

**THE  
NEW  
YEAR'S  
PARTY**

**DANIEL HURST**

# ***THE NEW YEAR'S PARTY***

A SHORT STORY

DANIEL HURST

[www.danielhurstbooks.com](http://www.danielhurstbooks.com)

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Happy New Year to all my readers



# 1

## CARRIE

New Year's Eve is a time for reflection, as well as a time for looking ahead and making resolutions. But for me, it's also about something else, and the popping of the champagne cork is a perfect reminder of that.

It's about having fun, and tonight, fun is very much on the cards.

'Yes, please!' I say as I hold out my glass and allow the handsome waiter to top me up from his bottle of fizzy bubbles.

'I'll have another one as well, thank you very much,' says Andy, my husband, before he eagerly accepts another drink of his own, and once our glasses are full, we clink them together before taking a long and refreshing sip.

'That's lovely,' Andy says as he inspects the liquid in his glass. 'Much better than the stuff we buy in the supermarket.'

I'm not going to argue with him there, but then again, it's not really a fair fight to compare the champagne we have at home to the type they serve here. This is a five-star hotel in the Lancashire countryside, so they are hardly going to serve cheap champagne, are they? On the other hand, the bottles I pick up in our local supermarket are very much of the budget variety, less than £20 in most cases, and they only ever get opened on special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries. But this is a special occasion tonight, and I'm glad to be having a drink befitting of the event.

It's December 31<sup>st</sup>, but for the first time in several years, Andy and I aren't spending it sat at home on the sofa scoffing crisps and waiting for the coverage of the fireworks in London to start on the TV. No, this time we are actually doing something fun to cap off the previous twelve months before another hectic year arrives, and that fun is coming in the form

of a very extravagant New Year's Eve party that I've heard good things about.

The Highbridge Hotel is the setting for this annual ticketed event, and I believe this is the third year that it's been held. But it's the first year we've been, and the main reason for that is because tickets are £300 each. While that is a princely sum, it does include a four-course meal, free drinks all night, fireworks show at midnight and, best of all, a stay in one of the rooms at this grand hotel. With all that in mind, some might argue that is a bargain, and I'd be inclined to agree, but the expense of coming here is not negligible for us, which is why Andy and I had to think long and hard about it before purchasing a ticket.

There were plenty of things we could have spent that money on elsewhere, like fixing the leaky tap in our bathroom or hiring a decorator to give a facelift to our dining room that has been looking tired and unloved for years. Or with the cost of living these days, the money could have simply been saved to pay for necessities like food, heating and petrol for the crappy car we share between us.

So why did we decide that this year, of all years, we would splurge and treat ourselves?

Well, for one, we never do this kind of thing, and as we're not getting any younger, it felt like now or never. Both of us are in our fifties, and we've always been thrifty, so the habit of a lifetime is hard to break. But break it we have, and it's all in the name of enjoying ourselves and creating a new memory this New Year's Eve. Lord knows we already have enough memories of quiet, boring and very cheap New Year's Eve's to last us forever.

We were also persuaded to come here by two of our friends who attended this same event for the last two years. Sally and Graham, a couple we have known for over twenty years and who I am proud to call our best friends, recommended this event and said it was well worth the price of a ticket. So, here we are, and so far, they haven't been wrong. It was a shame they couldn't make it this year to join

us but never mind because we're managing to have fun without them.

'This salmon is divine,' Andy says, unable to resist the temptation to talk with his mouth full in his eagerness to let me know how much he is enjoying his starter.

'You mean you like it more than the crisps and chocolate we'd be having if we weren't here tonight?' I ask him with a chuckle, before treating myself to another bite of my portion of the tasty pink fish.

We're not the only ones tucking into our meals, and as I momentarily put down my gleaming knife and fork and look around the room, I take in the sights around me.

The first things I see are several smartly dressed waiters and waitresses moving between the twelve tables that are stationed equal distances apart in this expansive ballroom. Seated at each of those tables are six people, a mixture of couples, all groups of friends or perhaps strangers who just so happen to have been assigned to the same table by the organisers of this event. The little name cards in front of each plate showed the arriving guests where to sit, name cards that sat beside polished wine glasses and pristine plates, though both the glasses and the plates are now full.

In one corner of the room, a bald man in a tuxedo plays the piano, enchanting his audience with various renditions of well-known songs, while high above him and everyone else in the room, tinsel hangs from the ceiling, adding a festive touch to this decadent setting.

A large Christmas tree stands proudly in the other corner, beautifully decorated in red and gold baubles, and the lights wrapped around its sizable trunk glisten and glow. It might be almost a week since December 25th and only a few days until the tree is taken down, but for now, it's still proudly on display.

Just beyond the tree is a large bay window through which I can see nothing but darkness, as one might expect on an early evening in the middle of winter. If the sun was up, I and everyone else in this room would be treated to a wonderful



view of the hotel grounds containing well-maintained lawns, colourful flower beds and rows of conifers giving this lovely estate the privacy it deserves. But it's pitch-black out there, not to mention below freezing, so while I can't see anything outside, I am being warmed by the radiators in here, and I am very grateful for that.

Returning my attention to my table, I look around at the other people I am seated with. As well as my husband, there are four others - two couples who were strangers before the meal began but who have since become friendly acquaintances once the alcohol flowed and everybody got past the awkward small talk.

The couple seated on the right side of this round table are Kath and Phil, both in their sixties and both recently retired after almost fifty years working in a bank, which, coincidentally, was where they first met and fell in love. They explained that tonight is a little treat for themselves after decades of hard work, before they are set to embark on a cruise to the Caribbean on the 5<sup>th</sup>. What a lovely way to start the new year and, indeed, their retirement, Andy said to them after they had just finished telling us about their holiday plans, and I couldn't agree more. The pair of happy retirees look resplendent this evening, her in a sequined dress and him in a blue waistcoat over a black shirt, and as they nibble on their starters, they look just as happy as we are.

The couple seated to my left introduced themselves as Martin and Michaela, and I was quite relieved their names both began with the same letter because it made it a little easier for me to remember them. I've never been good with names, so the prospect of meeting several strangers this evening and having to dine with some of them was always going to put my memory to the test. But I've remembered their names and not just because of the alliteration. It's also because they're both incredibly chatty, positive and fun. The pair of them haven't stopped talking since we were all seated, and after the introductions were made, they told us a little about themselves.

Both in their forties, Martin works as a lawyer, though Andy jokingly promised he wouldn't hold that against him. That sums up my husband; he can always be relied on for a bad joke. Martin's wife, Michaela, is a dentist and said she was looking forward to an evening of going against her usual advice on how to keep teeth clean, namely by drinking lots of red wine and perhaps even having a cigarette once the clock strikes twelve. But beyond their jobs, they have plenty of hobbies, ranging from horse riding to painting, which made it a little awkward when they politely asked Andy and me what we liked to do in our spare time. Aware that replying honestly and saying that we generally just sat on the sofa and binge-watched shows on Netflix might be a little less interesting than what they got up to outside of work, I told a white lie about how we played tennis together and occasionally liked to partake in wine and cheese evenings in our local community.

Andy almost choked on his wine when he heard my fib, no doubt surprised because we haven't set foot on anything as sweat-inducing as a tennis court in our lives, while the only wine and cheese we eat is in the privacy of our own home and is not because we can claim to be any kind of connoisseur in either field. But it did the trick of making us sound a little more interesting, and everyone else around the table seemed happy enough with our answers.

The truth is that these two couples are clearly middle-to-upper class, while Andy and I are firmly in the working class. It took a lot for us to simply save up the money to be able to be here this evening because we're not lawyers, dentists or ex-employees of a successful bank. Andy is a mechanic, and I'm a receptionist at a primary school, meaning money has always been tight for us and most likely always will be. But tonight, for one night only, we are going to treat ourselves and try to live like the kings and queens that we are in our wildest dreams.

As the starter plates are cleared away and the wine glasses are topped up again, I'm wondering what else I might need to lie about tonight. But then Martin suggests a new topic of conversation, and when he does, I'm relieved because I'll be able to answer honestly during this one.

He asks each of us around the table what our New Year's resolutions are.

And that was the moment when things started to get crazy.



## 2

### CARRIE

‘Come on, Carrie, what’s your resolution?’

I stare at Martin, the man who has already asked me that question but is seemingly so eager to hear my answer that he’s asked it again. It’s not necessarily a difficult question, but New Year’s resolutions are personal, aren’t they? It’s easy to make them in the privacy of your own home and share them with a partner or best friend but sharing them at a table with people you’ve only just met? That’s a little less simple.

But I should do it because so far, everyone else who has been asked has answered.

Phil, the recently retired and long-serving bank employee, said that his aim for the upcoming twelve months is to spend more time in his garden and work on growing his own vegetables, something he’s always wanted to do, before adding he’d also like to attend the Monaco Formula1 race because it’s been on his bucket list for a while. Too bad that it’s so damn expensive, but he says he’s going to try and get there one day. Following him, his wife, Kath, said that her main goal for the next year was to get more exercise and lose some weight, which is a slightly predictable resolution and one I’ve claimed to be striving for myself on several occasions over the last few years, only to fall foul of the biscuit tin by 7pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January. Kath also added that she would love to take a trip to Iceland that she’s been dreaming about for a few years now, but just like her husband’s goal of going to Monaco, it’s a pricey aspiration.

Even my husband has already answered, telling everybody at the table that his resolution is to finally save up enough money to buy himself his dream car, a red Ferrari; a vehicle he’s always harboured hopes of owning ever since I met him. Of course, Andy’s resolution was made slightly tongue in cheek because he knows full well that it will always be

impossible for him to afford a car like that while employed at his local garage. But he got a good chuckle from everyone around the table, which I guess is what he was aiming for, and he seemed quite pleased with himself as he sat back in his seat and took another sip of champagne.

Now all eyes are on me as everybody here waits to hear what I have to say. Will I be serious or jokey with my resolution? Realistic or ultra-ambitious? I guess I'll just have to come out with it and see what everybody thinks, won't I?

'Erm, okay, well, my resolution is for Andy and me to finally take the trip we've always been talking about,' I begin with, giving my husband a knowing look so he gets on the same page as me.

'A trip? How wonderful,' Michaela says. 'Where is it you've always wanted to go?'

'New York,' I say, my mind already transporting me to the city I've only ever seen in films and TV shows.

'Oh, wonderful!' Kath cries, clapping her hands together. 'You've never been?'

I shake my head. 'Always wanted to but we've never been able to afford it,' I say, smiling at Andy to show that I'm not upset by that fact, just being honest.

'You absolutely have to go,' Phil chimes in, piggybacking off his wife's excitement. 'For me, there's nowhere else like it. Everything's so big and brash. So different to anything we have over here. I love it.'

'Hopefully, this year will be the year,' I go on. 'We just have to try and save up.'

'New York and a Ferrari. Wow, it will be an expensive year for you two,' Martin says with a chuckle. 'Good luck with that.'

'Cheers, mate,' Andy says, laughing as well in such a way that suggests he already knows what we have just discussed will never happen, but it's fun to fantasise a little, isn't it?

But now we are on the subject, I am not done with fantasising just yet.

‘But I don’t just want to fly to New York,’ I say, as I slowly twirl my champagne flute around on the tablecloth with the same hand that has my small wedding ring on it. ‘I want to take the boat there. Sail right past the Statue of Liberty on the way into Manhattan. Arrive in style, you know what I mean?’

‘A cruise! How wonderful!’ Kath squeals, but I already knew that she would like the idea because she’s going on a cruise herself next week.

‘Yeah, that would be nice,’ I say, warming to my theme. ‘Then once we were there, we’d stay at one of the fanciest hotels. I’m not too fussy, just somewhere nice, right in the heart of everything. It would have to be near all the shops. Macys, Bloomingdales, you know the ones, girls.’

The ladies at the table nod eagerly while the men roll their eyes.

‘This is starting to sound more expensive than my Ferrari,’ Andy quips, and that gets a laugh from everyone.

‘I guess it will be a little pricey,’ I admit, allowing a little reality back into my fantasy world. ‘Maybe not this year, then. But hopefully one day. I guess the problem is we never really know exactly how long we’ve got to do things, do we?’

‘That is true,’ Martin says with an agreeable nod. ‘Seize the day, that’s what I say.’

‘Oh, I’m all for seizing the day,’ Andy replies quickly. ‘Unless it results in bankruptcy, which I have a feeling a trip to New York with my wife would.’

More laughter between the six of us, and with that, my time as the centre of attention at the table is up. Then, as the main courses are served and the glasses are refilled, it’s time for us to hear what Martin and Michaela’s resolutions are. They were the ones who suggested this topic of conversation, so I’m guessing whatever they have to say is going to be good.

‘You first,’ Martin says to his wife, giving her a wink before picking up his knife and fork and tucking into his

perfectly cooked sirloin steak.

But Michaela suddenly looks uncomfortable, which is the first time I've seen this calm and confident woman flustered since we met her. And then she gives a hint as to why she looks a little awkward.

'Oh, I don't think I should say,' she tells her husband, but of course, that only ignites the curiosity of everyone else around the table, not least my husband.

'Come on, we've all shared our resolutions,' Andy reminds her with a jovial lilt to his voice.

'Yeah, it's just a bit of fun,' Phil chips in. 'And we're all friends here.'

That might be a slight exaggeration considering we only met an hour or so ago, but I get what he means. We're all having fun tonight, and nobody is being judgemental, despite the fact that we all clearly come from different backgrounds. But Michaela still looks a little unsure until her partner seems to guess what she is thinking about.

'Oh, I see,' he says, now looking a little fidgety himself. 'It's still the same thing as last year, isn't it?'

Michaela nods her head, and now Martin seems to understand. Well, at least somebody does because everyone else at this table is still confused.

'What is it?' I ask, my curiosity getting the better of me. I'm so intrigued now that I've not even touched the chicken breast on my plate, but I'm not bothered about it getting cold just yet. I'm more bothered about what this couple seem to be withholding because it sounds like it might be interesting.

'I was just going to say that my resolution was to learn a new language,' Martin admits, putting down his knife and fork because his meal doesn't seem as important now either. 'But if I'm being honest, and I probably should be because my wife is, my real resolution is the same as last year's too.'

I watch him reach out and take his partner's hand then, and they share a smile. Meanwhile, all that I, Andy, Kath and Phil share are several puzzled looks.



‘Well now you really have to tell us,’ Andy insists. ‘It sounds like you both have the same resolution, so come on, out with it. If you tell us, maybe we can help you with it.’

I think my husband means help in terms of offering encouragement if the resolution turns out to be something slightly unrealistic like climbing Everest on a Bank holiday weekend or going into space on the next tech billionaire’s rocket launch. But Martin and Michaela noticeably stiffen when they hear Andy’s suggestion of help, before Martin lets go of his wife’s hand and fixes my husband with a considered stare.

‘Maybe you could help us,’ he admits before Michaela tries again to get him to be quiet. But he ignores her, and as I watch him draw in a deep breath, it feels as if this night is just about to take a turn.

Good food, good wine, good music. None of that matters now. I just want to hear what Martin has to say. And then I do.

‘You see, my wife and I have this resolution, but it’s not exactly a traditional one,’ he admits.

‘What is it?’ Kath asks, impatience seeping into her voice.

Martin takes one more look at his wife before blurting it out.

‘This year, we would both like to sleep with somebody else.’



### 3

#### CARRIE

The first thing I hear after Martin's admission is the sound of my husband accidentally knocking his glass of wine over. The second thing I hear is poor Phil choking on a piece of his chicken. But it's no wonder they're so flustered.

Did we just hear right?

*Did Martin just admit to us all that he and his wife want to have sex with somebody else?*

I figure he must have been joking, so I force myself to let out an awkward laugh, hoping that Martin and Michaela will admit that they were indeed jesting, and we can all go back to having a nice meal. But despite my laughter, neither of them breaks character.

They look deadly serious.

*Oh God, I think they are serious.*

I stop laughing then and nervously pick up my fork, prodding my chicken slightly and pretending to be occupied with it. But nobody is saying anything, so the awkwardness endures, and the sound of the piano is the only thing disrupting the uncomfortable silence.

'You both want to sleep with somebody else?' Kath eventually repeats, trying to understand what she just heard.

'That's right,' Martin replies. 'That's our resolution, and it's been our resolution for a number of years now, actually.'

Wow, they really are serious. I don't know where to look. Back down at my chicken, I suppose.

'I'm sorry, we shouldn't have said anything,' Michaela admits. 'We've made you all feel uncomfortable, and that was not what we wanted.'

‘No, it’s okay,’ Martin interjects, placing his hand on his wife’s leg. ‘We’ve just been honest, like everybody else has. We shouldn’t apologise for that.’

I watch as Martin picks up his glass of red wine then and swills it for a moment before taking a sip. He does look rather relaxed for a man who just admitted something *very personal* to the table.

‘Yeah, you don’t have to apologise,’ Andy suddenly says. ‘You’ve been honest, and I respect that. I mean, I don’t think any of us were expecting a resolution quite like that one, but if that’s what you want, who are we to judge?’

Andy inexplicably picks up his own glass then and holds it out towards Martin and Michaela as if he wants them to clink their glasses against his own. They do so, looking relieved now, and it seems the awkwardness is over, at least for my husband anyway.

‘I do have a few questions, though,’ Andy admits, looking rather excited about the fact that he gets to talk about what most would consider to be a taboo subject. ‘How did you both realise you wanted the same thing? I mean, how did you both know you wanted to sleep with other people? Who admitted it first?’

‘Andy,’ I say, attempting to stop my partner prying. It’s one thing to ask such a personal question of two people, but when one of those people is an attractive woman with curves that I have definitely caught my husband glancing at a couple of times tonight? That’s too much, right?

‘No, it’s a good question,’ Martin replies, actually looking pleased that he gets the chance to elaborate. ‘It just came up one night when we were in bed together, didn’t it, darling?’

‘Yes,’ Michaela says, her shoulders relaxing and her pretty smile returning. ‘We were talking about our fantasies, as I’m sure you all do the same, and we both just said it.’

I steal a glance at Kath, and the mortified look on her face suggests she spends about as much time talking about sexual

fantasies with her partner as I do with mine, and that time amounts to zero.

‘So how would it work?’ Andy asks, clearly intrigued and not shy to show it.

‘Well, we haven’t actually found anybody to do it with yet,’ Martin admits.

‘No, but if you did.’

My husband seems really interested in this subject. Maybe a little *too interested*.

‘Well, I would think it would be pretty obvious,’ Martin says. ‘I would sleep with another woman while my wife would sleep with another man.’

The words leave Martin’s mouth so effortlessly, but it takes a lot more work for them to be processed. Kath still looks mortified, Phil looks plain confused, and I have no idea where to look. But Andy shrugs as if it all makes sense.

‘I see. So, it’s a bit like swinging, yeah?’

‘Andy!’

Of all the words I thought Andy might mention tonight, ‘swinging’, the act of spouses swapping sexual partners, was not one of them. But he’s just said it, and now poor Phil has gone bright red. He’s not the only one. His wife is a little beetroot too.

‘I wouldn’t class it as swinging, per se,’ Martin says nonchalantly. ‘There’s a little more to it than that. Or at least there is where we are concerned. Perhaps it’s why we’ve found it so difficult to find another couple to be intimate with.’

I see a waiter lurking nearby and wonder if he is going to inadvertently wander over and walk right into the middle of this strange conversation. But he goes to another table, sparing himself any of his own blushes in the process.

‘What do you mean?’ Andy asks, delivering yet another question, like a good talk show host who wishes to learn more about his guest.

‘Well, we don’t just want to sleep with anybody,’ Martin replies. ‘It has to be with people we like. And it also has to be with people who want something themselves.’

‘Want something?’

That’s my question, but I couldn’t help it. Now I’m as intrigued as my husband.

‘Yeah, it can be anything,’ Michaela says, fielding this one. ‘Money. An item. An opportunity. Whatever. Just something that we might be willing to trade in exchange for getting what we want too.’

Andy and I share a look. Instead of getting clearer, this seems to be getting weirder.

‘Ideally, if somebody could help us fulfil our New Year’s resolution, we’d be willing to help them fulfil theirs,’ Martin says with a smile. ‘Now do you understand?’

I think I do. Andy does too. Phil and Kath still look confused, bless them, but I get exactly what this couple are hinting at now. They asked us what our resolutions were, not to make conversation but to get to the point. They wanted to find out what we all wanted this year, so now they know what we could have if we are willing to give them what they want.

*And they want us.*

‘Have any of you ever thought about being with somebody else?’ Martin asks, but Phil just responds to that by pretending to check if his chicken is cooked enough, showing his wife so they can both look down at the plate instead of looking at the rest of us.

‘No, not all,’ I say in response to the question before looking to Andy for him to back me up.

‘Erm, yeah. No, we haven’t. Definitely not,’ he says, although I wonder if he’s only saying that because I’m here.

‘Okay, fair enough. But that doesn’t mean you couldn’t be tempted, right?’ Michaela asks and as she does, she lets her gaze linger on my husband for a few more seconds than would be considered normal.

Andy shuffles in his seat before laughing nervously. But Martin and Michaela seem ice-cold.

‘What would you say if we could give you what you wanted this new year?’ Martin asks me, in between mouthfuls of his main course. ‘You give us what we want, and you’ll get the same in return.’

‘A Ferrari and a trip to New York?’ I say, and Martin nods.

‘That’s right. That is what you said you wanted, correct?’

‘Well yeah, but we didn’t know it was some kind of a test.’

‘Not a test. Just a game. A fun game, and if you can’t have fun on New Year’s Eve, when can you?’

Martin winks at his wife again before putting an arm around her shoulder and leaning in for a kiss.

Andy and I watch the couple’s lips meet before parting after a few seconds and when they do, things get even more real.

‘Take your time and think about it,’ Martin says with a smile. ‘The night is still young, and we have lots of other fun things to talk about. But if you are interested in anything that we’ve said, we’re staying in Room 2B tonight.’

‘And we are serious,’ Michaela adds. ‘You can have the car and the holiday if you want it. You just have to say the word. Okay?’

With that, the pair go back to finishing their meals, leaving Andy and me to look down at our plates and the meals we haven’t even started yet. Kath and Phil start eating too, before Martin and Michaela quickly change the subject, remarking on the skill of the piano player before asking if anybody else here can play an instrument.

But I don’t answer that question. That’s because I’m still too busy thinking about the last one.

*We can have the car and the holiday if we want it.*

*We just have to say the word.*

*Okay?*





## 4

### CARRIE

‘Ten! Nine! Eight...’

The countdown to midnight has begun, and Andy and I are standing with all the other ticket holders by the bay window as the excitement builds. The lights have been turned off in the room, so we’ll be able to see the fireworks outside, and as the seconds tick by, the anticipation grows. But I’m not looking out of the window to see some pretty pyrotechnics now. Instead, I’m looking to my left, where I can just about make out Martin and Michaela in the gloomy room.

He has his arm around her, and she is nuzzled into his shoulder, and to the untrained eye they would look like the picture of contentment. The perfect couple. Utterly in love. Happy with each other and not wanting for anything else in this world. But I know that’s not the case, not really, because they told me so. They do want something; something that they don’t seem to have found so far, and because of that, I guess they aren’t actually as happy as they seem.

It’s what they want that suggests to me that they aren’t as in love with each other as it appears. They want to be with somebody else, somebody other than the person they married. That’s weird, right? I mean, I couldn’t imagine being with anybody other than my husband, so how can Michaela wish so much to be with another man who isn’t the one who put the ring on her left hand? It’s very unusual, but maybe I’ve just lived a sheltered life. Maybe this is more common than I realise.

And maybe I’m the weird one for not going along with it.

‘Three! Two! One! ‘HAPPY NEW YEAR!’

The room is suddenly illuminated with the bright lights of multiple fireworks exploding outside, the choreographed display wowing everybody who witnesses it, and for that one

brief moment, all fears and anxieties about the year ahead are dispelled. Everything is going to be alright. Everyone's resolutions are going to come true.

Well, maybe not *everyone's*.

I glance at Martin and Michaela again and see their smiling faces being lit up in all sorts of colours. Reds, greens, blues. And now they're kissing, slowly but passionately, and despite feeling like I should look away from them, somehow I can't seem to make myself do it.

That's when I'm suddenly kissing somebody myself, and despite it being obvious who it is, it still takes me a second to figure it out. But it's Andy, of course, and as my husband's lips press against mine, I guess this is just his way of saying Happy New Year to me without words. But I detect something in the way he is kissing me. There's an urgency to it, unlike one I've felt before, and when he breaks off from me and I look into his eyes, I notice he isn't looking at me at that moment.

*He's looking over at Martin and Michaela instead.*

The fireworks end, and the lights come back on, and once they have, the waiters and waitresses are quickly on hand to refill everyone's champagne flutes. This event is not due to end until 1 AM, and as the music starts and a few people make their way onto the dancefloor on the other side of the room in the space that was recently cleared by several tables being moved away, it looks like the party is in full swing.

Andy is clearly in the mood for a dance because he leads me to the dancefloor, and once there, he twirls me around while merrily singing along to the song coming out of the speakers. More and more people join the dancefloor, and I spot Kath and Phil amongst the revellers, but they aren't dancing themselves. They're talking to Martin and Michaela, and while I can't hear what they are saying with the music blaring, I do notice Martin mouthing something to the couple.

It looks like he says '2B.'

Andy and I make the most of what remains of the party, dancing and drinking until the last song ends, before the

metaphorical curtain finally comes down on what has been an eventful evening. Then we join the remaining revellers as they make their way to the doors that head to the grand staircase that will take us all up to our rooms for the night. We're in Room 2F, and it's not lost on me that we're only four doors down from the room that Martin and Michaela invited us into this evening.

But of course we're not going to go, or at least I didn't think we were until Andy pauses as we are passing the door in question and smiles at me with a mischievous look in his eyes.

'Do you think we should knock and see if they were serious?' he says, and even though I know he's tipsy from all the champagne tonight, I'm not sure it's the funniest joke he's ever made.

'Are you kidding? Let's get in our room now before they catch us out here and drag us inside!'

I tug on Andy's hand and lead him to our room, and once I've tapped the keycard on the electronic door lock, the light turns green, and we're in.

It's a relief to kick off my heels, and I can't wait to get out of this dress and change into something more comfortable, namely my trusty pink, fluffy pyjamas that always keep me warm in bed at this time of the year. I ask Andy to help unzip my dress, and he stands behind me to do the deed, but as he puts a hand on my zipper and starts to lower it, he has something to say.

'You know, if we'd said yes to them, then Martin would be the one doing this now.'

Another joke. Or maybe it's the truth.

'Well, I'm glad it's you and not him,' I say, meaning it, though it's impossible not to briefly imagine that man behind me instead of my husband for a moment now that it's just been suggested.

'What a weird resolution,' Andy goes on as my zip lowers. 'I can't believe they would make such an offer and not be joking. And to say such a thing in front of people they've only

just met. I guess I admire them in a way. It takes guts to be that upfront about what you want, I suppose.'

'I saw them talking to Kath and Phil on the dancefloor,' I say as my dress loosens and I'm able to free one shoulder from inside it. 'I think they were reminding them of the offer.'

'Wow, that's funny. I wonder if they'll go for it.'

'I doubt it.'

'I don't know. I think Phil had quite a bit to drink tonight. And I bet Kath is a bit of a wild child underneath that prim and proper demeanour she gives off.'

'Surely not. I think they'd be mad to go for such a thing. I mean, it's a recipe for disaster for marriage, right?'

I slip my second shoulder out of the dress, and as it falls by my feet, I feel free. Not quite as free as Martin and Michaela obviously like to feel but more comfortable at least.

'Maybe,' Andy says as he starts to unbutton his shirt. 'Or maybe it's the secret to a happy marriage. I mean, Martin and Michaela sure did look happy together. Did you see the way they were kissing at midnight? All their desires to be with other people don't seem to have harmed their relationship from what I can tell.'

'You think sleeping with other people is the secret to a happy marriage?' I ask, a hint of concern in my voice.

'Huh?' Andy mumbles as he continues undressing.

I'm already in my pyjamas while Andy is still getting out of his suit, but before I go into the bathroom to clean my make-up off, I feel like I need to make sure Andy isn't having any regrets about what we decided tonight.

'We're happy, aren't we?' I ask tentatively.

'Yeah, of course.'

'It's just the way you're talking, it's like your suggesting Martin and Michaela are happier than us.'

Andy stops undressing and looks awkward, showing the kind of dumb expression he sometimes displays when he's had

a little too much to drink and said something foolish.

‘No, that’s not what I’m saying at all.’

‘Then what did you mean?’

‘I just meant that whatever they are doing obviously works for them, and who are we to judge?’

‘I’m not judging.’

‘Aren’t you?’

‘No, I’m not. I’m just getting at the obvious, which is that a married couple who wish to sleep with other people can’t actually be that happy.’

‘Maybe they just like the adventure of it. We only live once, right?’

I’m not sure what to say to that, so I don’t say anything at all. But Andy, in his excitably drunken state, clearly doesn’t know when to shut up.

‘I love you, Carrie, you know I do. And I know you love me. But that doesn’t mean life has to be boring. I think that’s what Martin and Michaela have realised. They can love each other but still have some excitement.’

It was the last thing I was expecting to happen but suddenly, it sounds like my husband is suggesting that we entertain the idea of sleeping with other people too. If I’m right, I will not only be hurt but be forced to argue with him, and that is a terrible way for us to start the new year.

‘I’m going to ask you this one time and I want you to be honest,’ I say to Andy, fixing him with a stare that will let him know I am being deadly serious here. ‘Do you want to sleep with Michaela?’

Andy looks shocked at my question but a few seconds pass and he still hasn’t answered me. But eventually he finds some words.

‘No, of course not,’ he tells me and while I suppose he could just be saying that, I do think he means it. He’s a fool

but he's my fool and I can tell when he's being honest with me.

With that cleared up, I can breathe a sigh of relief. But just before either of us can say anything else, we hear voices outside our room in the corridor.

*Voices we recognise.*

'Is that Kath and Phil?' Andy asks, and I think it is, so I nod and look towards our closed door.

'They told me they were staying on the fourth floor,' I recall.

'So what are they doing down here?' Andy quite rightly asks.

I shrug before I have an idea.

'Wait, you don't think that they're...-'

'-what?'

'Going to see Martin and Michaela?'

Andy's eyes go wide with a mixture of excitement and disbelief.

'No, surely not?' he says, but he is already making his way over to the door, and when he gets there, he puts an ear to it to try and hear what's going on out there.

'What's happening? What are they doing?' I whisper as I join him by the door, but he shakes his head, letting me know that he can't hear anything.

We should probably leave it there, but if we do, it's likely we'll only end up lying awake in bed with our imaginations running wild. That's why I decide to very slowly and very quietly open our hotel room door and peep outside to see if I can get a better idea of what's going on in the corridor.

And when I do, I see Kath and Phil entering Room 2B.



## 5

### CARRIE

Despite it not being forecast, we wake up on the morning of January 1<sup>st</sup> to a light sprinkling of snow. The grounds that surround this magnificent hotel are covered in a beautiful white powder, and I make sure to take a couple of photos from our hotel room window before we pick up our bags and go to check out.

‘Will you be okay to drive in this?’ I ask Andy just after we have handed our keycards to the man behind reception and made our way to the revolving doors that will lead us out onto the chilly car park.

‘Yeah, it’s not that bad,’ Andy replies, though it wasn’t so much the amount of snow I was worried about. It was more the dependency of our old ruin of a car to get us home in these conditions. The tyres are worn out, almost bald in fact, meaning they won’t offer as much grip on the icy roads, and the heating system inside the car hasn’t worked for a while, meaning defrosting the windscreen will be a challenge, just like the journey home will be as we both sit beside each other with our teeth chattering. But what other choice have we got? It’s the only car we have, and it’s better than walking.

*Just about.*

While one might think being married to a mechanic would mean any car troubles would be quickly sorted out, I have to laugh at that because after a hard day of working on other people’s ailing vehicles, my husband says the last thing he wants to do is go to work on his own.

As we make our way to the car, our shoes crunching over the snow and our breath fogging up in front of us, Andy stops suddenly and taps me on the shoulder.

‘Look,’ he says, and when I do, I see Kath and Phil loading their luggage into the back of their vehicle. ‘I wonder if they



got much sleep last night.’

Andy has amused himself with his joke, clearly insinuating that Kath and Phil might have been kept awake all night by some extra-marital activities with the couple in Room 2B. But there’s no way to tell what actually happened in that room in the early hours of the morning, although I do notice Phil stifle a yawn after he has put his suitcase into the back of his car.

He notices us looking then, and we give him a wave before starting to head over to say hello, something I’m sure Andy is keen to do because he might be able to get a better idea of what might have happened with them. But Phil doesn’t wave back and neither does Kath. Instead, they just quickly get in their car and start the engine. They seem to be in a rush to get out of here, and I guess they aren’t in the mood for chatting.

We watch as their car reverses out of its parking spot before it makes its way down the lane towards the main road, going a little too fast for the treacherous driving conditions and further proving that they want to leave quickly. And then they’re gone, disappearing from view and leaving Andy and me to share a puzzled look before we go to our own car and get ready to leave ourselves.

‘No sign of Martin and Michaela,’ Andy muses as he looks back to the hotel, possibly hoping to catch a glimpse of the adventurous couple.

‘Maybe they left as quickly as Kath and Phil,’ I say, and we share a chuckle before we get in the car and try to warm up.

It’s been lovely to be at this hotel, but I’m ready to get back and have a very lazy New Year’s Day at home.

The drive back to our house is a challenging one, mainly because every other driver out on the roads seems to have forgotten how to operate a car now that there’s snow on the ground. What is it about Britain coming to a standstill as soon as the weather turns? Whatever it is, we eventually make it back onto our street, and by the time we do, I can barely feel

my hands because they're so cold. I'm very much looking forward to a hot cup of tea and a biscuit, but before any of that can happen, we have to park on our driveway. But there's a problem.

Something is blocking our way.

It's another car, parked right outside our house.

*It's a red Ferrari.*

Andy finds another space to park in opposite our property before we quickly get out and go to investigate the new car in the way. As it's his dream car, Andy is far too busy admiring the sleek bodywork of the vehicle to notice what I have. There's an envelope trapped under one of the windscreen wipers of the Ferrari, so while my husband is busy taking photos of the car with his phone, no doubt to show to his mates, I open the envelope and take out the letter inside.

Unfolding the piece of paper, I see there is a short message written across it.

***To Andy. We put the key through your letterbox. Happy New Year. M & M***

'Look at this,' I say, handing the letter to Andy, and while he was excited before about his dream car being outside his house, he gets even more excited now when he realises it's for him.

'What the hell?' he says. 'This is mine?'

'I guess so,' I reply with a shake of the head. 'And I think we know who M and M are, don't we?'

'Martin and Michaela?'

I nod my head. 'You did tell them you wanted a red Ferrari.'

'Yeah, but there's a difference between telling them and them actually buying it for me!'

There definitely is, and as I head to our front door to go inside and see if the car key really is in there, my head is swimming.

Unlocking the door, I open it and immediately find a key on the doormat, attached to a fob with the famous Ferrari insignia engraved into it. Picking it up, I hand it to my disbelieving husband who very quickly goes from looking confused to looking like a child on Christmas morning. But there's something else on the doormat too. It's another envelope, so I bend down to pick it up and open this one just as eagerly as the first.

It's another letter, and it's written in the same handwriting as the one on the windscreen.

***To Carrie. Happy New Year. Enjoy the Big Apple. M & M***

Accompanying the letter in the envelope are two tickets, and when I examine them, I see they are for a cruise due to set sail to New York next month. Not only that, but there is a reservation confirmation for a five-night stay at The Plaza, one of NYC's finest hotels. And to cap it all off, there's even a cheque for \$5,000 to cover expenses while we're there.

Wow, it seems that my New Year's resolution has come true too.

'This is crazy!' I say to Andy as I show him our tickets to New York. 'Martin and Michaela paid for all of this for us!'

'Yeah,' he replies, looking from the tickets to the Ferrari outside. 'I guess they did. But why?'



## 6

### MICHAELA

They say that Christmas is the time for giving, but I've always found that it's fun to give at any time of the year. Summer. Winter. Christmas. Easter. New Year.

Especially New Year.

That's why for the last three years, my husband and I have made a habit of starting the year by being generous.

*But only to those people who we deem to deserve it.*

I smile at my husband as we drive back from 72 Archer Crescent, where we have just delivered two presents to the people who live there. One present could fit inside an envelope, while the other was slightly bigger and had to be left outside the property, but the important thing is that they were left before the homeowners got back. I'm guessing Carrie and Andy will have found what we left for them by now, and hopefully, they are happy.

*Or at least they will be when the shock wears off.*

The Ferrari and the all-expenses-paid trip to New York are the gifts we left for the couple we met at the party at the hotel last night because that is what they said they wanted this year. It was their resolution, and while they might have been fantasising rather than being realistic, it's a good thing that they used their imagination because now they have actually got what they really want.

*But it's an even better thing that they chose to decline the offer we made to them.*

Telling Carrie and Andy that Martin and I wished to sleep with other people was not true. We're both very happily married to each other and do not wish to stray. We simply suggested that we did because we like to find out just how strong the other couples are that we meet. We put them to the

test, essentially, and we do that to see who is deserving of being rewarded.

Pass the test by staying away from our hotel room, like Carrie and Andy did, and whatever resolutions they made will come true. But fail the test by knocking on our door and suggesting to be up for some extra-marital fun, like Kath and Phil did, and they will get nothing but a shake of the head and an explanation that we weren't actually being serious after all.

I smile at my husband as he navigates the roads and takes us onto the high street and onwards towards our destination, which today happens to be a private airstrip just outside of town. It's there where we are due to catch a flight to the Cayman Islands, where we will lie on a beach and soak up the sun, relaxing and getting bronze and beginning the new year just right. That beach will be a world away from these snow-covered streets here, where people like Carrie and Andy will be turning on the heating inside their home and drawing the curtains in the middle of the afternoon when it's already going dark.

I'm very grateful for the fact that Martin and I can escape winter in England for a sun-soaked getaway, just like I'm grateful that a private plane will be taking us there, but the only reason that is possible is because we worked hard and made our millions the right way. We didn't inherit a fortune, nor did we beg, borrow and steal to get to where we are today. We just took a risk, started a company and twenty years later, sold it for £350million. Don't get me wrong, being rich is fun, and we're rarely bored. But there is more to life than holidays and private planes, and that's why we like to play games.

*Games like the one we played at the New Year's Eve party last night.*

Martin and I have been attending that same party for the last three years, and every time we go, we make sure to give two other couples the same opportunity that the couples last night had. We say the same things and see what happens. The only part of the story that changes are the professions we claim to do. This year, I pretended to be a dentist, and he pretended to be a lawyer. That is just our way of mixing it up and having

some fun, although it also helps conceal our real identities so that nobody we talk to at the party knows that we are actually millionaires. If anybody knew that, then it may make them act differently, and that's not what we want. We want real honesty, and last night, just like all the other years, we got it.

Carrie and Andy clearly have a very strong relationship and did not consider cheating, which is why they got rewarded. Sadly for Kath and Phil, they gave in to temptation, which meant that all they got was an explanation of the game in our hotel room and a little advice to perhaps get some marriage counselling. Maybe what happened to them last night has exposed some flaws in their marriage that need to be addressed, or maybe they will just chalk it up to having too much to drink and think nothing more of it. Either way, they are left with a memory and perhaps a funny story to tell at the next party they go to. But Carrie and Andy, the couple who did not come to our hotel room, are left with something more tangible, namely a car and the holiday of a lifetime, all paid for by us.

I hope Andy enjoys driving his car around town, and I hope Carrie enjoys everything she gets to do in New York. I'm sure we've made a lasting impression on them, but we'll never think of them again now. There are lots more couples out there to meet and lots more opportunities for my husband and me to be generous with our wealth.

After we've played a few more games, of course.

*We have to make it fun, don't we?*





# 7

## CARRIE

I'm happy when I see the postman at my front door with a parcel under his arm because I know exactly what it is. It's the large photo frame I ordered online a couple of days ago, and it's the one I'll be using to hold the pictures I took when Andy and I were in New York last week.

We've just got back from our trip, and I haven't stopped smiling since because we had the time of our lives. It was everything I dreamt it would be. From a horse-drawn carriage ride around Central Park to taking selfies at the top of the Empire State Building, I can now officially say that my New Year's resolution came true.

I got to have my dream trip to New York, and it's all thanks to Martin and Michaela, that quirky couple we met at the New Year's Eve Party.

'Thank you very much,' I say to the postman as I accept the parcel from him. But he's not looking at me as he hands it over. He's looking over his shoulder at my husband, or rather, the car my husband is currently cleaning.

'Wow, now that's what I call a motor,' the postman says as he admires the gleaming Ferrari.

'Yeah, it's his pride and joy,' I say, smiling at my husband as he continues to polish his car, even though it couldn't be any more sparkling than it is right now.

I bid the postman a good day before he leaves, and as he stops and chats to Andy about the car, I go back inside and open my parcel. Sure enough, it is the photo frame that I ordered, and I hold it up to the space on the kitchen wall, which is where I plan to hang it once the photos have been arranged inside it.

The photos in question have already been printed and are currently set out on our kitchen table, so I sit down and make a

start on putting it all together. But I'm interrupted by a text message on my phone, and when I pick up my device, I see that the message is from my best friend, Sally.

She's asking if Andy and I fancy getting together later tonight and having a catch-up over a bottle of wine and a takeaway, and I quickly text back to tell her that it sounds like a plan. I haven't seen Sally since I got back from New York, so we'll have lots to talk about. I also make sure to mention in my reply that Andy and I will pay for the takeaway tonight because it's the least we can do considering what they have done for us recently.

Sally can't argue with that and tells me she'll see us later, and with that, I put my phone down and get back to work arranging the photos. But while I do, I reflect on the favour that Sally and her husband did for Andy and me because without it, none of this would have happened.

Not the trip to New York. Not the Ferrari. None of it.

*That's because my best friend was the one who told me about Michael and Michaela and about how meeting them would change our lives.*

It was a couple of years ago when Sally first told me about the couple that she and her husband, Graham, had met at a New Year's party at the Highbridge Hotel. She said they had found themselves sitting at a table with two other couples, one of whom shared a very unusual New Year's resolution. They had gone by the names Martin and Michaela and said they were both doctors in the city. But the intriguing part was when they mentioned wanting to sleep with other people.

Sally had said that she had been mortified at the suggestion and had done her best to avoid the couple for the rest of the night but not before she had told them what her resolution was for that particular year. She wanted to renovate her kitchen and transform it from the fairly average room it was at the time to a very sleek, modern space where she could prepare all her favourite meals in surroundings that were more befitting of a woman who loved to cook. Graham had also mentioned that his resolution was to build a 'man cave' at the bottom of his

garden where he could invite his friends round to play pool and watch the football.

The story took a twist when Sally told me how she and Graham had arrived home from the party the following day and found a cheque on their doorstep that would cover the cost of both the kitchen renovation and the 'man cave'. It was from 'M & M', who Sally figured was Martin and Michaela, the couple she had met at the party the night before.

But why?

That part still confused my best friend, or at least it did until the following year when she returned to the same party to see if she could spot the couple who had been so generous with their money. Sure enough, she saw them through the crowded room sitting at another table, and as the night wore on, she found the chance to go and speak to them. They were surprised to see her, but all she wanted to do was thank them for their generosity twelve months prior and ask them exactly why, and indeed how, they had done it.

Martin and Michaela were apparently pretty coy before admitting what they liked to do. They were millionaires who enjoyed playing a game, and at New Year, that game involved rewarding any couple who didn't take them up on their offer of coming to their hotel room to try and sleep with them. They were also clever in the way they ascertained the addresses of the people they were playing the game with, so they could visit their homes and deliver the prizes if the game was won. They reminded Sally how they had asked her where she lived, and when she had named the part of town, they had said they had a friend who lived in that area. That allowed them to ask again to get a more specific answer, and by the time Sally had finished, she had given the number of the house to go with the street name.

She hadn't thought anything of it at the time and had almost forgotten about that part of the conversation completely, but Martin and Michaela had expertly managed to get her address out of her without making it obvious that they were prying. It turned out to be the same way they obtained my address twelve months later, casually inquiring about

where we lived during a brief lull in the conversation, back when we were still getting to know each other and well before they dropped the bombshell that they wished to sleep with other people.

It seemed it was an annual game for them, and after clearing a few things up, Sally had left them to it that night, not wanting to spoil their fun and ruin another couple's chances at getting whatever it was they wished for the most. But that wasn't all Sally did. She also came straight to my house and told me all about it, before explaining what I had to do next.

*I had to get tickets to next year's party for me and Andy and make sure that whatever I did, I got on the same table as the millionaire couple.*

Thinking back on how I managed to do that, I can't help but smile because it was actually incredibly easy. Having purchased our tickets for the next year's party, Andy and I went to the hotel to check in and get ready for the meal. Guests were due to arrive in the ballroom at 6 PM for a champagne reception before being seated, but I made sure to go down before that so I could speak to one of the staff before everyone else arrived.

Entering the main room where the food would be served, I saw all the tables set out, ready for the upcoming meal. But I knew it was unlikely I would be seated next to Martin and Michaela, so I had to do a little editing with the seating plan. After asking one of the waiters if he could double-check with the chef regarding any allergens in the upcoming meal, I took advantage of having the room to myself and found mine and Andy's nametags. Then all I had to do was swap them with whichever couple was due to sit next to Martin and Michaela, ensuring we would be the ones who got the opportunity and not them.

I was able to make the swap, and once Andy and I were seated with the millionaire couple, I knew all we had to do was play along with the game, and pretty soon, we would be getting what we wanted too. And it worked. I got the holiday, and Andy got the car.

Do I feel bad for tricking Martin and Michaela? No, because I was playing a game, just like they were.

I just made sure we won, and we certainly did that.

*Happy New Year to us.*



## 8

ANDY

I can think of worse ways to start the new year than polishing a Ferrari.

This car is incredible. Immaculate. Gleaming.

And best of all, *mine*.

I'm not sure exactly how long I've spent out here cleaning my new car, but I haven't got any plans to go inside the house just yet. Carrie is in there now, and I see her occasionally at the window checking to see if I've finished yet. But I'm putting off going inside to see her, although it's not just because I'm enjoying spending time with my new vehicle.

*It's because I am feeling a little guilty about what I did at New Year's.*

As far as Carrie knows, I spent the early hours of that morning fast asleep next to her in the bed. But what she doesn't know is that I found it impossible to sleep because I was thinking about the offer Martin and Michaela had made us.

The chance to sleep with a beautiful woman and, in doing so, get the car I want? That sounded like too good of an offer to be true. But it kept me awake pondering it, and while it did, I thought about how my wife had been so quick to dismiss the idea of it.

I got that she saw it as infidelity but was it really cheating if it was more like a business arrangement?

I tried my best to hint that I was open to the possibility of it without making it too obvious that I was keen, but Carrie made it clear she didn't wish to pursue the opportunity. I guessed she wasn't as desperate to go to New York as she made out at the dinner table that night. But it wasn't just the prospect of a holiday and a Ferrari that was exciting me so. It

was Michaela herself, the attractive woman who came as part of the package. I couldn't stop thinking about her, and it got to the point where I wasn't even bothered about the car. I just wanted the opportunity she was giving me. The opportunity, for one night only, to be with somebody else.

*And that was why I found myself sneaking out of bed and creeping to my hotel room door just after 3 AM on New Year's Day.*

I already knew that Kath and Phil had visited Room 2B earlier that night because Carrie and I had spotted them out in the corridor. But the occupants of that room were in for another visitor, although this one would be more discreet than the previous ones.

I had moved as quietly as I could as I left my room and made my way down the corridor that night, aware that my decision-making and confidence was undoubtedly fuelled by all the champagne I had consumed earlier in the evening but still not stopping until I was in front of the door with 2B on it. Then I had knocked, very faintly but still loud enough to wake those inside.

While I had waited, I had no idea how Martin and Michaela would react when they saw me standing outside their room in an old t-shirt and scruffy pair of shorts, especially because I was alone.

Would the deal have only stood if both Carrie and I were there? Would Martin have said that I couldn't be with his wife if he couldn't be with mine? And would I have ultimately ended up having to scuttle back to my room disappointed and embarrassed?

Those things might have happened if Martin had been the one to answer the door.

But he wasn't because Michaela answered it instead.

And when she did, she had immediately put her fingers to her lips.

She had told me that Martin was asleep, not having been woken by my knock on the door. Then she had asked me what



I wanted, so I just came right out with it and said it.

*I wanted her.*

I had wondered what Michaela would do after my statement. Blush? Cringe? Get annoyed? Told me to get lost because the offer had expired? There were lots of ways she could have reacted. But in the end, she reacted in the best way possible for me.

She told me to wait a moment while she went back into her room to grab her keycard.

*And then she joined me out in the corridor before asking me if I knew anywhere we could go to be alone.*

I accidentally drop my sponge onto my driveway as I get distracted with the memory of what Michaela and I got up to in that empty conference room on the ground floor while everybody else in the hotel slept. It was wistful, wild and most of all, wrong, but that didn't stop either of us from having a good time.

Once we were done, I had been about to tell Michaela that I didn't want the car, if only so Carrie wouldn't get suspicious and figure out what I had done behind her back. But Michaela had something she needed to tell me too. She admitted that her and her husband didn't actually make a habit of sleeping with other couples, and it was just a game they played. They put couples to the test simply for fun, and if those couples passed the test by not agreeing to sleep with them, they got what they wanted for New Year's.

It was obvious then that Michaela had as much of a need to keep what she had done a secret as I had, so we both agreed to pretend like what we did hadn't happened. That meant once we had made it back to our beds and the morning came, certain things had to occur.

I had to act as if I'd just slept all night and been a faithful husband, while Michaela not only had to fake a night of undisturbed sleep too but also arrange for the car and the New York tickets to be delivered to our house, otherwise Martin would know something was wrong.

But that was accomplished. Michaela and I did what we had to do, and because of that, Carrie and Martin are still none the wiser.

As I pick up the sponge and go back to washing the car, I find it incredible to think that I got everything I wanted this New Year's.

A woman and a car.

Even some of the guilt I feel about what I have done is assuaged by the fact that Carrie got what she wanted too. She's been to New York now.

Everyone's a winner.

*Happy New Year to me.*



# 9

## MICHAELA

Okay, so I wasn't exactly honest.

I did break my own rules. I cheated, as did Andy, yet I still went along with the game and rewarded him and his wife with their gifts. But that was a small price to pay for keeping my secret from Martin.

He still doesn't know what I really did at New Year's.

*And I'll make sure he never does.*



# Epilogue

MARTIN

I've always enjoyed playing a game on New Year's Eve. My wife and I have great fun toying with other couples and putting their relationships to the test amidst a sea of champagne, canapes and midnight firework displays. But last New Year, I played a new game, and that game was called pretending to be asleep while my wife snuck out of our hotel room with another man.

Michaela must be stupid if she thinks I didn't wake up to that knock on the door, and she must be even more stupid if she thinks I still don't know about her sneaking out to go and be with Andy. I heard them whispering in the corridor just before I peeped and saw my wife creeping out of our room not long after 3 AM.

I know she cheated on me.

So why haven't I said anything to her?

*And why did I reward Andy with his Ferrari if he cheated on his wife too?*

I have my reasons, but they don't include me being weak and passive. Far from it. I've just been biding my time, letting the pair of them think they have gotten away with what they did. All the while, I have been plotting my revenge.

I've spent money on a lot of things since I became a millionaire. Houses. Cars. Holidays. But today, I made a new purchase.

I hired the services of a hitman.

*And I hope it will be the best thing I've bought so far.*

The man I have hired is very good at making murder look like an accident, which is how I am going to get away with taking the lives of Michaela and Andy.

My dear wife will encounter difficulties with her parachute during our upcoming jump together to mark fifteen years of marriage and will plummet to her death while I float peacefully to the ground beside her. Meanwhile, Andy will encounter difficulties with his Ferrari, finding that the brakes don't work quite as well as they used to the next time he is out taking the high-powered vehicle for a spin, ultimately crashing and burning up in the resulting fireball.

Two people who were taken by two tragic accidents.

What a shame.

*And what an investment.*

What about Carrie in all of this? She is just as innocent as I am. I'm aware of that, which is why, once our respective partners are in the ground, I will visit to see how she is doing. I'll say I heard about Andy's accident in the news and wanted to check she was okay, possibly mentioning that I feel a little guilty about his death because I bought him that Ferrari after all. But I doubt she'll blame me, especially not once she hears about poor Michaela and how we're both widowers by then.

I expect that fact will bring us together. Make us close.  
*Very close.*

She did look rather pretty at that New Year's party.

So who knows?

*Maybe she'll be the woman on my arm at the next one.*

*THE END*





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Thank you again for reading *The New Year's Party*. If you have enjoyed this short story and if it's your first time discovering my writing, you'll be pleased to know that I have several full-length books in this genre, and you can find a list of my titles on the next page.

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# About The Author

Daniel Hurst lives in the Northwest of England with his wife, Harriet, and considers himself extremely fortunate to be able to write stories every day for his readers.

You can visit him at his online home

[www.danielhurstbooks.com](http://www.danielhurstbooks.com)

You can connect with Daniel on Facebook at

[www.facebook.com/danielhurstbooks](http://www.facebook.com/danielhurstbooks) or on Instagram at

[www.instagram.com/danielhurstbooks](http://www.instagram.com/danielhurstbooks)

He is always happy to receive emails from readers at

[daniel@danielhurstbooks.com](mailto:daniel@danielhurstbooks.com) and replies to every single one.

Thank you for reading.

**Daniel**

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