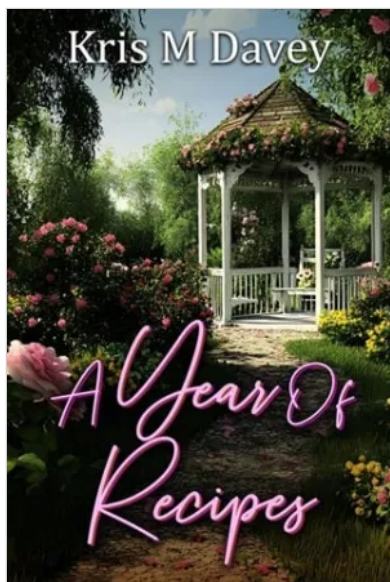




A Year of Recipes

Author: *Kris M Davey*

Category: Romance

Description: This is a short story following Recipes for Life.

This is a brief glance at Odette and Murphys marriage over the years.

This short story cannot be read without reading Recipes for Life

Its book two in my Recipes for Love series.

Recipes for Life

A Year of Recipes-short story

Recipes for Disaster- Wynns story

A Perfect Recipe- Luxs story

Total Pages (Source): 12

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:14 am

Murphy

The countdown on the TV was what originally woke me.

Everyone screaming in celebration must have kicked my unconscious brain into gear, thinking it was our son Lennon waking up.

I wanted to snag him before Odette woke up.

Lennon was the definition of Gerber baby cute; but don't you dare let those adorable baby looks fool you.

He was a tough baby. If he wasn't being held or fed, he was crying.

He was an attention hog, and unfortunately for us, I was a total sucker and gave in to every single one of his demands.

Odette and I decided rather quickly after Lennon was born that two were enough for us—two kids were perfect, but these two might send us into an early grave.

Luck was on my side: it wasn't Lennon being fussy.

He was curled asleep between Odette and me on the sofa, giving him the attention he needed, even in his sleeping form.

I couldn't help the grin that took over my face as I looked at my sleeping family.

This was all I'd ever need, all I could ever want, and if I could bottle up this feeling right here and sell it, I'd never have to worry about money again.

A clearing of a throat had me looking over at my daughter Lux as she wiped the sleep from her eyes.

"Daddy!" She started in a shout but immediately toned down to a whisper once she saw the horror-filled look I shot at a sleeping Lennon, praying it didn't wake him.

Lux tried her best not to laugh. She had asked us the other day if she could stay home from school because she didn't sleep one wink because of her brother.

"Sorry, Daddy," she whispered and scooted off the sofa, where she sat nestled into the other side of her mom and came over to me. "I just got so excited!"

"It's okay, baby girl. Happy New Year!" I picked her up and tucked her into my side but was very careful not to jostle Lennon or Odette awake.

I kissed Lux on the nose, and she squealed a little, which caused Odette to stir and her eyes start to flutter open.

She immediately softened when she became fully aware and she took in Lux and me, with Lennon all but squished in between us.

Her eyes filled with gratitude and tears, and I used my one free hand that wasn't holding our daughter to wipe them away before they fell and held her cheek in my hand as she nuzzled into it.

I lifted her chin with my thumb so she could see me.

"Thank you ," I mouthed in her direction, and I knew she knew what I was thanking

her for. This family. The chance to actually be a family. The look she gave me took my breath away.

“In this life and the next ,” she mouthed back to me, and I couldn’t help but lean down to kiss her.

“Happy New Year, Odette.” I tried to say it quietly, but I couldn’t seem to keep my emotions at bay, and it rumbled out louder than I had anticipated.

The small bundle of joy we brought into this world that we appropriately named Lennon due to his healthy lungs, woke up with a vengeance and let us know immediately how unhappy he was that he wasn’t the center of attention.

Lux groaned from beside us, “Way to go. No sleep for anybody.” She did her best to pout but was unable to hide her smile.

Odette stood up to stretch and laughed at our daughter. “You begged us for a sibling.”

“I changed my mind.”

“Too late, kid; he’s already here.” Odette said with a smirk.

She held her hands out to me so I could hand her Lennon. “Still feel like thanking me?” She winked as I placed our son in her arms.

“Always.”

Page 2

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Odette

“I’m going to kill him, Wynn. Straight up kill him. ”

Her laugh sounded over the phone, and I couldn’t help but smile at her happiness. I never thought I’d hear the lightness she now carried in her tone.

“Ode...it takes two to make a child.”

“I know, but I’m so tired, Wynn. I haven’t slept in a year. A year. ”

I stood there, aggressively stirring the cupcake mix for Lux to take to her class for their Valentine’s Day party tomorrow. I stood there, mixing batter and writing cards, all while my lovely husband had passed out on the sofa with our son. I was contemplating murder for that reason alone.

How dare he be sleeping.

“You realize you’re planning your husband's murder because he’s sleeping, right?”

“You forgot to add that he’s sleeping peacefully.”

She just laughed harder over the phone. “And what would you have me do?”

“Come over and bring Benji. We all know how that gets Murphy all bent out of shape,” I hissed into the phone, not caring how ridiculous I sounded.

A lack of sleep will do that to you. I loved my kid, I really, really did, but the little terror hadn't let me sleep through the night since he was born.

Now, his dad had the audacity to grab the fussy one-and-a-half-year-old from me when he was done with work and got him to take his nap without any bribery. I was at my wits' end.

"Odette, please, be reasonable. Benji isn't a sacrificial lamb."

"He could be. Please, for me," I begged and turned my back on the scene of my sleeping boys.

"It's the lack of sleep that's affecting the rational part of your decision making."

I knew she was right; it took Murphy months to get over Benji being a permanent fixture in our lives.

I still remember the color of red Murphy's face had turned when Wynn told us about their relationship.

I had the exact opposite reaction; I was practically bouncing off the walls in excitement because I could see how enamored she was with Benji and I saw the way Benji looked at Wynn.

He looked at Wynn like Murphy looked at me—like she was his reason.

"Wife." I heard from behind me, then I heard the "Shit" Wynn let out from the other side of the phone before the line went dead. "Care to let me in on your crazy plan?"

Of course he called me Wife; he knew what that did to me, and he had been obsessed with using it ever since we re-tied the knot last month.

It was a small ceremony in our backyard, with only family, and it was one of the best nights of my life.

I never knew I could fall so deeply in love with my life, and I would do everything in my power to preserve it, cherish it, and grow old with it.

“Not particularly,” I mumbled, doing my best to keep my angry facade in place.

He chuckled. “You sure about that?”

I grumbled, “It’s on a need-to-know basis.”

He barked out a laugh. “I heard you planning my early demise.”

“You were supposed to be asleep.”

“Who could sleep through all that mental shouting you were doing in my direction.” His arms came around and circled me from behind. “Would you like some help with these?”

I found myself wanting something completely different.

“Stop looking at me like that, Odette, or these cupcakes won’t ever get finished.”

I bit my lip, and I took in the quiet around us. Lux was at her grandparents; Lennon was, for once, snoozing peacefully, and I made the decision that the cupcakes could definitely wait.

“Fuck the cupcakes. Take me upstairs, Husband.”

“As you wish.” He scooped me up and all but sprinted to our room upstairs, then

practically threw me onto the bed.

“Wait, you better grab that bowl of frosting...”

“Do. Not. Move.” He gave me a death glare. “You stay right there.” He pointed at me.

This is the only place I wanted to be, I thought, gazing at his retreating form.

Always.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:14 am

Murphy

I had to stop glaring at the man. I knew I had to stop glaring at him, but he had seen my wife naked and I just couldn't help the red haze that clouded my vision whenever I looked at him.

He was about to become my brother-in-law.

Odette was so excited and happy for Wynn that I was trying my best not to punch him in the face on his wedding day.

I saw the way he always tracked Wynn with his eyes, like he was afraid if he took his eyes off her for one second, she would change her mind and disappear.

I saw how he barely gave my wife a fleeting glance and was nothing but polite to her.

The most they spoke about was work, some new research or something that happened at the hospital.

There were no lingering looks, no pent-up sexual chemistry.

Zilch. And I knew that I should be thankful, that I should get over it.

..but he's seen her naked, and I could just not let that go.

Or at least I thought I couldn't, but my wife was currently standing on one end of the aisle with tears streaming down her face as Wynn walked toward where they stood to

a beautiful piano version of “You Raise Me Up.” And one glance at Benji showed me the error of my ways.

His entire focus was on his bride-to-be, with so many emotions filtering through his face, but the most prominent one was a look of awe.

Awe over Wynn, awe over the depth of his love for her. I saw the moment he started walking towards her, not caring that he was meeting her halfway down the aisle. The music stopped playing and Wynn looked at him in bewilderment.

“Benji...you’re supposed to meet me down there,” she said out of the corner of her mouth,

“I couldn’t wait.” He held his hand out to her as the music started up again, and they made it the rest of the way down the aisle, together.

Odette wasn’t even trying to hide her tears, and Lux was right beside her, throwing an obscene number of flowers left in her basket from earlier over the couple as they stood facing each other ready to say “I do,” which only caused everyone in attendance to laugh.

Fine, maybe I could get over it...but I would always remember it.

Always.

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Odette

“I take back every mean thing I’ve ever said about you when you were pregnant, I swear.” Wynn said through clenched teeth as her little one kicked the ever-loving crap out of her insides.

“I didn’t know I could be so uncomfortable,” she whined. My normally stoic sister was a total demon when pregnant. Her hormones made her, well... absolutely unhinged. I couldn’t help but love her, but I had no idea how Benji hadn’t run for the hills yet.

“Benji, how do you deal with her constant complaining?”

Of course, Benji was just looking at my sister with the most smitten look on his face, and it made me gag. He was a lost cause.

“She can be as unreasonable as she wants; she’s carrying my kid.

” His no-nonsense tone let me know that he was, in fact, not kidding.

He had informed us over the course of our last dinner together that he had been studying how other species treated their mate while pregnant, and he had come up with the fool-proof plan of whatever Wynn wants, Wynn gets.

Smart bastard.

Once Wynn announced her pregnancy, and Benji went all mother hen on us, Murphy

had finally made peace with him in our lives.

It didn't hurt that Benji barely tossed a look in my direction; his focus was always almost one hundred percent on my sister.

At first, I thought it was a bit weird, a little unsettling, but once I realized how much Wynn settled Benji, I understood everything.

"Mark my words, you'll regret having that motto, Benji," Murphy said as he handed him a beer from across the table.

He just shrugged while he took him up on his offer. "Maybe, but I'm good with it."

"Leave him alone, Murphy. You don't always have to be right."

"Yet I always am..." he told Wynn but when he looked at me.

"Always," he mouthed.

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Odette

“My god, when did we get old?” Wynn asked the table as we cheered for the fact that Wynn could drink alcohol again.

“I’m going to say around the time we decided to get married and pop out babies. Re-married and more babies in my case,” I told her.

Benji was over in the shop with Murphy. Ever since they had become parents, it was like Murphy finally accepted Benji into the fold.

Especially after that dinner we had when Benji promptly fell asleep, face-first, into his plate.

Murphy took pity on the poor man and befriended him.

He told me he ‘knew how tough fatherhood could be at first,’ and ‘what kind of man would he be if he didn’t lend some advice.’

Their friendship had only grown since then, especially since Murphy found out Benji was incapable of being anything but a good guy. They bonded over fatherhood, and Murphy was trying to teach Benji about being handier in the real world, not just in the operating room or hospital.

“It’s the nights like these that make it all worth it, don’t you think?” Wynn whispered to me.

“It’s a beautiful life, Wynn, and it’s only just beginning.”

Her smile was radiant as she nodded and agreed with me.

“I’d have to agree with my wife.”

Murphy and Benji must have snuck up behind us while we were enjoying the sunset.

“You always agree with her, even when she’s wrong,” Wynn pointed out, but Murphy just grinned and bent down low enough so only I could hear him and whispered, “always.”

Always.

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Odette

“They grow up so fast.” My mother-in-law’s voice caught me off guard as I watched Lux run after her brother, getting lost in the willow trees and the flowers that only seemed to multiply every year.

“It’s absolutely insane how much I love them,” I said, unable to hide my tears at how close I came to not having this at all—at how close Lennon came to just being a dream.

“You worked hard to get here; you deserve the happiness that comes with it.”

She handed me a glass of what I thought was lemonade, but upon first sip, it tasted like gasoline. “My god! What did you put in here?”

“Don’t be so dramatic. It’s just a shot or two.”

“ Susan,” I scolded while still choking on the drink.

“Okay, fine...probably closer to two shots.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at her. “Are we celebrating?”

“If that’s what you have to tell yourself, dear.”

Still chuckling to myself, I took another sip of her deadly concoction and tried not to gag.

I heard the roaring of Murphy's tools going in his shop and knew that he and his dad were currently cutting some lumber for a commissioned dining room table he was in the process of working on. The entire scene laid before me was the one thing I'd worked so hard for.

Kids in the yard, in-laws over to enjoy a summer evening.

Wynn and Benji were on their way with their rugrat in tow, almost the exact same scene from a year ago, just one year older.

I was one sip away from being tipsy, or maybe I was just riding the high of my life.

I couldn't help but look over at my mother-in-law and smile.

"I might work hard, but he's worked harder. He picks us and this life every day, even on the days I can't."

She didn't need to add more words, she knew what I meant.

"Always."

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Murphy

“I have a date tonight.” Lux had barreled inside after spending the afternoon at the pool with her friends, and I could hear the roaring sound of blood pumping throughout my body.

A stroke...I think I was having a stroke.

I was fully prepared to start panicking before I felt the comforting touch I'd know anywhere.

Odette. My peace .

Surely, she would talk some sense into our daughter. There would be no dating, not while she lived under my roof, and even then, I wasn't sold on the idea.

“Absolutely not,” I said at the exact same time as my wife asked, “What's his name?”

She shot me a look of surprise while I couldn't help but glare at her and her question. Who cares what his name is? She's not going.

“You're fourteen,” I stuttered. No way. No fuckin' way!

“I'm in high school now Dad.”

“Barely,” I said through gritted teeth, still waiting for Odette to back me up. Our girl took after her mother completely, and I knew she was gorgeous. The thought of her in

high school was already a lot for me to take in, but dating? I don't think my heart could handle this.

"Lux, why don't you go upstairs, and I'll talk to your dad, okay?"

"Mom..." She started to argue but Odette gave her a look that I'd been on the receiving end of multiple times—meaning there was absolutely no room for debate.

"Ugh, fine." She stomped off, and I couldn't help the look I shot at my wife.

"Don't give me that look, Murph. At least she told us about it. Would you rather she lied? "

"She wouldn't do that."

"She's fourteen."

Odette started to giggle, and no matter how stressed I was, her giggling had always been my undoing. I felt my anxiety start to fade into background noise while I found normalcy in handling this situation with the woman who was the love of my life.

"Exactly why she shouldn't be dating! My god, Odette, I really think you're trying to kill me.

Did you raise my life insurance policy? Is that it?

Finally, you've had enough of me?" Her giggles turned into full-blown laughter and just continued to ease my worries and fears.

"She can't date, babe... She just can't. I'm not ready."

I pulled my wife to me and groaned into her neck, but breathing in her scent helped to calm me further.

“If we tell her no, she’ll just want to do it more.”

“I hate when you’re right.”

“I’m always right. Why don’t we ask if he wants to have dinner here? Okay? That way we can see who this boy is for ourselves.”

The wheels in my head were spinning. Fine, but like hell was I going to make it easy.

I didn’t realize I hadn’t spoken my thoughts out loud until my wife called after me, “Uh, Murph, where ya going?”

“To get a goddamn shotgun, Odette. Where the hell do you think?”

She busted out laughing. “You always surprise me Murph.”

Always.

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Odette

“I can’t believe you picked out our daughter’s sophomore year homecoming dress without letting me see it.” Murphy huffed and puffed in our bathroom behind me as I was removing my makeup.

“Murph, you would have lit the store on fire, and with two kids in the house, I wouldn’t have been able to afford your bail.

” If he had laid eyes on some of the options for dresses they had, I had no doubt he would have at least committed a misdemeanor, if not a full-fledged felony.

I was on whatever team kept my husband out of jail.

“You aren’t giving me much reassurance here, Odette.” He continued to pace.

“Could you just trust me, please?” I begged him.

It had taken hours for us to find the perfect dress—one that would showcase that she wasn’t a kid anymore but was still respectful and wouldn’t send her father into an early grave...or her date.

It was a perfect powder blue with a sweetheart neckline; it sat high enough to hide anything that could be considered risqué.

It fell to the floor in silk that hugged her body but was blurred by the layer of sparkly tulle.

You would think it would make it look tacky; however, it fell just perfectly so she looked like she was glowing.

It really was the perfect dress, and we had spent entirely too much money on it.

“It’s the perfect dress for her, and you will love it. Do you understand me?”

His distressed eyes met mine and softened for a fraction of a second before I saw him shake his head and the stress crept back in. “I just can’t believe she’s growing up. And she’s been dating that punk for over a year. Do you know what kids are doing at fifteen, Odette?”

“Murph, it’s just puppy love, you know that.”

“I’m sure that’s what people used to say about us.”

I sighed at my husband. “I’m sure they did, but she cares more about her dress than who her date is. Believe me, Murph, he isn’t her forever.”

That seemed to make him relax a bit more than anything else I’ve said. “I can’t help it.”

“She’ll always be your little girl, even if she puts on a fancy dress.” I squeezed his hand as I headed to our bedroom to turn in for the night.

“Always,” he agreed with me as he laid down next to me.

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Odette

I stood looking out at gardens through the sliding glass door, and despite the wind and rain, I caught my reflection. I couldn't hide the devastation I saw on my face that matched the one we saw in our daughter's earlier this evening.

"Did she say when she would be home?" Murphy's trembling voice called out to me from the living room, and I realized I was holding the cup of coffee I was supposed to bring to him. I directed my attention from my reflection and made my way to him.

I shook my head and handed him the cup of coffee I thought I just made, but the cold cup hinted that I'd been lost in my memories for longer than I thought. "Wynn said she would keep Lennon for the night. He and Benji were apparently putting together some sort of Lego race car track."

For once, Murphy didn't grimace at the sound of Benji's name, and I knew the conversation—or should I say, confrontation—between Murphy and Lux this afternoon after school was tearing him apart.

We had always known the day would come; we just didn't expect it to be on some random rainy September afternoon.

"And Lux?" He choked out her name.

"She made it just fine; she asked Wynn if she could spend the night. Benji is on Lennon duty, and Wynn is on Lux duty."

I sat down next to Murphy and placed my hand over his.

His glazed-over eyes held such sadness that I couldn't help but want to shield him from our daughter's impending wrath.

We took pride in the fact that we raised an extremely independent daughter, a daughter who was never scared to speak her mind or stick up for what she wanted.

She was a perfect mix of Murphy, me, and of course, Wynn.

In fact, she took after Wynn so much, it was uncanny.

Her impossibly smart mouth got her into trouble more often than not, and I knew this wasn't something she was just going to let go.

She was a daddy's girl through and through, and this changed everything for her.

"Murph..." I whispered as I tugged him into my body. I could feel his body start to shake, knowing all I could do was hold him through his emotions.

"She hates me—" His voice was broken beyond belief as I felt the anguish in his words wash over me.

"She could never. She could never hate you, Murph. She loves you, and that's what makes this so hard."

"Did you see her face?" he whispered. I let myself remember what just happened a few hours ago, even though it felt like days since we'd been sitting here.

"Mom? Dad? Are you home?" Lux's panicked voice carried from the entryway to the kitchen, where I was sitting reading some new medical journal and Murphy was

sorting through emails from new potential clients.

“In the kitchen,” I hollered back while shooting Murphy a “what gives?” look, only to have him shrug at me in response.

Lux came barreling into the kitchen at high speed, and I noticed the tears in her eyes.

I immediately went into Momma Bear mode and stalked toward her.

Unfortunately, I totally missed the way she glared at her dad before meeting me halfway and throwing herself into my arms.

“What happened, my love?” I whispered into her hair. Once I said those words, I had a sobbing teenager in my arms, who was struggling to breathe through her tears. Murphy got up from his seat and started to pull both of us into him.

“No! Don’t touch me!” Lux all but screamed at her dad, and I was shocked stupid at the malice behind her words. Murphy must have felt the same because he stood frozen with his arms still outstretched.

“Lux,” I scolded her. “What has gotten into you? You don’t speak to your dad that way. Ever.”

She pulled away from me, and I couldn’t help but wince at the hatred I saw reflected in her gaze and I immediately knew...

She knows.

“Lux...what happened?”

“He cheated on you! Dad cheated on you. How...how could you forgive him? How

could you? You always told me to be strong; you raised me to demand respect, and you're with a cheater .

"She shot her dad the nastiest look I've ever seen, marring her beautiful features, and I couldn't help but gasp as Murphy stumbled back as if she had physically hit him.

"You cheated on Mom." Her words were a direct hit, leaving no room for debate—not that there would be one.

"You both lied to me," she whispered, more to herself.

"That is not true, Lux. Despite what you think, you are the child, and you are not entitled to know everything about your father and me."

She shook her head, and I knew nothing we would say right now would make any difference to her. She needed to wrap her mind around it first.

"I can't be here... I'm going to Aunt Wynn's."

I could only nod in understanding because Wynn was who I needed at the time as well.

"Lux..."

"I can't." She turned on her heel, grabbed the keys to the car she and Murphy had spent last summer fixing up together, and stormed out the door. Murphy was still standing like he was frozen in time.

"She hates me," he mumbled again, bringing me back to him in the present.

"She doesn't hate you, Murph... She's sixteen, and she just realized her parents are

human and imperfect. That's going to take a minute to come to terms with."

"I deserve it... I deserve it all." His hands wrapped around my waist as he clung to me, and as much sorrow as I felt for my daughter in finding out her father wasn't perfect, I knew she would forgive him, because I had.

Murphy had spent her entire life making up for a mistake Lux had no idea about and being the best father and husband that he could possibly be.

If Lux wanted it, he made it happen, no questions asked.

He would not be allowed to lose sight of that.

"Murphy, look at me."

He nuzzled his head further into me instead. "Murph. Please."

He managed to sit upright, but his shoulders were slumped and his head was in his hands. He looked like the picture of a man who had the weight of the world on his shoulders, and I found myself sliding to the floor between his legs, forcing him to look at me instead.

"Murphy, you are the absolute love of my life. You have proved yourself over and over again. You haven't missed one bedtime routine; you haven't missed a single after-school activity.

You bought a shotgun and learned how to use it, just so you could clean it to scare her dates.

You have dedicated your entire life to this family.

We never intended to keep the truth from her, but it's just never come up why we were separated.

This will be hard, but we will get through it like we always have. As a family."

"As a family," he said as he nestled his head in the palm of my hand.

"As a family."

Always.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:14 am

Murphy

The last year has been tough—real tough.

The kind of tough that makes you question everything you've ever done in your life to get to that point.

It was my cross to bear, and I would bear it happily and for the rest of my days if it meant that eventually, I could be the dad and man my daughter had once seen me as.

As long as I got to come home to my wife and family, I would bear whatever I needed to.

And though it was slow, we were getting there; we were making progress.

It had taken over six months for her to speak to me again, and even then, it was more like a grunt of acknowledgement here and there.

Let me be clear, six months for a teenager not to utter a single word in your direction was probably some kind of world record.

I saw my baby girl shut down right in front of me—it was the hardest thing I've ever been through, and I'd lost the love of my life once.

Something about your child oozing disdain for you from their very essence was debilitating.

Odette rotated from wanting to shake Lux out of her bitterness and grudge to understanding because she had once felt all those same emotions.

She had admitted in our therapy session that it was hard for her not to place blame on me again.

It felt like she was going through the betrayal again but through the eyes of her daughter, and she felt weak.

She felt like she had betrayed some sisterhood and it was hard for her, and some days she struggled with her forgiveness.

I hated that I ever put us in this position, and I never blamed Odette in her struggle—I would never blame her for that. I listened as she cried over it again, as she screamed at me for the first time in seven years, her hands clenched into fists at our last session.

“Please don’t ask me how I feel right now,” she spat at me

“It might help if you...”

“Fine, fuck you, Murphy. Fuck you for putting us in this position in the first place. It’s the hardest part of my life, being so helplessly in love with someone who tossed me away, who tossed our family away.

And now I have to sit here and explain to my daughter that she should forgive you because I did, but it’s a choice I make every day.

I choose to forgive you and look past what happened.

Every day, I make that choice and it’s not always the easiest; in fact, it’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.

How can I ask my daughter to do that? What if she doesn't want to?

That's her choice, and I refuse to take her choices away. ”

I broke that day. I knew I'd pay for my mistakes for the rest of my life; I just never thought Odette would wake up every day bearing the weight of her choice like I did.

We started to heal again after she let me have it.

I realized there wasn't anything I could do but be here, just like I always have been.

Eventually, Lux saw through the hurt; she saw the love and devotion her mom and I raised her with, and she saw how much we loved each other.

She saw how much we would always love each other, and she began to understand and forgive.

Which led me to where I was right now, sitting with Lux during our weekly silent dinner date that our therapist recommended and Odette adamantly agreed that maybe we would get further if we had one on one time, which led us to now, a year and a month since Lux had found out.

“I'm tired of hating you,” Lux finally whispered to me over her plate of spaghetti. It had been so long since I heard her string a full sentence my way.

“Baby girl...” I couldn't help but choke on my words. Hearing her admit that she hated me felt like she was stabbing my already bleeding heart.

“I thought I'd ask you why, but the why doesn't really matter, does it?”

“If it matters to you, then it matters, Lux.”

“I don’t think I want to know,” she whispered as tears streamed down her face.

I wanted to wrap her up in my arms and squeeze all my sorrys into her so she could carry them for the rest of her life.

If there was anything she could take away from this, I wanted her to know how damn sorry I was, even knowing it wouldn’t fix anything.

“Do you regret it?” she barely got the words out.

“Every day, with every breath I take.”

“I’m tired of hating you. It’s exhausting,” she said again, then went back to eating her spaghetti. And for the first time in a year, it felt like there might be light at the end of this tunnel.

“I’ll always be here for you kid, even if you don’t want me to be.”

Always.

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Odette

Our house looked like the holidays had thrown up in it, with garland hanging from every available empty space.

The outside of the house could win some sort of Hallmark movie award.

Murphy had bribed Lennon to decorate the backyard and woodshop like Santa's Village and, in turn, Lennon begged Lux to help, because 'Mom and Dad had apparently lost their minds.'

Last Christmas we were still in the thick of Lux forgiving her dad and doing our best to shield Lennon from the fall out, and this year we were spending our last Christmas with Lux still under our roof before she left for college.

I might have gone a bit off the deep end to make up for last year and to give her a proper holiday break she could remember.

Murphy had spent this entire last year reaffirming the family unit to the point where Lennon had joked that he was going to run away to Wynn and Benji's house or his grandparents because at least they weren't suffocating his adolescence or whatever that meant.

"Mom, I think Dad has lost his mind. I mean really, really lost it."

I couldn't help but chuckle at Lennon's complaining, only for it to be followed by Lux scolding him, "Let Dad be. Maybe he's going senile in his old age; we all know

he isn't the best at decision making..."

"Lux." I gave off a warning tone, even though she had admitted to me months ago she had forgiven him, she sometimes made these rude, off-handed comments because she was still just a teenager and wanted to push her luck.

"Just sayin..."

"Lennon, go find something else that needs tinsel, and leave me and Lux for a minute please."

He groaned, "More tinsel? Mom, you can probably see our house from outer space."

"Sounds perfect to me. Go tinsel something. Now."

Lux snickered at her brother's retreating form.

"Sit, kid. Now."

She huffed but sat regardless. "I thought we were over the passive-aggressive comments about your dad."

Something we never would have anticipated was what seemed like the never-ending fall-out of Murphy's indiscretion.

I had known how difficult it would be to restart our relationship, because there was no such thing as a "clean slate" after cheating, but I made a choice, a choice I stuck by, and one I would make again.

"Sometimes it's hard... I feel this bitterness toward him, and I can't help it," Lux said, and I studied her.

She looked almost ashamed of how she was feeling about her dad.

I knew she struggled with the knowledge because she only ever had fond memories of him.

He was always there for her. It was hard for her to separate her dad being her dad and putting him in the “he’s a human who makes mistakes category. ”

“Can I ask you a question, baby girl?”

She shrugged as if it made no difference to her.

“If you had never found out the truth by snooping through your grandma’s journals, would you have ever known what happened between your dad and me?”

She shook her head.

“Now, can you understand why we didn’t tell you?”

I know it’s hard for you to understand this because you’re still learning how to become an adult, how to sort through and deal with these big adult feelings, and your dad and I didn’t want this to touch you.

We didn’t want you to judge your father based on the worst thing he’s ever done.

Can you understand that? That we decided together, as a couple, to work through it because he’s it for me, baby girl.

Your dad...he’s it for me, and I’m it for him.

Yes, we got lost, but we found our way. And that’s our journey, our story, our

beginning, and we refused to let that be the end.

You have to find a way to be okay with that because you only get one dad, and he loves you more than life itself.

I can tell you that all this anger you have, you'll regret it one day. ”

“Were you angry at him?”

“Oh, you have no idea,” I told her truthfully.

“But you forgave him?”

“Yes.” There was no hesitation in my forgiveness now; he had earned it and continued to earn it every day of every year that we were together.

“Do you regret it?”

I shook my head. “I don't regret any part of it, Lux, and that might be hard for you to understand.

I don't regret the beginning because it gave me you, I don't regret the fall-out because it made us stronger , and I'll never regret forgiving your dad because the forgiveness gave me Lennon, and it gave me this beautiful life.

I would have missed out on all that if I held on to my anger. ”

“But you did, for a while... I read about it. For years. I remember, you know, when you guys weren't together. Now that I'm older, I remember how sad you were. How hard you worked at pretending you were okay. I remember it all now.”

I nodded at her. “A selfish part of me wishes I could have shielded you from that, but I am human, and I made my own mistakes in trying to heal.”

“What made you decide to give him another chance?”

“Truthfully, Lux, I’m not sure. It was a bunch of little things and nothing at the same time.

I realized how it felt like I was struggling to breathe without him.

I saw how dedicated he was to you, how dedicated he was to me , even though I made it almost impossible for him to be part of my life. I saw the change.”

“He’s always been the best dad.”

“I know.”

“Always,” she whispered, and I heard it, even though it was obvious she was saying it to herself, and not to me.

Always.

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Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:14 am

Odette

I couldn't help the pacing in my kitchen as I waited for Lux's car to pull up into the drive.

This was the first time she'd been away from home for a stretch of time this long, and I was positively crawling out of my skin to have my baby back under my roof for the first time since she left for college.

She decided to go skiing with some friends over Thanksgiving, and as much as Murphy and I wanted to beg her to come home and spend time with her parents, we knew she needed to spread her wings and make a life for herself.

"I can feel your anxiety." Murphy's voice hit the tender spot behind my ear that still caused my body to go on high-alert and goosebumps to rise over my skin, even after all these years. "Later, baby." He kissed the tender spot, and I had to suppress a moan.

"I know what you're doing," I scolded.

"And what's that?"

"Trying to distract me. She should have been here by now."

Murphy rolled his eyes. "She's nineteen; she's probably just running late."

I couldn't help but look at him in confusion. How dare he act like he wasn't the one

who booked us a hotel after we dropped her off for college for an entire week—not just the weekend, like we had originally agreed on in case she needed us.

She didn't .

“You're oddly calm.”

“Don't let him fool you, Ma; he was just checking that tracker app he installed on her phone.

” Lennon's voice called from behind me as he stood eating a sandwich, even though dinner would be ready as soon as Lux got here.

My eleven-year-old, almost twelve-year-old, stood at an alarming five foot eight already, and I knew I was going to be in some serious trouble with him.

His looks took after his dad, and girls were already swooning .

“Tracker app?” I had no idea what my son was talking about, and a quick glance at my husband had me noticing his red cheeks.

“That was our secret, bud. Did you forget?”

At least he had the decency to look a little ashamed.

“Oops” was Lennon's only response as he shoved the last half of his sandwich into his mouth in one bite.

“Do we have to have a discussion about boundaries, Murph?”

“Boundaries?” he scoffed.

“She’s nineteen... We shouldn’t be tracking her.”

“You refused to let us move close to her school, so this is my compromise, Odette. Besides, I don’t check it all the time.”

“Only every morning and night.” Lennon had no problem outing his father for his actions.

“Murph,” I started to scold but was met by tires turning into the driveway and all thoughts of Lux’s invasion of privacy were shoved to the back of mind. I couldn’t wait to wrap my hands around my daughter, and I was out the front door before she even had the car turned off.

“Mom!” She met my excitement with her own as I threw open her car door and she tossed herself into my awaiting arms. “Dad! Lennon!” She laughed as they joined us outside. “I missed you guys!”

We stood out there, hugging for what one would probably consider a touch too long, but I couldn’t find it in me to care one bit.

A grumbling stomach broke up the peace of the moment, and Lennon’s muffled voice muttered out, “I’m starving.”

I couldn’t help but laugh as we untangled ourselves from each other, and I noticed Murphy had tears in his eyes, just like I did.

“It smells like Dad’s famous grilled cheese in here,” Lux pointed out as we made our way inside.

She made her way to the stove and uncovered the tomato soup that Murphy always made to go with it.

“I knew it!” Her eyes were light and sparkling, and I knew what that meant.

.. She looked like something brought her to another dimension of life.

Love.

“She looks good, but there’s something different about her...” Murphy said as we watched Lux bustle around the kitchen like she hadn’t been gone for months.

“She’s in love, Murph.”

He whipped his head to me as if the words I said clicked everything into place.

“She looks different because she’s in love.”

“That’s not possible. She’s our little girl.” He moved in front of me, so he was openly gaping at Lux now as if he was seeing her for the first time.

“She’ll always be our little girl, even if she’s growing up.” I reaffirmed while leaning back into him and giving him a squeeze around the waist. His misty eyes tracked her while she was talking to Lennon and laughing in the kitchen and he turned back to me and mouthed the words,

“Always.”

The end.