

# Clara

**I PROMISED MYSELF, SITTING** on the barstool the afternoon after my brother's funeral, that it would be only once, that all I wanted from Guy was just a taste—at first, it seemed that just a kiss, a test to see if the electricity that had flashed between us was real, the heat I'd felt ever since the first moment I saw him across the room and then the obligatory conversation—don't I know you from somewhere? Where did you go to school, what year?—was just a mating dance leading to the actual moment when he touched me and we really danced, right there in the Eagle's Club under the gaze of the old drunks and guys dressed in blue shirts with names like "Joe" and "Butch" embroidered over filthy pockets bulging with cigarettes and pencil stubs, holding up the bar with their leaning potbellies and unfocused eyes, and I knew that a kiss would be absolutely necessary, just that and nothing more than a taste, although when I closed my eyes and felt his hand on my lower back, and imagined him naked, the red hairs flowing smoothly over that impossibly flat stomach, erupting in a glorious chorus of thick pubic hair that must herald the presence of what had to be a thick, red cock and then, interrupting my wet revelry, the question—circumcised or not?—that always came up, so to speak, at these moments, and oh how I wanted to see, actually to taste and experience, the uncut penis of my imagination, pulling the skin away to reveal the glistening red head whose very ripeness was a quivering piece of fruit I must nibble cautiously and then suck upon and finally encompass with my entire being, and then he looked at me, the slow lazy look of a man who knows you want him, and I felt it then, no, not the bulge I'd been expecting or the muscle flexed with the tension of our chemistry, no, I realized there was a ring on his left hand, and I felt my stomach lurch with the absolute certainty that I could not have this man and the realization that I would, in fact, fuck him. The ring actually sealed the deal as I felt my breathing quicken in anticipation.

This familiar exercise had never taken place in the town I used to call home, and that ratcheted up my interest in this red-haired, freckle-faced Frenchman. That and the fact that, since September 11 and the chaos of lower Manhattan, since the murder of my brother, I had lost my bearings. The best way I knew how to ground myself was against the foreign and familiar pelvis of a man.

