

An Excerpt from the
novel

Unfaithful

By

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*One forbidden act of desire
can destroy everything you love.*

Unfaithful



At the exact moment Olivia's line goes silent, Ryan awakens. He senses floors creaking, hears a door closing and a toilet flush. Ryan rises up slowly to examine his surroundings. Feeling the throbbing in his head, he curses silently.

He finds himself in a darkened room—a small, cramped one—on the couch, covered by a light blanket, his feet pressed against the end of the hard sofa. Clothes still on and rumpled. The smell of cigarette smoke hangs on the fabric like cheap cologne. Looking around the living room, he sees a small TV housed in one of those entertainment centers made from wood veneer—the kind you find in Wal-Mart or Target. Several dozen DVDs are in the cabinet underneath the TV.

Hardwood floors, no carpet. A rattan chair in the corner by the window. A number of potted plants; a few prints hanging on walls—an apparent attempt to add color to the place. Small trinkets and miniature sculptures made of wood and stone adorn the coffee table and are positioned around the room.

Ryan places his feet on the cold floor. Hands to his face, holding his head. The pain is a dull roar—a throb that lessens a bit when he massages his temples with his fingers.

Checks his watch.

7:37 a.m.

SHIT!

Door opens, floor creaking.

Ryan glances up and sees her.

Reese—clad in a white tank top and matching panties—caught in mid-stride. It is her thigh that Ryan attempts to focus on. Their stares lock before her head turns along with her body. Then her back is to him as she retreats to her room, and Ryan is left with the afterimage of her round bottom, ass cheeks rising and falling in slow motion, the contrast of her white panties on dark skin—thrilling. For a moment, he forgets everything—the past and the present—as lust infuses his being, and he exists merely as a male. For a brief moment in time, he watches her silently, feeling himself swell and rise. However, as quickly as the euphoria comes, it is gone, and all the images, sounds, and feelings from the previous night come crashing down upon him—back to reality, shattering any sense of lustful thoughts that were beginning to take hold.

Ryan's head throbs as he rises. He wobbles unsteadily as he shuffles over to the coffee table where his jacket has been deposited. Reaching into the pocket, he fishes out his cell phone, powers it up, and experiences spikes of pain radiating throughout his chest as he sees sixteen missed calls.

Sixteen...

Five voice mail messages.

Ryan listens to them—all from his wife, Carly, her voice morphing from calm and collected to frenzied, harried, and then crazed.

He winces in pain, more so from Carly's words than his inebriation.

He's got to call her. Let her know he's okay.

Got to get out of here first.

His mind races with detailed thoughts.

Got to get home fast.

This thing between him and Olivia is a snowball that's rolling down a hill, expanding in mass and volume as it goes. Soon, it will be an avalanche—nothing in its way stopping it.

The thought makes him pause.

Ryan realizes he no longer knows for sure who this thing is about anymore.

Is it Olivia—the object of his obsession?

Once upon a time, it was.

But now, with the icy words of Miles, her husband, creeping back into his psyche, Ryan no longer knows.

He can't even trust his instincts.

Oh God.

How did he get himself into this mess?

He snaps the cell shut, and then re-opens it. Contemplates calling his wife this very instant. Begins to speed-dial her number before snapping the phone shut again.

No, not here.

Not yet.

But she's got to be going crazy—wondering if I'm dead or alive.

He sits. Ping-pongs back and forth—should he or shouldn't he?

Get out of here—find the car. No, too much time. Instead, get to a pay phone and call her from there—appease her mind.

The cell phone is heavy in his hands.

He stares at it as if it is a meteorite—something not of this world.

Turns it over in his palms before opening it and sighing heavily.

Glancing at the empty doorway, he speed-dials her number.

Carly snatches up her phone on the first ring. And Ryan feels her fury.

“WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN???”

“Baby,” he begins, the pain in his head threatening to make him black out. He presses forward, through the fire. “I’m sorry. I was too drunk to drive, so I slept in my car. Phone’s been off—battery dead—just have a second or two of juice left...”

Carly is in the midst of a rapid-fire tirade that Ryan can only half comprehend.

“Baby,” he interrupts, “I’m on my way. Just have to get something in my stomach before I get sick again. Be home soon, okay?”

She is relentless, on fire. Ryan winces, turns the volume down, lest the entire neighborhood hear their back-and-forth exchanges.

“I know; I know, Carly. I’m sorry, but I was drunk. Look, gotta go. Be home soon.”

He closes the phone on her words. Shakes his head as the cell is dropped into his lap. He exhales slowly before glancing over to the doorway. Reese is there again, shoulder pressed into the doorframe, still clad in her sexy white tank and panties. Legs crossed. Arms folded across her large chest.

She is staring at him. He is staring back. No words are spoken.

He is observing her, the jewelry in her eyebrow and sparkle at her nose. The steel, along with her full, moist lips, is drawing him near. The outline of dark nipples pokes through translucent fabric, making him weak—a slave to the flesh. Ryan is unblinking. He is thinking about her—this stranger—wondering about her allure, if she has the power, the *authority* to take his hurt away.

If only for a moment.

Make him forget...make him right with the world. If only for a single solitary moment. He’d give his right arm for that...a moment of solitary peace.

But he’s got to go—get home. Face Carly and her wrath.

Suddenly, everything is falling away again. This time, Ryan prays the instant will last.

Reese turns and walks away.

Her footfalls are heavy on wood.

Ryan's heart is pumping a mile a minute as he observes her retreat. Her fullness speaks to him again.

The sound is *loud*...

Seconds later, he rises unsurely.

Head pounding, blood flowing, he follows...

Like a slave.

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