrow.

“So, I *can* talk about it with you, or I *can’t*?”

“Can’t,” I said. “But only because I can’t guarantee that I

won't kill you once you get done explaining.”

“Fair enough...” He sighed as he handed the paper to me. “Let me know what you want to do about it after you read it. And if we need our PR department to handle it...” His voice trailed off and he looked genuinely hurt, like he needed someone to listen, but I couldn't talk about Hayley with him.

I just couldn't.

“Thank you, Corey. I'll call you right after I read it.” I stepped onto the elevator and headed down to Starbucks—finding Claire and Hayley laughing together.

“Everything okay?” I asked, sitting next to Claire.

“Yes,” Hayley said. “I'm much better now...Claire has a way with words.”

“Does she?”

Hayley nodded, standing up. “She does...I can now see why she runs your every move.”

I narrowed my eyes at her, prepared to make a point, but Claire placed a kiss on my cheek before the words could come out.

“We'll see you at dinner tomorrow, Hayley.” Claire smiled. “Greg is outside waiting for you...”

She quickly rushed to the elevators and I pulled Claire into my lap.

“What was wrong with her?”

“I'm not allowed to tell you.”

“*Excuse me?*” I said.

“She made me promise not to tell you. She thinks you'll lose your mind if you know.”

“Bullshit, Claire. Tell me. *Right now.*”

“And if I don't?”

“*You will.*” I bit her bottom lip. “Tell me.”

“Only if you tell me what *your* meeting was about...”

“Fine,” I said. “It was about Damien attempting to get

information from our mainframe, and about my wife hiring a private investigator to get information on something I've done."

Her cheeks turned bright red and she sucked in a short breath. "Jonathan...Let me explain...I—"

"Stop." I kissed her lips. "I just need you to trust me on the arranged settlement, Claire...I did the right thing and I need you to believe that...And I need you to accept that I'm not hiding anything from you...And for the umpteenth time, I'm not going to hurt you. *Ever.*"

She nodded and pressed her forehead against mine.

"Now," I said. "What was wrong with Hayley?"

"I don't think so." She smiled and eased her way out of my lap. "A promise is a promise."

"*Claire...*"

Her smile widened, and she stepped back behind the bar. "Would you like some coffee to take home with us?"

"Claire, don't make me—"

"Make you *what?*" She smirked and started taking out coffee beans, giving me a look that still drove me insane.

I stood up and walked over, but the paper Corey had handed me fell onto the floor. I started to fold it and put it away, but certain words caught my eye.

Transfixed, I read each and every word—seething at the end of every sentence.

"Jonathan?" Claire asked. "Jonathan, what's wrong? What happened? Why are you looking like that? *Jonathan?*"

I pulled out my phone and immediately called Corey.

"Yeah?" he answered. "Did you want me to tell the PR department to handle it? I can send them the email now since I'm leaving."

"No." I gritted my teeth. "I'll be handling this shit *personally.* Tonight."

*****End of Episode 3*****



EPISODE 4

CLAIRE

“Jonathan?” I walked over to him, wondering why he was suddenly upset. “Are you going to say something to me?”

He ignored me and dialed a number on his phone. “Greg? Where are you?” He paused. “No, not for me...I need you to come back ASAP and take Mrs. Statham home. *Now.*”

“How about *asking* Mrs. Statham if she’s ready to go home?” I raised my eyebrow as he ended the call. “I’m not going anywhere until you tell me what’s wrong with you.”

“*Claire...*” He gave me that ‘not-right-now’ look, but I wasn’t backing down.

“Just tell me. How bad could it possibly be?”

“It’s Gwyneth.”

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. “What about *Gwyneth*?”

“Nothing you should worry about,” he said. “I’ll handle it.”

“No.” I shook my head. “I want to know. And regardless of how many times you give me that look, I’m not going anywhere until—“

“She’s lost her fucking mind.” He cut me off. “And contrary to what my wife thinks, I’m going to put an end to it—*alone*.”

I closed the gap between us, ready to tell him that definitely wasn’t happening, but his phone rang.

“Yes?” he answered it.

“Turn on the fucking TV right now.” Corey’s voice was so loud I could hear him. “Channel five.”

“I’m talking to Claire right now,” he said, looking at me. “I don’t have time to—”

“Right. Fucking. Now.” He hung up and Jonathan rolled his eyes, strolling over to one of the coffee carts. He picked up the remote and turned on the widescreen that hung over the cafe tables.

He turned the TV to channel five and walked back over to me, pulling me against his side. “I don’t want to fight with you, Claire.”

“I don’t want to fight with you either, I just—” My words stopped mid-air as my eyes settled on the TV screen before us.

In an all white dress, Gwyneth sat at a table with San Francisco’s leading late night reporter, Heather Turner. Smiling as the credits rolled, she looked directly into the camera as the headline appeared at the bottom of the screen: “Former Girlfriend of Statham Industries CEO Tells All.”

I felt Jonathan’s holding me even tighter, felt his fingers gently pressing into my skin.

“Good evening, San Francisco...” Miss Turner’s voice was calm and soothing as always. “Tonight we have a special guest on our show. As you know, I’ve been reporting on high profile divorces and splits once a month per my special segment, but it was brought to my attention that my reporting wasn’t as unbiased as it could be.”

Gwyneth smiled into the camera.

“I realized that I needed to go deeper, to find out what

drives some of these splits, as its about much more than the outcome and which spouse receives what. Which brings me to my guest, Gwyneth White.”

“It’s an honor to be here, Heather.”

“It’s a pleasure to have you.” She picked up a notecard. “Gwyneth White is the former President and CEO of the multi-million dollar start-up firm, Gigi’s, which is now—“

“*Defunct.*” Gwyneth cut her off. “Thanks to *Jonathan Statham...*”

“Um...We’ll get to that in just a minute, okay?” Amanda handed her a box of Kleenex for the fake ass tear that was now rolling down her face.

My heart started to race, and a part of me wished that I would’ve gone home so I wouldn’t have to watch what I knew was about to be bullshit.

“Let’s start with the demise of your relationship with Jonathan Statham,” Heather said. “You said that you two were engaged and you went overseas, only to come back and find out that he was married to someone else?”

“Yes,” she said, dabbing a dry eye. “We weren’t technically engaged, but we’d had a long relationship and he promised to wait for me.”

“And he kept in contact with you every day that you were gone?”

“Not every day because I had limited internet access...But almost every day, yes.”

I noticed Jonathan clenching his jaw out the corner of my eye.

“And we have some of those emails, some of them from months before he was married...” A few emails appeared onscreen—the same ones I’d seen before leaving for Helen’s house.

I looked up at Jonathan for an explanation, but I saw him

texting Corey: **I need you to get to the bottom of this fucking email shit before midnight...**

“So, you were in quite a shock to come back all these months later and see that he was married? To a former employee?”

“Yes.” She rolled her eyes. “A former employee...with kids who were nearly his own age.”

Heather laughed. “That’s a bit of an exaggeration there, don’t you think? They were twin teenagers in high school.”

A picture of the four of us on Jonathan’s yacht last year appeared onscreen, and if I hadn’t been so angry in the moment, I would’ve smiled at how happy we all looked.

“Before we delve deeper into what really brought you here tonight, Miss White..Why do you think he didn’t at least tell you he was dating someone else before completely moving on? Why do you think he led you on?”

“I have no idea...I guess I wasn’t old enough for him! He clearly has a thing for much older women, and maybe I never was good enough in that regard...I can’t magically give myself eleven years, you know?”

Gwyneth laughed, and I was pretty sure my blood was reaching a record boiling point.

“And you said you think he’s the reason why your start-up company is now defunct?” Miss Turner put on her reading glasses. “Can you explain that?”

“Jonathan Statham is hell bent on getting whatever the hell he wants...Just ask his wife’s ex husband. While I was searching through—” She cleared her throat. “While I was tracking how my firm could suddenly go belly-up overnight, how my investors were slowly backing away days after they’d agreed to pledge more money, I found out that I wasn’t the only one he was pushing around...If he thinks you possess the slightest bit of a threat to his beloved *Claire*...” She was actually tearing up

right now and those tears looked somewhat believable. “He ruins everything you’ve ever touched...You’ll be lucky if you get a job as a janitor when he’s done with you...”

“And what about...” Miss Turner stopped as Gwyneth stood up, as she turned away from the camera and asked for a minute alone. “We’ll be right back ladies and gentlemen. Stay tuned for more Live with Heather Turner. We have a full hour with you tonight...”

The cameras faded to black, and a kitten commercial quickly appeared onscreen.

“Are you here now Greg?” Jonathan was already on his phone. “No...I’m coming with Claire. We need to get somewhere within the next ten minutes.”

END OF EPISODE 4



EPISODE 5

CLAIRE

"Jonathan?" I walked over to him, wondering why he was suddenly upset. "Are you going to say something to me?"

He ignored me and dialed a number on his phone. "Greg? Where are you?" He paused. "No, not for me...I need you to come back ASAP and take Mrs. Statham home. *Now.*"

"How about *asking* Mrs. Statham if she's ready to go home?" I raised my eyebrow as he ended the call. "I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what's wrong with you..."

"*Claire...*" He gave me that 'not-right-now' look, but I wasn't backing down.

"Just tell me. How bad could it possibly be?"

"It's Gwyneth."

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. "What about *Gwyneth?*"

"Nothing you should worry about," he said. "I'll handle it."

"No." I shook my head. "I want to know. And regardless of how many times you give me that look, I'm not going anywhere until--"

"She's lost her fucking mind." He cut me off. "And contrary to what my wife thinks, I'm going to put an end to it--*alone*."

I closed the gap between us, ready to tell him that definitely wasn't happening, but his phone rang.

"Yes?" he answered it.

"Turn on the fucking TV right now." Corey's voice was so loud, I could hear him. "Channel Five."

"I'm talking to Claire right now," he said, looking at me. "I don't have time to--"

"Right. Fucking. Now." He hung up and Jonathan rolled his eyes, strolling over to one of the coffee carts. He picked up the remote and turned on the widescreen that hung over the cafe tables.

He tuned the TV to Channel Five and walked back over to me, pulling me against his side. "I don't want to fight with you, Claire."

"I don't want to fight with you either, I just--" My words stopped mid-air as my eyes settled on the TV screen before us.

In an all white dress, Gwyneth sat at a table with San Francisco's leading late night reporter, Heather Turner. Smiling as the credits rolled, she looked directly into the camera as the headline appeared at the bottom of the screen: "Former Girlfriend of Statham Industries' CEO Tells All."

I felt Jonathan's holding me even tighter, felt his fingers gently pressing into my skin.

"Good evening, San Francisco..." Miss Turner's voice was calm and soothing as always. "Tonight we have a special guest on our show. As you know, I've been reporting on high profile divorces and splits once a month per my special segment, but it was brought to my attention that my reporting wasn't as unbiased as it could be."

Gwyneth smiled into the camera.

"I realized that I needed to go deeper, to find out what

drives some of these splits, as it's about much more than the outcome and which spouse receives what. Which brings me to my guest, Gwyneth White."

"It's an honor to be here, Heather."

"It's a pleasure to have you." She picked up a notecard. "Gwyneth White is the former President and CEO of the multi-million dollar start-up firm, Gigi's, which is now--"

"*Defunct.*" Gwyneth cut her off. "Thanks to *Jonathan Statham...*"

"Um...We'll get to that in just a minute, okay?" Amanda handed her a box of Kleenex for the fake ass tear that was now rolling down her face.

I felt my heartbeat pick up speed, and a part of me wished that I would've gone home so I wouldn't have to watch what I knew was about to be bullshit.

"Let's start with the demise of your relationship with Jonathan Statham," Heather said. "You said that you two were engaged and you went overseas, only to come back and find out that he was married to someone else?"

"Yes," she said, dabbing a dry eye. "We weren't technically engaged, but we'd had a long relationship and he'd promised to wait for me."

"And he kept in contact with you every day that you were gone?"

"Not every day because I had limited internet access...But almost every day, yes."

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A picture of the four of us on Jonathan's yacht last year appeared onscreen, and if I hadn't been so angry in the moment, I would've smiled at how happy we all looked.

"Before we delve deeper into what really brought you here tonight, Miss White...Why do you think he didn't at least tell you he was dating someone else before completely moving on? Why do you think he led you on?"

"I have no idea...I guess I wasn't old enough for him! He clearly has a thing for much older women, and maybe I never was good enough in that regard...I can't magically give myself eleven years, you know?"

Gwyneth laughed, and I was pretty sure my blood was reaching a record boiling point.

"And you said you think he's the reason why your start-up company is now defunct?" Miss Turner put on her reading glasses. "Can you explain that?"

"Jonathan Statham is hell bent on getting whatever the hell he wants...Just ask his wife's ex-husband. While I was searching through-" She cleared her throat. "While I was tracking how my firm could suddenly go belly-up overnight, how my investors were slowly backing away days after they'd agreed to pledge more money, I found out that I wasn't the only one he was pushing around...If he thinks you pose the slightest bit of a threat to his beloved *Claire*..." She was actually tearing up right

now and those tears looked somewhat believable. "He ruins everything you've ever touched...You'll be lucky if you get a job as a janitor, when he's done with you..."

"And what about..." Miss Turner stopped as Gwyneth stood up, as she turned away from the camera and asked for a minute alone. "We'll be right back, ladies and gentlemen. Stay tuned for more Live with Heather Turner. We have a full hour with you tonight..."

The cameras faded to black, and a kitten commercial quickly appeared onscreen.

"Are you here now, Greg?" Jonathan was already on his phone. "No...I'm coming with Claire. We need to get somewhere within the next ten minutes."

CLAIRE

I sat in the back of the town car with Jonathan, leaning against him as he ran his fingers through my hair.

We were on our way to the news station, listening to the second segment of Gwyneth's interview on the radio.

"Before we go to our second commercial break..." Miss Turner took a deep breath. "I'd like for you to explain why you think that Mr. Statham, a billionaire CEO with a busy schedule, I'm sure, would have any interest in ruining your start-up company. And, if you can, could you also tell us what emails from him led you to believe that you two were definitely in a committed relationship?"

"Whose side are you on here?" Gwyneth snapped. "Seriously?"

"I'm not on anyone's side, Miss White. I'm trying to be as unbiased as possible."

"I was in love with him and he was in love with me. He cheated and married someone else. That's the crux of the story."

Jonathan tensed and pulled me into his lap.

"Miss White, I'm trying to give you a chance to tell your

side of the story in an uncut manner." Her voice was firm. "This is live. No one here is editing your words, and none of my producers have asked you to steer clear of any particular stories, have they?"

"No...They haven't."

"Okay, then." She cleared her throat. "Could you answer my initial questions about Mr. Statham ruining your start-up and the emails between you two while you were overseas?"

"Yes, well..." She paused. "When I came home and found out he was married, I tried meeting with him to talk about it--tried to get his attention, but he blew me off and told me to go away. It was as if what we had meant nothing, as if all his emails of "Yes...I'll be there...Take your time, Gwen...I'm still yours." had never happened. I did my research and found out he'd sent me one of them while he was on his honeymoon with *her*..."

She sniffled. "And after trying to talk to him a few more times, my company started to fall apart the same week...That's no coincidence. It's also no coincidence that no investors would hold meetings with me, and that the best job I could get was at a fucking--"

"No cursing, Miss White."

"Right..." she said. "The best job I could get was at a nursery designing firm...He did that to me...And I still don't understand how he could just toss me away like that...I mean, I can handle rejection and he could've just broke up with me, but why trade down? Why go from me to that? She's not even that attractive, you know? And the man I knew never wanted anything to do with a family...She definitely has something on him..."

"Isn't that speculation, Miss White?"

She didn't answer. "Can we take that commercial break now?"

"Of course...Ladies and gentlemen, we'll be right back for the rest of the interview."

Just as a commercial began, Greg pulled the car past the gate at the studio and I slid out of Jonathan's lap.

We walked into the small space hand in hand, and a receptionist stopped us before we could go any further.

"Do you two have an appointment today?" she asked.

"We don't need one." Jonathan rolled his eyes. "Where is Miss Turner currently filming her joke of a show?"

"None of your business." She snapped. "You can take a seat over there and you can wait for me to--"

He led me through a set of double doors before the woman could complete her sentence. Ahead of us was another receptionist and doors to several studios.

"Good afternoon," she said. "How may I help you?"

"I can't wait any longer..." I let go of Jonathan's hand. "Can you tell me where the restrooms are, please?"

"To your left, Miss..." She kept her eyes on Jonathan and blushed. "And how may I help you, sir?"

"We'll discuss it when *my wife* gets back."

"Of course." She forced a smile and returned to her work.

I opened the door to the restroom, trying not to let Gwyneth's silly interview under my skin again.

"Look at the emails, Miss Turner...He emailed me while they were on their honeymoon...He emailed me every month, letting me know he'd still wait...I have proof...They're all right here...All from his personal email account...So, unless someone else was emailing me--"

I stopped dead in my tracks as a memory suddenly hit me. And I cursed at myself for not remembering it until just now...

CLAIRE

A couple years ago...

I took the elevator to Jonathan's office, ignoring the butterflies in my stomach. I was still having a hard time processing what I felt for him, accepting that what we had could be anything more than a temporary fling.

Stop thinking about it....Stop thinking about it...

"Good afternoon, Miss Gracen." His secretary, Angela, greeted me as I stepped onto the floor.

"Good afternoon, Angela." I smiled. "Is Mr. Statham available?"

"His meeting is almost over, but I'm sure he'll want to know that you're here."

"No, that's okay." I walked over to a sofa and took a seat. "I can wait. It's not that important..."

She pulled a silver gift-bag from her desk and walked over, handing it to me. "I was actually on my way to deliver this to your office."

"More flowers?"

"Shockingly, no." She laughed. "But wait until you see tomorrow's assortment."

Blushing, I peered inside the bag and saw a bottle of my favorite wine with a note around its stem: "I need to see you tonight...—Jonathan."

I looked up and noticed Angela staring at me—tilting her head to the side.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"No, just wondering...How long have you been dating Mr. Statham?"

"We're not dating...We're just friends."

She rolled her eyes, smiling. "Well, I've never seen him behave the way he does with you with any of his other *friends*."

"Are you insinuating something?"

"No." She shook her head. "But I do want you to know that he is one of the most amazing people I've ever worked for, and I'm very protective of him, even though I'm just a secretary...And I know you two have only known each other for a few weeks but... If you ever hurt him..." Her voice trailed off as a group of men and suits suddenly walked out of the conference room.

"I won't hurt him, Angela." I gave her my most sincere look. "I like him too much."

As if that was good enough, she returned to her desk.

"Mr. Statham?" She picked up her phone. "Miss Gracen is here to see you." She motioned for me to go right in. "Sir, I also need to ask you something important...About a woman you used to date...Miss White?" She lowered her voice as I passed her. "Right, well...she still emails you so—" She sighed. "Right...I will just copy and paste your old responses whenever she pops up and archive them...Yes, sir, Miss Gracen did receive your gift as well...Have a great afternoon..."

I held my hands under the sink's cool water, still scolding myself for not seeing this before, for not realizing my interpretation of everything had been a major mistake.

There was no way Jonathan continued emailing her after marrying me--especially not on our honeymoon; we barely took our hands off one another the entire trip. We barely left our room...

And even when we did briefly use our phones for short calls and emails, he always held his in plain view, and as a habit, he read his messages aloud to himself.

Letting out a sigh of relief, I leaned over the sink--hoping my morning sickness wasn't about to make an appearance.

I waited a few seconds, and heard someone walking in behind me.

"Oh, he'll definitely see it." The raspy voice said. "And hopefully his hag of a wife will, too...Do you think my tears seemed real enough? The first set were fake, but when I was talking about my company...Those were real..."

There was a locking sound, and I turned around swiftly--realizing that Gwyneth was now behind one of the stalls.

"Oh!" she said, clearing her throat. "The baby thing wasn't true, but it was a nice touch, don't you think? I'm pretty sure his dumbass wife believed me when I gave her all those papers. I figure since the emails were real and undeniable, what's the harm in pushing it a little further?"

Her laughter echoed through the empty room and I leaned against the sink, trying my best not to storm her stall and take her down.

"I wouldn't take Jonathan back unless he grovels like he should..." she said. "But then again, after this interview runs and he realizes that he'll need to fix his public image ASAP, I

have a feeling that he will...He'll come back to me--wife or not. Besides, don't you think that woman has something on him? Why else would he want to be with her?"

Seething, I walked over to the bathroom's main door and twisted the lock--waiting for her to come out...

*****End of Episode 5*****



EPISODE 6

CLAIRE

I kept my eyes on the stalls, waiting for Gwyneth to come out—trying my best to ignore the rest of her ridiculous conversation.

“Well...” she said, still laughing. “We’ll have to see about that. I’ll call you back tonight. I’ve kind of been holding it for the past three minutes and the commercial break is only so long, Rachel....I’ve got to go for real this time.” She laughed again and there was a loud beep.”

Seconds later, there was a flush and she emerged from the stall humming. Her bright eyes immediately met mine and she gasped, taking a step back.

Scowling, she looked me up and down—letting her eyes linger on my stomach for a few seconds before walking to the sink.

“I’m not really one to hand out compliments to those who don’t deserve them, but you actually look pretty today, Claire.” She smirked. “Any particular reason why you’re here? Any reason why you felt the need to follow me inside the restroom?”

I took a deep breath, and silently warned myself to stay calm. “I think you know exactly why I’m here.”

“I really don’t. Claire. I’m actually—”

“It’s *Mrs. Statham*,” I said, cutting her off. “The two of us are not friends, and you don’t want me as your enemy. You can keep it formal.”

“It was sarcasm, *Claire*.” She emphasized my name again. “Surely someone of your age would know what that term means. I know you’re here because you’re jealous, because you want me to put an end to my interview because you’re threatened....I would be, too, if I were you.”

Keep your palm still...Don't step closer...Yet.

“How many times do you have to be told that my husband has no interest in you?” I couldn’t help but step closer. “Is your plan to make every reporter in need of ratings listen to your lies until someone believes you?”

“I take it you haven’t seen the video, huh? I bet—”

“I saw that bullshit.” I hissed. “And I also saw that it was years ago, Gwyneth. *Years ago*. Let it go.’

“You should talk.” She smiled. “How many years did it take for you to get over your ex-husband, again? So many that your new husband had to step in and come to a settlement with him? Have you had the chance to read over that yet?”

I clenched my fists to avoid the inevitable. “My husband does not want you, Gwyneth. I know that’s hard to believe, especially since he hasn’t contacted you in years, and is now married and has two children on the way, but I need for you to—”

“He sent me emails...” She crossed her arms and smiled. “And since they were directly from his personal account—”

“His *secretary* sent you those.” I snapped. “Repeatedly. It was copy and paste, switching up a word here or there, or were you too delusional to notice that?”

Her face fell, but she quickly recovered. “You’re lying...You just made that up.”

“No, I’m not.” I stepped close enough so that we were nose to nose, so I wouldn’t be able to stop myself, if she said something else rude. “While we were going on dates and trips, and starting what is now our life together, his secretary was only following protocol. He never even saw your emails. They were archived and filed away, just like you were, because whatever the two of you had, didn’t matter that much once he met me.”

“Get out of my face, *Claire*.”

I remained still and narrowed my eyes at her. “And yes, I may be older than him—thanks for pointing out the fucking obvious on live television by the way, but the only person that fact seems to bother, is *you*. A person who he doesn’t even give a damn about, a person who is wasting her time pining for a man who comes home night after night, to *me*.”

“Not for long.”

“Oh?” I wasn’t moving. “You think your childish interview will make him talk to you? Out of sympathy for you?”

“Out of love.” She hissed, trying to move around me, but I grabbed her elbow.

“Get out of my way, *Claire*.” She rolled her eyes. “I have an interview to finish.”

“If you say one more ill word about me or my husband on that show, I will make your life ten times worse than it already is.” I tightened my grip on her arm. “Are we clear?”

“*Are we clear?*” She cracked a smile. “Wow! Is that your attempt at impersonating Jonathan? If I didn’t despise you already, I’d say that was pretty damn good. Now, be a good girl and let go of my arm before I have to hurt you. Now, *Claire*.”

“You’re going to tell the interviewer that you were misinformed as soon as the show goes live again,” I said, keeping my voice firm. “And you will tell her that you are sorry—incredibly and painfully sorry, for wasting her and all of her viewers’ goddamn time. You will also tell her that my husband had

nothing to do with your company going under, and that you are sorry for ever slandering him without having all of the facts.”

“Is this speech part of your new comedy act?”

“You will also refrain from ever discussing me or Jonathan ever again and if you agree to those terms, I might be nice and make a few phone calls on your behalf, to maybe restore what little of a career you have left.”

She burst into laughter and jerked her arm away from me. “I feel so threatened right now. Please, tell me more...”

“Try me, Gwyneth...” I kept my eyes on her as my chest heaved up and down. I was done trying to be respectful. “*Fucking try me...*”

“I will.” She shrugged and turned to look at her reflection in the mirror, and a voice came over the speakers.

“Paging Gwyneth White to Studio C,” the voice said. “Two minutes. Paging Gwyneth White to Studio C.”

“So, just so we’re clear...” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “I’m supposed to apologize to the reporter for wasting her time or you’ll ruin my life?”

“Exactly.” I nodded and headed for the door. As I was twisting the knob, she laughed.

“One more thing, Claire!” She waited for me to look over my shoulder. “And...I’m also supposed to say what now? That it wasn’t your husband who ruined my company shortly after I came back to him? That days after I showed up to your house and he told you who I was, that he didn’t call every investor and tell them to back out indefinitely?”

“That’s right,” I said, flatly. “That was actually *me*.”

She gasped and her eyes widened.

“I’d be more than happy to explain to you exactly *how* I did that, or if you’d rather me show you after the remainder of your interview...Let me know.” I stepped out and slammed the door.

*****End of Episode Six*****



EPISODE 7

JONATHAN

The security manager of the TV studio stepped in front of me. “Mr. Statham, contrary to whatever you’re thinking right now, this building is not the property of Statham Industries. You can’t barge in here and make demands.”

“You have until my wife gets back to let us inside the studio,” I said flatly.

“Okay, let me see if I can break this down for you in simpler terms....” She started talking about rules and regulations, but I tuned her out. My only focus was stopping Gwyneth’s lie-filled interview.

“Are you there, Mr. Statham?” She looked at me. “Do you understand now?”

“No. You still have until my wife gets back.” I suddenly felt my phone vibrating in my pocket and pulled it out. Corey.

“Did you figure out anything new?” I asked.

“Yeah...” he said.

“Care to share whatever the hell that is?”

“It’s that you may have married someone who is just as fucking psycho as you are.”

“What?” I looked around the room for Claire and spotted her leaving the restroom. “What did you just say?”

“That investigator she hired weeks ago? I was wrong...It wasn’t to figure out the settlement you have with her ex-husband—although apparently she did ask about it a few times, but her main focus was...” He sighed. “Do I really have to spell this out? You know you didn’t completely obliterate Gwyneth, so that only leaves the other half of the psychotic Statham dynasty...Wait. Do you need me to spell it out after all?”

“No...” I narrowed my eyes at Claire as she approached, as she looked completely oblivious. “Can I call you back, Corey?”

“As long as we never have to talk about this again, sure.”

I hung up and stared at Claire, waiting for her to speak.

“Yes?” She smirked. “Are we playing the ‘Jonathan is mad at Claire and wants to glare at her all afternoon’ game today? Can we at least wait until after the rest of Gwyneth’s interview airs to start that?”

“Do we really need to?” I slipped an arm around her waist and pulled her close as I spotted Gwyneth walking away from the same door she’d come from seconds ago. “Is there a point to watching the rest anymore?”

“Yes...”

“I don’t think there is.” I kept my voice firm. “Is there something you want to tell me, Claire?”

She shook her head. “Nothing I can think of. Is there something on your mind?”

“Quite a few things, actually...” I tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

“Do you plan on telling me what those things are or are you going to make me guess? Am I going to have to—”

I cut her off with a long kiss, pulling her even closer to me—running my hands up and down her back. Each time she

attempted to pull away, I kissed her harder. When I finally released her to take a breath, I whispered against her lips. “You said something to her while you were in the bathroom, didn’t you?”

She nodded.

“Should I assume you’re behind everything else she’s mentioned? Everything she thought *I* personally did?”

She didn’t answer.

“*Claire...*” I gripped her tighter. “Answer me...”

“Yes...” She nodded, much slower this time. “I was honestly sympathetic at first...until I did some research and...” She sighed. “She’s not a good person, and if you think I could’ve handled it differently—”

“You *could’ve...*” I looked into her eyes as the interview began again on the monitors above us.

“Miss Turner, before you ask me anything else...I actually...” Gwyneth’s voice wavered through the speakers, but I kept my eyes locked on Claire’s. “I actually would like to retract most...I mean, I would like to retract all of my previous statements...I would also like to apologize for misleading the public...”

Miss Turner gasped and quickly cut to a commercial, and a faint smile crossed Claire’s lips. A smile she quickly dropped, when she realized I was still glaring at her.

“I’m not sorry for what I did, Jonathan,” she whispered. “And even though I did somewhat threaten her, I told her that I would reverse some of what I’d done to her, if she retracted.”

“Some of what you’ve done?”

“Yes. *Some*. Not all.” She narrowed her eyes right back at me.

“And why is that?”

“Because she’s....Excuse me for putting this so bluntly, but

she's a bitch...And she tried to ease her way into relevance and take my husband away."

"He was never going anywhere." I clasped her hand and led her down the hall...

CLAIRE

I tried not to sigh too loudly as Jonathan led me out of the studio center and into a connected building. He hadn't looked back at me or said a word, and I wasn't sure what was going through his mind.

I braced myself for him to tell me how upset he was that I'd hid everything behind his back, for him to tell me that he wasn't the "destroying people's livelihood without enough reason" type, but he didn't.

Instead, he quickly pulled me into an empty room and pressed me against the wall. And without another word, his lips were on mine in seconds, and he was kissing me harder than he'd kissed me minutes ago—slowly torturing me.

"Stop kissing me, if you're angry with me..." I murmured.

He ignored me and moved his hands to the hem of my dress—slowly inching it up to my waist. "Claire Statham, you still manage to surprise me every day..." he whispered. "Do you know that?"

"You're not upset with me?"

“Not at all...” He bit my bottom lip and gently pulled it. “I’m *impressed*.”

“What? But I—” I didn’t get to finish that sentence.

He was biting my lip even harder, commanding me not to say anything else.

I moaned when he finally let it go, and he moved his mouth to my neck—kissing and biting my skin as he made his way down to my breasts. Softly pinching my nipple, he whispered something I tried to understand, something that sounded like my name and a mix of “I’m about to fuck the shit out of you.”

I shut my eyes as he trailed his kisses lower and lower, as he pressed his mouth between my thighs and slowly swirled his tongue against my clit.

“Jonathan...”

“Shhh.” He pressed a palm against my thigh to steady me, telling me to be quiet, but I couldn’t help it. The second he sucked my clit into his mouth, any attempts at silence were long gone.

“Ahhhh...” I murmured with every brush of his tongue, every press of his lips. And I cursed in frustration each time he stopped, right when he knew I was on the edge.

“Jonathan...” I gripped his hair in my hands as he slipped two fingers inside of me. “Jonathan...*Please*...”

He swirled his tongue against me as tremors traveled up and down my spine, as I said his name over and over again. And when he lifted my leg over his shoulder to plunge his tongue even deeper inside of me, I completely lost it.

“Oh my god!” I screamed as my body shook uncontrollably, but he continued kissing me relentlessly. “Jonathan...”

“Claire...” he whispered, gently pulling me down to the floor. “Claire?”

Shaking my head, I kept my eyes shut and waited for the tremors to come to a complete stop.

“Come here...” He pulled me into his lap and ran his fingers through my hair.

Several minutes later, I opened my eyes and he smiled at me.

“I hate when you do that to me...” I said softly.

“I hate when you lie like you don’t like it...” His smile widened. “Regardless of how impressed I am with your degree of ruthlessness, obliterating people’s livelihood isn’t really my style. You know that, Claire...”

“What about Ryan?”

“There’s one exception to every rule.” He rolled his eyes. “But you didn’t have to ruin her in the way that you did. I would’ve handled it, and I was actually planning to...”

I leaned against him as he adjusted my bra back into place. “I was only taking a page out of your book.”

“Hmmm.” He helped me up. “What about the many pages about coming home by six when you’re working? Or not working late when I ask you not to? Will you be taking any of those, when you go return to your company?”

“Probably not.” I smiled. “But I’ll try.”

“You won’t try at all,” he said, smiling back at me. “You wouldn’t be the woman I married, if you did...” He trailed his fingers along my anchor necklace. “Barring anything else dramatic happening between now and your due date, I have somewhere I need to take you.”

“This weekend?”

“No...*Now*...”

*****End of Episode Seven*****



EPISODE 8

CLAIRE

I smiled as I opened another suitcase, anxious about whatever the next few days would hold. I had a few weeks before I wouldn't be able to travel anywhere per my doctor's orders, and I was looking forward to whatever Jonathan had up his sleeve.

"So...Where exactly is Jonathan taking you this time?" Helen crossed her arms as I tossed a shirt into the suitcase.

"He hasn't said yet. He just brought me home and told me to pack for a two week trip."

"And you begged me to come over and watch you pack, because...?" She started arranging shirts on my bed. "To brag? To make me jealous? Which, I'm sorry, Claire, I'll never envy being committed to one cock for all eternity."

"I asked you to come so you could one, help me pack because that's what a good friend would do. But more importantly, to house-sit for the weekend since the last bits of the nursery will be arriving and I need someone I trust to make sure it's set up properly. Do you not remember me telling you this on the phone? I would've asked Hayley or Corey, but they've both been acting really strange lately."

"Ha!" She laughed. "I wonder why...Is Hayley still a virgin?"

"No comment...Can I trust you to make sure the designers do everything right?"

"How can they get it wrong when you sent them three different blueprints and taped one of them on the wall? I'm surprised you haven't sent them an e-copy of your plans every hour."

"She has." Jonathan suddenly stepped into the room, walking right past Helen and up to me for a kiss. "You're still not done packing?"

"I need twenty more minutes..."

"I'll give you *ten*."

"Then I'll take fifteen." I smiled, and he rolled his eyes.

"Trust me, you won't be needing that many clothes for where we're going," he whispered, kissing me again. He turned to face Helen and handed her an envelope. "This is for you."

"You're giving me money?"

"I'm not giving you anything." He glared at her. "I still haven't forgiven you for Claire's bachelorette party. And I don't plan to anytime soon..."

"Oh, no..." She faked a frown. "Whatever can I do to get back into your protective and over-the-top-good graces, Mr. Statham?" She burst into laughter. "Is this envelope your attempt at a peace offering, then? A fresh start between us?"

"It's actually from *Greg*." He smirked. "And since I accidentally read it by thinking it was for me, I suggest not opening it until Claire and I leave...Unless you want her to know the type of stuff you're *really* into..."

Her cheeks turned bright red and she went speechless--something completely rare for her.

"You have exactly fifteen minutes, Claire." He kissed my cheek. "*Fifteen. Minutes.*" He warned one last time before leaving the room.

I stared at Helen, waiting for some type of explanation, for her to say something about her envelope, but she simply cleared her throat and stuck it into her back pocket.

"I will definitely make sure the nursery people do their job while you're gone," she said. "And I wish you the most amazing sex with your psycho-husband while you're gone."

I smiled. "Thank you, Helen." I decided not to press her on the envelope issue, and continued to pack--taking my time, deadline from Jonathan or not.

I stuffed my suitcase with summer dresses, flats, and pajamas. Just as I was staring at the rack in my closet and debating what else I needed, Jonathan lifted me up and carried me out of the room.

"Really?" I narrowed my eyes at him. "Will you ever get tired of doing this?"

"Of showing you that I mean *exactly* what I say?" He narrowed his eyes right back at me. "No." He carried me outside to the town car and placed me on the backseat.

Greg carried my suitcases out of the house shortly after, and secured them in the truck.

"What if I left something important, Jonathan?" I asked as he pulled me into his lap.

"Did you pack the new lingerie I bought you?"

"Yes."

"Then you didn't leave anything important." He pressed his lips against my neck. "If it was up to me, I honestly would've let you continue packing for another hour. But unfortunately, we're on my pilot's limited time today."

"Oh..." I murmured as he softly squeezed my breast.

"Are we ready, Mr. Statham?" Greg called from the front.

"Yes." Jonathan answered, and the car immediately pulled off. He slipped a hand under my dress and caressed my thigh--making my head fall back on his shoulder.

"Wait..." I whispered. "Wait..."

"For?" His hand slipped further.

"I need to show you something."

He trailed his tongue against the shell of my ear. "Now?"

"Yes..." I managed, against my body's wishes. "Now..."

Groaning, he slowly eased me out of his lap and set me against the seat. "What is it?"

"I know you said..." I sighed. "I know you said that you didn't want to know the sex of the babies until after they were born, but..." I reached into my purse and pulled out a small manila envelope. "The doctor gave this to me last week, just in case you changed your mind."

"I haven't." He glanced at it.

"But..." I took a deep breath. "In all honesty, *I* want to know...And, I'd rather find out together, than let my curiosity get the best of me and open it without you..."

"You would open it without me? Behind my back?"

"What do you think?"

He smiled and gently took the envelope from my hands. "Knowing the sex now would make you happy?"

"Very happy..." I nodded.

"Hmmm." He pulled me close and trailed his finger along the seal. "In that case, I guess I have no choice, do I?" He softly tore open the envelope, but he asked me to pull out the results for myself and read them first.

I stared at the sheet a long time--reading the words and failing to hold back tears.

"So, Claire..." He wiped away as many as he could. "What are we having?"

****End of Episode 8****



EPISODE 9

JONATHAN

I waited for Claire to say something--anything, but she only stared at the paper in her hand and cried.

"Claire?" I wiped away a few more of her tears. "Claire, are you going to tell me?"

"Yes." She leaned against me, still crying.

"Is that a yes for today or *tomorrow*?"

"Sorry." She smiled and held the paper between us. "Baby B is a girl...and Baby A is a boy...I'm happy you said we should hold off on the nursery paint until next month, I was honestly thinking it was going to be two girls, and I..."

The rest of her sentence came in muted, as thoughts rushed through my mind. On the one hand, I was happy she was happy, and I'd gotten used to the idea of becoming a father. But on the other hand, I was upset that I had no idea what the hell I was getting into, what the hell was about to change.

"Jonathan?" Claire rubbed my shoulder. "Jonathan, what's wrong? Are you upset about me wanting to open the envelope?"

"No."

"Then why are you looking at me like that?" She frowned.
"Like you're mad?"

"I'm not mad."

"Then whatever it is--"

"I raised Hayley when I was younger because I *had* to," I said, cutting her off. "I just did the opposite of what my parents did to us. And I swore, fucking promised myself, that after that, I never wanted kids of my own, that I would make sure whoever I dated knew that from the start, if we ever got serious."

"*Jonathan...*" Her face immediately turned red and she opened her mouth to respond, but I pressed a finger against her lips.

"I'm not saying what you think I am..." I looked into her eyes. "I'm just realizing how close your due date is, how you're yet again changing something I thought I had figured out...And I honestly still don't know shit about babies."

She laughed as I moved my finger away from her lips. "You would, if you actually paid attention to the books I've tried to read with you."

"You shouldn't be trying to read them while naked in our bed."

Blushing, she slowly slid into my lap. "I think you know a lot more than you give yourself credit for...Hayley thinks the world of you and how you brought her up. Well, minus you apparently beating up every guy that ever showed interest in her."

"Except Corey." I rolled my eyes at the thought of that ridiculous scenario. "Hayley was three when I started caring for her. She wasn't a newborn..."

"You only missed endless diaper changes and bottle feedings every few hours. The care and need for attention is the

same...You'll also have a wife this time around, one that knows you'll be more than fine."

"Will this wife also agree to the idea of our daughter not dating until after college?"

"Only if this husband makes our son agree to the same rule..."

"Our son can date in high school," I said flatly. "It's not the same for girls. No boyfriends. Ever. At least while she lives with us."

"Are you being serious right now?"

"Do you see me laughing?"

She rolled her eyes. "That's your biggest concern? Who she grows up to date?"

"It's one of them."

"Any others you care to share?" She crossed her arms. "What color onesies you prefer either of them to wear?"

"No, but I'm very partial to blue." I laughed and kissed her lips. "I'm kidding, Claire."

"About the dating?"

"About the onesies."

"Mr. Statham?" Greg suddenly called over the intercom. "We've arrived, sir."

"Thank you, we're ready."

Claire shook her head at me one last time before she let Greg help her out of the car. I followed suit and slipped a hand around her waist as we approached our plane.

"Can you please tell me where we're going?" She whispered as we stepped closer, squeezing my hand.

"I'm taking you to every place we went on our honeymoon, before we have to come home for good." I glanced at her stomach. "But this time, we're actually going to step outside of our room and get to actually what we didn't before...Do you not feel like flying today?"

"I do." She smiled. "I just don't believe you and the 'actually stepping outside of our room' part."

"You should." I laughed and led her aboard. "Let me show you..."

****Episode 9****



EPISODE 10

CLAIRE

I rolled over in bed, reaching for Jonathan, but he wasn't there. I spotted the short note he'd left on the nightstand, "I'll be right back, Your Husband," and quickly turned on the TV.

I flipped through the channels until I saw a headline that caught my eye. "Former Girlfriend of Billionaire CEO Still Recanting."

The blond reporter stood outside of an unfamiliar building and spoke. "Yes. That is right, Charlie. Gwyneth White is scheduled to do another interview tonight with our news-team to further clear the accusations she once leveled against Mr. Statham."

"Is it true that she requested this interview, Charlotte?"

"Yes and no." The reporter shook her head. "Our team first reached out to her after seeing her on the—"

Jonathan turned off the TV as he walked into the room.

"We've discussed this, Claire," he said, narrowing his eyes at me. "Why do you keep checking the news?"

"Just to make sure nothing new comes up, to make sure she stays in line."

“Do you have ties to the mob that I don’t know about?”

“No.” I laughed. “I’ll stop...I’ll stop looking.”

“Good. There are far more interesting things to do on this island than worry about Gwyneth.” He took the remote from my hands and tapped a button, forcing the drapes open—revealing miles of white sand and clear blue waters, feet away from our doorstep.

We were in St. Kitts and Nevis, the same place where he’d first proposed to me years ago. And true to his word, we’d toured the town yesterday without him having his way with me at any given moment. There was only one incident, when a tour guide was being a little too flirtatious with me, that he seemed to lose focus for a few seconds. (Moments after the tour guide looked through the rear view mirror and complimented my “very pretty smile” for the umpteenth time, Jonathan pulled me into his lap and kissed me so possessively and passionately, that the tour guide didn’t give me any more compliments for the rest of the day.)

“We’ll have to bring Ashley and Caroline here one day,” I said. “I think they’d really enjoy this.”

“They’ll be here soon.”

“What?”

“Greg met them at the airport last night. They should be arriving any minute now.”

“You invited them?”

“No. Ashley invited herself once she heard me mention it... Caroline was in the background begging to go as well.”

“And you gave in that easily?”

“I did,” he said, pulling me out of bed and against his chest. “I also spoke to your doctor and apparently, I’m out of line for bringing you here and making you travel...” His lips curved into a smirk. “And for continuing to want to have sex with you.”

“She said we couldn’t?”

“She said we *shouldn’t*.” He trailed his finger against my lips. “There’s a difference...”

“Jonathan—”

“I won’t.” He kissed me. “I meant what I said...It’s just one last trip before everything changes.”

There was a sudden knock at the door and he slowly let me go. He walked over to open it and was greeted by a man wearing all-white.

“As you requested, Mr. Statham.” He gave him a box. “Anything else?”

“No, thank you.”

Before he could shut the door, I heard the familiar sounds of talking, that incessant-no-one-is-around-but-us talking, coming from far down the hallway.

“Can you believe they weren’t going to tell us about this trip, Caroline?” Ashley’s voice, loud and clear.

“Is it really that hard to believe?” Caroline laughed. “It’s their baby-moon. I’m pretty sure we weren’t supposed to come.”

“Do you think Jonathan will care that we brought dates?”

“No, he definitely said we could bring one friend each...”

“*Claire...*” Jonathan shook his head—sighing, and I walked over to him.

“Both guys are in college.” Ashley scoffed. “He shouldn’t have any issues, and if he does...”

“If he does, *what?*”

There was a brief pause.

“Let’s just tell him we came alone.” Ashley sighed. “What suite are they in again?”

“*Seven,*” Jonathan said, stepping into the hallway. “Suite seven.”

“Hey, Jonathan! There you are!” They hugged him and made their way into the suite. They took turns hugging me,

gently pressing their palms against my stomach, and within seconds they were roaming around the space.

They marveled at the marble bathrooms, at the living room that connected four separate bedrooms, and even at the cookie display the staff had left for us—the “Congratulations, Mr. & Mrs. Statham!” that was standing tall in the kitchen.

“Where are your friends?” Jonathan asked, slipping an arm around my waist. “Did either of you choose to bring a *female* friend here to vacation with you?”

“Is it me...” Caroline said, looking away from us, “or is there a vein popping outside of his neck right now, Ashley?”

“It’s definitely not you...He seems upset about something...”

“*Ashley...*” He warned, but I couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

“Why don’t you two tell your friends that they’re more than welcome to hang out with us here, but they’ll have to sleep in suite six across the hall from you when you decide to go to bed?”

Jonathan narrowed his eyes at me in disapproval, but I ignored him.

“Please go tell the concierge that *Mrs.* Statham requests that they add another suite to our bill, and to give your two friends keys.”

The second the words were out of my mouth, they squealed and rushed out of the room, presumably to let me deal with Jonathan alone.

“Their friends are already here, Jonathan,” I said, looking up at him. “What were you going to suggest when they told you they brought guys? Fly them back?”

“That’s *exactly* what I was going to do.”

“Well, now that you *can’t*, because your *wife* said so...Deal with it.”

“Deal with it?”

“Would you like me to repeat it again?” I smirked. “Deal. With. It.”

He glared at me. “You are so very lucky I spoke to your doctor, Claire...”

“Am I?” I stepped back, ready to move away, but he pulled me close again and kissed me.

“Very lucky,” he said softly. “But I’ll keep this in mind months later...”

CLAIRE

Later that night...

The six of us—me, Jonathan, Ashley and her “friend” Matthew, Caroline and her “lab partner,” Tate, sat around a small bonfire. We’d spent the afternoon on a sailboat—lounging on the deck while getting caught up, and we’d spent most of the evening sampling new foods from the resort’s kitchen.

As the sun set, Jonathan handed me a glass of water. “Are you missing wine?”

“Not really...”

“Good.” He brought a glass of red wine to his lips and slowly sipped it. “I’m not either.”

“Are you teasing me?”

He took another sip and smirked. “Deal with it.”

I rolled my eyes and leaned against his shoulder.

“Thank you once again for inviting us on this trip, Mr. Statham,” Matthew said from across the fire.

“I didn’t invite you on this trip. As a matter of fact—”

“We’re very happy you could join us,” I said, cutting him off.

Both of their dates had been nothing but nice the entire day, and even though Jonathan didn’t want to admit it, he liked them. A lot.

Unlike Ashley’s previous boyfriend, Matthew was at the top of his class and was on track to graduate early with a degree in engineering. And although Caroline wouldn’t admit that she was dating her “lab partner,” he was the type of guy that Jonathan would definitely approve under any other circumstances; he was a computer science major and he’d just won an award for one of his designs.

“We’re going to go grab a few drinks from the coffee stand down the beach,” Ashley said, standing up. “Do you two want anything?”

“No, thank you,” we said in unison, watching the four of them disappear—watching them link hands once they thought they were far away from sight.

“Do you still remember the spot where you proposed to me?” I asked.

“Of course. Why?”

“Just wondering...I’d like to go back there before we leave.”

“Okay.” He took the glass out of my hand and sipped my water. “I actually prefer this when you can’t drink with me.”

“So you say...I’m making my list of things to remember about you, too...”

He smiled and slipped his hands underneath me, slightly lifting me and placing me in his lap. “I spoke to my father while you were sleeping this morning...The warden let me talk to him for over an hour.”

“How’d it go?”

“Surprisingly well...He asked about my company, being married, how far along you were, and...”

“And...” I looked at him. “Go on...”

“Without me even bringing it up, he said, ‘If you want to be a good father, just do everything I didn’t do for you...’ And then he thanked me, actually thanked me, for raising Hayley and being ‘a better father than he could’ve ever been back then...’” He paused. “Took long enough, right?”

I nodded, unsure of what to say.

He lifted my hand to his mouth and kissed my wrist. “I like the name Alicia.”

“You overheard me talking on the phone last night?”

“You were right next to me.” He held me tighter. “I like the idea of her having your middle name, though.”

“Would you like him to have your middle name, then? Carter?”

“No.” He ran his fingers through my hair. “I want him to share my first name, Jonathan...”

*****End of Episode Ten*****



EPISODE 11

CLAIRE

For two weeks, reality ceased to exist. The sound of the ocean's waves greeted me every morning, and the warm sun always rose early and set late on the coast of St. Kitts and Nevis. Every now and then, I would pinch myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Then again, overhearing some of Ashley and Caroline's conversations were sometimes all I needed to remind me that I wasn't.

Jonathan let me walk for all of thirty minutes a day--per doctor's orders, so if I wanted to go somewhere, I did so via the courtesy of a sand buggy. And, as hard as it was for him to hold back, the only thing he did when we were in bed at night, was kiss me and hold me close.

On the last day of our trip, as promised, he took me to the spot where he first proposed and told me it was still one of the best memories of his life.

These were the images that I kept letting my brain process over and over again, anything to keep it from thinking about where I currently was: In the west wing of a private hospital.

Warm sand...Beaches...Cold water...Jonathan kissing me....

“Mrs. Statham?” A female voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Yes?”

“Are you feeling okay?”

“Very much so...” I looked over at Jonathan. “My husband has overreacted once again. I coughed one time. One. Time.”

He rolled his eyes at me. “You were heaving, Claire.”

“It’s actually a good thing he brought you in, Mrs. Statham.” The doctor flipped a sheet on her clipboard. “I was going over your charts with my consultants and we think it’s best, given the high risk of this pregnancy, that you remain on bed-rest for the remainder of the third trimester.”

I shot Jonathan a glare, knowing he was somewhat relieved by the order.

“And just so we’re clear, Mrs. Statham,” she said, her voice firm. “Bed-rest means you stay in bed as much as possible. You only need to get up to use the restroom and maybe stretch for a few minutes a day. I’m sure Mr. Statham will get anything you need done, while you rest.”

“I will,” he said, walking over to her to shake her hand. “Is that all?”

“I believe so. I’ll have one of my staff members bring up a wheelchair for Mrs. Statham.” She gave us both one last smile and left the room.

Before I could say something to Jonathan, he pressed his mouth against mine and kissed me.

“I need you to try not to be stubborn for a few weeks, Claire...” he said softly. “I really need you to do that...”

“First of all, I would never do anything to jeopardize this pregnancy. And second of all, I won’t be difficult at all, if you promise not to bring me to the doctor’s office anytime I cough and sneeze.”

“That’s doable,” he said, taking the wheelchair from an attendant. “I’ll just have the doctors come to our house.”

I didn't get a chance to protest. He slipped his hands under me and lifted me up, gently placing me into the wheelchair. He kissed me one last time and wheeled me down the hall and to the elevator.

"Is this bringing back memories?" I looked up at him. "This is the second time in our relationship that I've been in a wheelchair."

"No." He hit the down button. "I'm not tempted to murder anyone this time."

We rode the rest of the way in silence and when we arrived at the bottom level, we were met with Greg and three other security guards I was sure Jonathan had hired for over-protection.

One of them opened the back door of the town car, while the other two spoke to Greg about "how close" they should drive behind us.

"You are so ridiculous..." I whispered to Jonathan as he helped me into the car. "Do you know that?"

"I do." He smirked. "I also know that you *like* it." He shut the door and got in from the other side.

I spotted the morning's newspaper on the seat and read the headline: *Damien Edwards to Unleash New Laptop at Public Investors' Meeting This Friday.*

"Is it going to bother you that his computer is going to be number one for a while since you're taking a break?" I asked.

"What makes you think his will be number one?"

"He doesn't have any competition right now. Statham Industries isn't unveiling a laptop for another eight months. At least, that's what you've told me."

His lips curved into a smile and he pulled me close. "We're actually unveiling ours on Wednesday."

"Two days before his? Seriously? You still feel the need to rain on his parade every chance you get?"

“I wasn’t going to.” He ran his fingers through my hair. “Until I saw him touching you in that convenience store. He needs to know his place...”

My jaw dropped. “That was weeks ago, Jonathan!”

“I don’t give a fuck when it was,” he said flatly. “He touched someone who belongs to me.”

“I think you need to see a counselor about your jealousy issues.” I held back a laugh. “Your wife is clearly pregnant and head over heels in love with you. I’m pretty sure no other man stands a chance with her.”

“I know that...” He kissed my cheek. “I’m just making sure that every man is well aware of that fact, too.”

I shook my head at him, not bothering to fight him on his compulsiveness any longer. I leaned against his shoulder and shut my eyes, hoping that the remaining trimester of my pregnancy would be just as easy as the first two.

CLAIRE

Several weeks later...

“Well, well, well...” Helen laughed as Sandra wheeled me into the kitchen. “I’m so honored that your husband has allowed us to come over and have a play-date with you, Claire. How sweet.”

“Grow up, Helen.”

“I personally think it’s sweet how over the top he continues to be,” Sandra said. “And I love that he still sends you flowers every day. What do you do with them again?”

“I started a garden.” I pointed to the windows, smiling. “It’s the one activity I’ve been able to do while serving time here in my personal prison.”

“Prison guards don’t give their prisoners nightly foot massages, Claire.” Jonathan walked into the room and placed a kiss on the back of my neck. “I’ll be back with your dinner. Do you ladies want anything?” He looked at Helen and Sandra.

“Some time with our friend without her overprotective husband will be just fine,” Helen said. “Thanks.”

Jonathan ignored her. “Anything for you, Sandra?”

“No, thank you.”

“And Claire,” he said, lowering his voice as he headed out, “Your daily prison gift arrived an hour ago.” He pointed to the flowers that were sitting on the counter and smiled at me before leaving.

Helen and Sandra both laughed, and I slowly stood up to grab today’s arrangement. It was a small assortment of white lilies and pink roses with a simple note: *Dear Mrs. Statham, I still love the way you murmur my name in your sleep...Looking forward to making you scream it over and over again in the months to come...Love, Your Husband.*

Blushing, I folded the note and slipped it into my pocket. I felt one of the babies kicking my stomach and winced. “Does it look like I’m carrying twins to you two?”

“You look like you’re carrying quadruplets.” Helen poured herself a glass of wine. “No offense.”

“None taken...” I slowly sat down in my chair and took a deep breath. The last few weeks had flown by in a blur of doctor’s visits in our living room, midnight binge eating on my part, and an endless weight gain that I didn’t even try to curb.

“You’re so rude, Helen.” Sandra laughed. “You just look like you’re pregnant, Claire. I’m sure Jonathan doesn’t mind the weight at all.”

He didn’t. His usual perfection had heightened to a whole new impossible level.

He answered all of my “How do I look?” questions with “Fucking beautiful,” and if I even attempted to say something negative about the weight I’d gained, he would kiss me so senselessly, that I would forget all about it for hours at a time.

I was two weeks away from my due date, and I was literally counting the remaining time by the seconds. And although I

still wouldn't admit it to Jonathan, I was grateful for the wheelchair. Very, very grateful.

"Are either of you going to start talking to me or are you just going to stare?" I looked back and forth between them. "What have I been missing?"

"Well, let's see...We'll start with sex." Helen started to wax poetical about Greg's prowess in the bedroom, how his cock "always hit all the right spots"—making me and Sandra shake our heads and silently pray for her soul.

As Sandra started to tell me about her upcoming trip with her husband, I felt another sharp kick in my stomach.

I gritted my teeth so I wouldn't draw attention to myself, but there was another kick—an even sharper one, and seconds later, I felt the inevitable.

"So..." Sandra was looking at Helen. "I was telling him that I think we should do Paris for three days and then—"

"I think my water just broke..." I managed. "Can one of you..." There were more sharp pains. "Can you call Jonathan? Can you...Can you..." I bit my lip, unable to talk through any more of the pain and shut my eyes.

I heard the two of them calling Jonathan and Greg, heard them making their list of people to call, and I felt myself being slowly wheeled through the corridors and to the front door.

"How pissed do you think Jonathan would be if we took her to the hospital ourselves?" Helen asked.

I was pretty sure Sandra gave her the appropriate look, because she didn't mention it again.

With the pain getting worse and worse, I was tempted to tell them to risk it, but I heard the sound of a car speeding down the driveway—along with Jonathan giving orders and breathed a short sigh of relief.

"Claire..." He pressed a soft kiss on my forehead, and

ordered two members of his security team to help me into the car.

I gripped his hands as hard as I could, and cursed as the pain worsened by the second.

Undaunted, he held me close as the car sped off toward the hospital.

I didn't remember how I made it from the car and into the hospital suite, but two painful hours later, I knew I was squeezing the life out of Jonathan's hand as doctors stood near the edge of the bed.

"Why isn't the epidural shot working?!" I screamed, feeling tears well in my eyes. "I can still feel pain! Can someone, please fix it?! Can I just get the goddamn C-section?!"

The doctors ignored my screaming, instead asking me to push—calmly and annoyingly reiterating the fact that "We would have definitely performed a cesarean section on your scheduled date, Mrs. Statham, but your body clearly had other plans. You're dilated ten centimeters, enough for us to at least try this a few more times so—"

"Just stop talking! Stop it right now!" I yelped in pain and shut my eyes, forcing myself to push more, to no results. I felt beads of sweat trickling down my forehead, felt my contractions seemingly double, and I hoped the doctors would give up and prep me for a cesarean surgery.

"Can you try a few more times?" Jonathan whispered softly, softly squeezing my hand in return. "For me?" He wiped my forehead with his sleeve. "I'll make them do whatever you want, if you can't though...I want to get you out of pain as soon as possible."

I didn't respond. I just looked at him and gave him a look that said I would try again.

"When you're ready, Mrs. Statham..." the doctor said softly. "Push as hard as you possibly can, okay?"

Crying, I gritted my teeth and pushed as hard as I could for another hour—punishing Jonathan’s hands with no mercy. And after what felt like forever, I heard a cry that was almost as loud as mine.

“Baby B,” the doctor said, handing her away to the standby nurse. “Can you try again, Mrs. Statham?”

The sounds of my baby crying across the room temporarily distracted me. I pushed quite a few more times—feeling worse this time around, and half an hour later, a screaming Baby A was born.

And as much as I wanted to hold him, to hold them both in my arms, my body started to go weak and everything went black...

“It’s like looking into a mirror from the past...” Ashley’s voice was the first thing I heard. “Alicia looks just like us...”

“You think Baby Jonathan looks like Jonathan?”

“I think she’s going to beg him to change his name.”

Laughter, then silence.

I tried to open my eyes, but it was no use. I involuntarily drifted to sleep again...

I felt familiar lips pressing against my cheeks and forced my eyes open to see Jonathan.

“Hi...” He smiled.

“Hi...” I noticed he was holding Alicia in a light pink blanket. “I thought we agreed on yellow?”

“She didn’t appreciate the yellow.” He looked down at her. “She actually cried until a nurse gave her pink. Then

again, it might have been a combination of that and her formula...”

I smiled and Greg was suddenly at my side, pressing a button that helped me sit up. He nodded at Jonathan and walked out of the room, leaving us alone.

Jonathan gently placed Alicia in my arms, and I held back tears. With her head full of unruly brown hair and pink skin, she was absolutely beautiful. She even had a mark on her upper lip—exactly where mine was but slightly darker.

I waited to see if she would open her eyes, but she was sleeping too soundly; she only cooed, never stirring once.

“They’re green...” Jonathan said softly. “Just like yours.” He stepped back and pushed Baby Jonathan’s bassinet closer to my bed. Gently lifting him up and out, he sat on the edge of my bed and held him close so I could see his features, too.

“His eyes, however, are blue,” he said, and I didn’t need to say anything else. Our son was his father’s spitting image. Period.

As if on cue, Baby Jonathan opened his eyes. He blinked a few times in confusion, and then, as expected, he began to cry. Loudly.

“There, there...” I motioned for Jonathan to hand him to me in exchange for Alicia. “What’s wrong? You don’t like sharing a name with your dad?”

Fully awake now, I grabbed a bottle from Jonathan’s hand and softly pressed it against Baby Jonathan’s mouth. “It’s okay... It’s okay...”

He cried a few more seconds before latching onto the bottle and shutting his eyes.

For the rest of the night, Jonathan and me took turns holding our babies—whispering promises to them both, to each other for our futures together...

*****End of Episode Eleven*****

CLAIRE

Months later

The sound of Alicia's cries made my eyes flutter open, but I didn't make a move; I didn't have to.

Jonathan was already slipping out of bed, walking over to her crib and picking her up. He walked her out of the room and downstairs, softly humming to her the entire way.

It'd only been five weeks since we'd been home, but I could already see a pattern forming: If the twins made a single sound—a coo, a cough, or a cry, Jonathan immediately took action. If he thought they were sleeping for too long, he picked them up and held them against his chest—waiting until they woke up and needed something else.

I didn't think it was possible for him to get any more possessive, but he never let either of them out of his sight for a single second, and it looked as if it pained him whenever we had company and they were temporarily in someone else's arms.

(And I meant “temporarily” in every sense of the word; no one except him and me got to hold them for longer than five minutes at a time.)

Rolling out of bed, I put on a robe and made my way downstairs—stopping outside the entryway once I heard his deep voice.

“Why aren’t you quiet like your brother?” He smiled, positioning a bottle against her lips. “You’re almost as frustrating as Claire...”

I crossed my arms and leaned against the wall.

“There’s only one difference between you and your mother...” He looked into her eyes. “I probably won’t ever have the heart to say no to you about anything...I’m sure you can tell that already, though...”

She shut her eyes—still drinking from her bottle, and he added, “As long as you agree to never date anyone and promise to never have a boyfriend, I’ll give you whatever you want...”

I tried to hold back a laugh, but I couldn’t help it.

“Something funny, Claire?” His eyes immediately met mine.

“Besides the fact that you’re talking to our five-week old child about potential boyfriends?” I smiled and walked over to him. “No, nothing at all.” I leaned against the counter and he kissed my lips.

Before he could ask me about Jonathan II, I set his company’s newest prototype—the sMonitor, on the counter. I tapped the screen and expanded the image, making sure he could see it for himself.

“He’s still sleeping,” I said softly. “He probably won’t wake up for another hour. And you know, if you actually let both of them sleep, instead of picking them up every thirty minutes, you might actually get to experience what the word ‘sleep’ means for yourself.”

“I’m more concerned about your sleeping than mine.” He kissed me again. “And if I *want* to pick them up, I’m going to pick them up, regardless of what my wife thinks.”

“Clearly...” I slowly pulled the empty bottle from Alicia’s mouth and he positioned her over his shoulder so she could burp. “Did you talk to your board members yet?”

“I did.”

“And?” I looked at him, hoping he’d told them what we’d discussed last week: Off for a complete year, with only Sunday as a potential update day. No meetings unless it was an absolute emergency. No public speeches or interviews unless it was for charity.

“And,” he said, “I’ll tell you what I said when you tell me the truth about your store.”

“I did tell you the truth.” I narrowed my eyes at him. “I’ll only work on Sundays—just like you, and only because my name is on all the contracts.”

“I can easily have that changed and you know it.”

“You agreed to let me have Sundays, Jonathan.” I looked into his eyes. “One year. Only Sundays. We discussed this.”

“And I don’t work for more than a few hours a week? You think that’s fair to ask of a CEO?”

“If this particular CEO wants to experience sex within this year, yes.”

He let out a low laugh. “I told them I was taking off for a year, but I will take meetings via Skype and I’ll still meet with Milton once a week.” He pressed a finger against my lips before I could interrupt. “But he’ll come here and keep me updated. I won’t have to go in.”

I nodded, stepping back. “And they took that well?”

“Of course not, Claire.” He rolled his eyes. “But I did it for you.”

“You did it for sex.”

“That, too.” He laughed, clasping my hand. “A full year with just you and our twins isn’t the worst thing in the world.”

Alicia hiccuped, immediately drawing our attention.

Smiling, Jonathan gently grabbed her sides and handed her to me.

“I get to hold my own daughter today?” I smiled back. “What an *honor*, Mr. Statham. How long do I get to hold her for this time? Three minutes? Four?”

He rolled his eyes and pressed his hand against the small of my back, gesturing for me to go back upstairs. As usual, he didn’t take his eyes off Alicia the entire time, and the second we returned to the nursery, he lifted her from my hands so he could personally put her into the crib.

Jonathan II stirred, and it looked as if he was about to wake up and cry for his next bottle, but he simply yawned and continued sleeping.

When he was sure they were both okay, he turned on another monitor and grabbed my hand—walking me into the hallway.

Without warning, he pushed me against the wall and pressed his lips against mine, kissing me until I bit his lip, until I begged him to let me breathe.

“What are you doing?” I barely managed.

“Is it six or eight weeks before I’m allowed to have you again?” He ran his fingers through my hair. “I need to make sure.”

“You think I want to have sex with you?”

“I know you do.”

“You’re a father now, Jonathan.” I tried to keep a straight face. “You need to know that brand new parents don’t have normal sex lives for at least a year after their children are born. You should also know that your own wife will let you know when she *feels*

like having sex with you again—especially since you’re intruding on her new motherhood experience by doing all the things that she should be doing. She’s teaching you a lesson in patience.”

He smirked. “Six or eight, Claire?”

“It’s ten.”

“*Claire...*”

“You’ll have to wait until I fit in my old clothes again.” I looked away from him, but he cupped my chin, making me face him.

Smiling, he gently drew my bottom lip into his mouth—biting it softly before letting it go. “You honestly think I care about you fitting into your old clothes?”

I didn’t answer.

“You think I’m any less attracted to you right now than the first day we met?”

I blushed. “No, but—”

“Good.” He cut me off, kissing me. “Because *I’m not...*” He threaded his fingers through my hair again. “And I really need to be with you again.”

“It’s still ten weeks.”

“Don’t make me call your doctor, Claire.”

I smiled. “It’s six...”

“So, four days?” He kissed my forehead. “If you feel like it, that is, and don’t want to continue teaching me a lesson in patience.”

“I’ll think about it.”

He laughed, and at that moment, the familiar cries of Jonathan II floated into the hallway. He slowly loosened his grip on me and stepped back.

“You don’t regret this, do you?” I asked, looking into his eyes. “Me having babies, I mean?”

“Never.” He gave me one last kiss and led me back into the

nursery. “You gave me everything I never knew I needed, and I love you more than ever now...”

“More than your children?” I smiled.

“Not even close.” He laughed and I watched him pick up our son, watched him slowly transition into the perfect father I always knew he’d be...

***SERIES FINALE**