

Loving Quinn Chapter 1

Book 1, Chapter 1

(Quinn)

Last night went exactly how I figured it would. Well, almost. The earlier part of the evening I spent with a busty brunette whose name I can't remember. It might have been Cindy or Candy. I am fairly sure it started with a C.

We met at a cocktail party thrown by one of my investors. Fancy suits and scantily clad women on a yacht. Not my kind of party, but I go where the money is. My date for the evening ended up making out with someone else, so I found another date.

The busty brunette was very bold, which appealed to me, so I took her down to a stateroom below deck. Her dress hit the floor the moment the door was closed. No surprise there. Then she was on her knees undoing my belt.

I had her on every flat surface in the room, in various positions, until she was breathless and exhausted. As I got dressed, she handed me a piece of paper with her number on it, which I threw in a trash can on my way off the yacht. She more than delivered on what her eyes promised me when she glanced my way hours before.

The second part of my evening was spent using the weight room in my penthouse to work off some frustrations and exhaust my body. That didn't work so I showed, dressed for the club I frequent, then fucked two hot blondes in a private room. Threesomes are a lot of work and I left them more than satisfied. Then I went home and passed out after I showered again.

Physical exertion has been my go-to distraction for years now. I used to start my mornings with a jog, but some mornings I go to this fantastic gym I found close to my penthouse. Mixed Martial Artists from all over the world train at this gym. I know the owner well.

I have my own gym but this morning I want the sound of other people in the background to distract me, so I head to the gym to get sweaty. Nightmares from my past woke me up this morning and I could really use a distraction.

Even after years of therapy, I am still chasing the dreams away in the morning. Well, at least on the mornings that I don't fall into bed with someone the night before or from the extreme exhaustion of not sleeping for days. The last few years have gotten better, but I am forever haunted by my time as a soldier.

After parking my truck at the entrance, I head inside to get my day started. I sign in with the receptionist, who gives me the double glance like always. Her eyes roaming over all my exposed skin as I grab my gym bag off the floor and head to the locker room. The tattoos on my arms and chest always get attention.

I have the insignia of the Army Rangers on my right bicep. Then a cherry blossom tree goes down the rest of the arm to mid-forearm. Hidden within the leaves are little crosses with names and dates. I never tell anyone who notices them what they are for. On my left arm is a full tattoo sleeve of many different images. The one that stands out the most is my St. Michael's medal.

A single tiger lily sits at the base of the medal with a name in flowing script within the petals. Annora, the girl, now woman, who branded my soul as hers for the keeping. I don't want it back. She can keep it.

I head straight to the locker room to store my gym bag then I wave at the owner of the gym, Hollis, as I walk over to the weighted heavy punching bags. I put one ear bud in then I get down to the task at hand.

Distracting myself.

It worked for an hour but then thoughts of where I am heading in life creep up in my mind as I give the punching bag a beating. I like where I am in my professional life.

What I have done with my money has made me who I am today. That and the never-ending support of my best friend, who is now my business partner. We grew up together, went into the Army together, then got out to do some good things together.

It is my personal life that is edging towards the point of no return. Work until my brain is comfortably numb, fuck a different woman or two every night, then go home to my empty penthouse. It is a lonely existence. One I force on myself.

Though the life I am living now is not how I saw my life as a teenager. Back then, I never thought more than a few days ahead at a time. At least until I enlisted in the Army to get the hell away from my father and the ghost of my mother.

I thought of dating, like seriously dating someone, but I am reminded of how my last relationship ended. That shit won't ever happen again. I don't date. I take women out, give them an enjoyable time, then fuck them until they are screaming my name. Then I leave them in their beds to sleep it off while I go home.

Sometimes, when I am sitting alone in the darkness of my living room, I think I am a terrible human being. What I do to these women is wrong, but they know what they are signing up for when they agree to go out with me. Hell, most of them are practically begging me for attention.

Shaking my head clear, I see that I have destroyed the punching bag. I head to the locker room to shower, then drop a check off on Hollis's desk for the bag. The drive back uptown to my penthouse is long, but it will clear my head further.

By the time I arrive at the office, it is nearly nine in the morning. My thick black hair is slightly messy, but I like it that way. I am wearing a navy-blue suit with a white button-up shirt beneath, without a tie.

My secretary greets me with a smile, and I don't miss the look of lust in her eyes.

"Hold my calls until Aaron gets in, then send him to my office."

"Yes, sir."

The last few days have been hectic since we started inquiring about our next venture. We have decided to buy a hospital but the one we want is in some serious financial crisis. We have a plan to get past that, but the owner has been resistant to meet with us. Time will wear him down. How much time will it take for the man to realize he owns a sinking ship? If our luck holds, the old man will come to grips with reality sooner rather than later.

I look out the window of my office towards the elevators to see if Aaron has arrived yet. I am still glad I had the office redesigned when I bought it. As it is now, the entire top floor of the building is mine. Well, mine and my best friend Aaron's. G&C Enterprises is our company name, a name that took us about a year to agree on, but it has worked well for us for the last five years.

"Ok, so the board members of Mercy General called. They are willing to sit down for a meeting." Aaron says as he enters my office.

Aaron is dressed in a charcoal gray pinstripe suit, his hair still in that military buzz cut he favors, and his brown eyes are staring at the file in my hands. I know what he is waiting for, but I haven't decided what we will do if they refuse to sell.

We are offering to buy a hospital, one that used to have the most prestigious veterans' programs on the west coast but has come on challenging times over the last few years. G&C Enterprises owns and funds many programs to help war veterans. We own manufacturing companies that specialize in artificial limbs for combat veterans. Companies that work to give housing to those veterans who lost their homes while fighting wars for their country.

When I heard about the program at Mercy General, I knew it was the one.

The program we had been looking for. Their program used to get patients from all over the country. It was once considered top of the line for helping wounded veterans get back to their lives. Then the hospital made some terrible investments and started cutting funding to the program.

I had thought of just funding the program, but Aaron made the observation that we would have more control if we just bought the hospital. So here I am staring at the folder

in my hand, not ready to open it yet to see the numbers that will show me just how bad Mercy General is doing financially. They gave us a copy of their records for the last year, but I wanted to have a deeper look at how they spent their money.

“Is it worse or better than what we expected?” I ask Aaron.

“Open the file and find out,” He replies. He sits in one of the overstuffed office chairs in front of my desk.

I groan, then do as he says. I open the file and scan over the pages quickly. The hospital is doing worse than expected. With a few major changes, I am sure it can be rejuvenated back to what it used to be. What concerns me the most is the veteran’s program. Some numbers in this file do not match what they originally gave to us. The discrepancies alarm me. Thousands of dollars that were said to have gone to the program didn’t go where they claimed.

Where did it go?

That will be something to find out. I will give my friend Mac a call. He is a corporate investigator. I want to know what has been going on with those funds before we buy Mercy General. I want a clean accounting book before we move forward.

“Call Mac, we need him to pull the threads on these discrepancies,” I tell Aaron as I close the file.

“Already on it. I emailed him a copy of both files they gave us and told him our concerns. He got pissed and said he would dig deeper for us. He should get back to us today. We can start the talks to buy the hospital while we wait for his call,” Aaron says.

“Why do I even bother making suggestions to you when you are always one or two steps ahead of me?” I ask him.

“That, I will never understand either. They will be here at two tomorrow afternoon,” he says. Then he stands from his seat. “I will go grab some lunch, then we can start strategizing our approach.”

Sometimes my best friend knows me better than I know myself. I have only allowed one other person to get that close to me. No, stop, don’t go down that road, I tell myself. Now is not the time to go down memory lane. I have meeting notes to prepare. Who knew that I would go from being an angry teenager to a war-weary soldier, then to a rich business executive?

I sure as fuck never expected my life to turn out this way.

I shake those thoughts away when I hear the elevator ding, signaling Aaron's return from grabbing lunch for us. I grab the files and my notes and follow Aaron to his office. We discuss our game plan over lunch.

"Do you think we will persuade them to sell?" Aaron asks.

To anyone else, he looks calm, but I know him well. The twitching of his left leg as he taps his foot under his desk. He is nervous that the hospital board will decide not to sell. I can understand his nervousness as I share the same thoughts.

There is so much good that we can do for our fellow veterans with this acquisition. Yes, we could have just bought the Veterans Program. However, Aaron is right. We will have much more control over what happens with the program if we own the hospital. There is a need for reform in the very foundation of Mercy General.

They have a cash flow issue of more money going out than coming in. As it looks now, they will barely be able to stay open for the rest of the year if something isn't done now. Aaron and I have a game plan to set things on the right track for Mercy General. Unfortunately, all that hinges on one old man, his son, and the rest of the board of directors. I hope Mac finds something that will give us a trump card. I have a feeling that there is more going on with Mercy General's finances that even the old man knows about.

"I think Mac will find something that we can use to persuade them in our favor."

"What makes you think that?"

"The outflow of funds goes beyond what it should for a hospital of that size. With all the programs it operates, they should run well into the black. Not to mention how many charity events they have a year to raise money for those programs. The money is going somewhere it shouldn't."

"I thought the same thing when I read over the report. I was thinking of using that thought in the meeting to get them to open their eyes."

"No, let's wait on that card until we hear from Mac. I want concrete evidence of my theory before I use it against them."

I shake my head in laughter at a joke Aaron makes about rich old men. We spend the rest of the morning going over our game plan. We refined our notes, goals, and first priorities. Neither of us know the first thing about running a hospital. We know people that do, who are on board to help us if the sale goes through.

Please let luck be on our side.

Loving Quinn Chapter 2

(Annora)

Some days I feel like a robot. I get up, get dressed, then make breakfast for my daughter. Then I take her to school, drive to the hospital where I work, then spend the rest of my day with sick or injured kids. I love my job. It is the career I have dreamed of since I was thirteen.

However, it is days like today that just make me feel...stuck.

The smell of antiseptic clings to my green scrubs as I exit the operating room. I was asked to scrub in on an emergency appendectomy for an eight-year-old girl. The girl and her family came into the Emergency Room late last night for help with pain. The E.R. was swamped with patients, so the little girl lay in pain for hours before a doctor could see her.

Now all I want to do is shower, change back to my street clothes, and go home to grab some much-needed sleep. Instead, I head back to my office to make a few calls. It disappointed my mother that I am rescheduling for the fifth time in a row. I am honestly surprised she isn't used to it by now.

"Dr. Winters, do you have a moment?"

I glance over my shoulder as I am waiting for the elevator. A tall man I have never met before is walking towards me. From the suit he is wearing and the manilla envelope clutched to his briefcase, I can only guess that he is a lawyer. Something about this man doesn't sit well with me.

"What can I do for you? Are you related to a patient of mine?" I ask. Then I lean forward and press the button to call the elevator.

"Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

Without giving him an answer, I hop on the elevator as soon as the doors open. He follows behind me but waits for the doors to close before he says anything further. Being alone with him in the elevator is making my skin crawl, but I know I have no other choice now.

"My name is Marcus Drumond and I represent Kyle..."

Before he can finish his sentence, I hold my hand up to silence him. I pull my phone out of my pocket, then hit the button to call my attorney. Before I can hit the call button, he grabs my hand to stop me. The action causes me to drop my phone.

His eyes go wide as it hits the floor and shatters. "Oh, my god, I am so sorry. I just need you to listen to me. I will buy you a new phone."

“Listen good, Mr. Drumond, because I am only going to say this once. I don’t care who you are, but I will tell you what to tell your client. Call my attorney. We are done here.”

When the doors open, I step out of the elevator to walk to my office. Marcus follows me as I hurry to my door. He is going on about how his client instructed him to speak to me. I ignore him until we reach my closed office door.

“You have two choices, Mr. Drumond. The first one is to leave on your own and take my message back to your client. Or you can continue to harass me in my place of work, which will prompt me to call security to have you removed from the building. Your client has been told multiple times that any further communication between us needs to go through our lawyers. Please mention this to him when you speak to him.”

I turn on my heels to open my door, then I close it promptly in his face as he tries to follow me inside. With swift strides, I walk to my desk to grab the phone. I call down to security at the front desk to give them the lawyer’s name and description.

Marshall, our head of security, answers the phone. He assures me he will escort Drumond off the property with a warning to not come back unless it is a medical emergency. I thank him, then hang up to make another call. This time to my lawyer, Lorelai Davon.

When her secretary answers the phone, he informs me she is in a meeting with a new client. I tell him what happened, and he assures me he will have her call me when she is free. I hang up the phone, then plop down into my chair.

Being a doctor, you would think I would be used to dealing with lawyers. However, I have not had that many encounters with unhappy patients that would require lawyers to get involved. I have saved, changed for the better, and helped more children and their families than I have lost.

My children’s practice has only been up and running for a year now. Two years earlier than planned. Normally there would be four years of residency, but I skipped the last two years when I was offered the position here to run their pediatrics department. I didn’t know until after I accepted the position that my father had pulled some strings to get me the job.

Part of me wanted to quit, but I stayed because of a little girl. My second patient, Chloe, came to the hospital with a severe burn on her leg. After examining her, I found evidence of abuse. Many healed fractures, which in most cases wouldn’t be alarming for a child her age, but it was the nature of the injuries.

Chloe pulled at something in me. Something that only one other person in my life has been able to. I stayed at Mercy General for her and the memory of the past. In all honesty, I stayed for myself, too. This has always been my dream.

Now that dream is being tainted by my nightmare ex-husband. Our marriage was a mistake from the moment I agreed to marry him. If I had known about his violent tendencies before we got married, I would have run.

I used to love my life. I have an amazing job, a beautiful home, and a daughter that makes me proud of her every day. Yet there is something missing in my life. My ex-husband was an abusive asshole, and I don't miss being slapped, punched or kicked any time I displeased him.

He never loved me. Not the way I needed to be loved. I need the kind of love I had once but lost long ago. The timing was wrong, but the love was real. I miss that feeling.

My phone ringing makes me look up at the clock on the wall across from my desk. Thirty minutes have passed since I sat down. I answer the phone and hear Lorelai typing something into her computer.

"Annora, I just got off the phone with Kyle's lawyer. He profusely apologizes for Drumond showing up at the hospital. Apparently, the eager man didn't get the memo that everything was to go through me first." Lorelai's voice is calm as she gets straight to the point.

"Our divorce is finalized. What more can there be to discuss?"

"Kyle is under the delusion that he gets the house. He wants to know when you will move out."

"The house was a gift to me from my parents. It is in my name only. It was also in the prenuptial agreement that if we divorced, he would have no claim to it."

"You are not telling me anything new. It is in his divorce papers, which I assume he didn't read. I told all of this to his new attorney. It was kind of sad to see that he fired Pensky. I was getting used to that little shit."

I laugh at her accurate description of Albert Pensky. That man always made me feel like I needed a scalding hot shower after being in the same room with him. He was also immature for a man in his fifties. He acts like an over entitled frat-boy still in college.

Guess like finds like. Kyle hired him, after all.

"So, did you set them straight? Will they be bothering me again at work?"

"His lawyer had to find the paperwork to confirm, which he should have done before taking the case. When he called me back, he apologized again, then told me he dropped Kyle as a client."

“Well, that is something in our favor. Can you make sure everything on my end regarding the house, my car, and Grace’s trust fund are all out of his reach?”

“Already done. He has no legal claim to any of that since it was all set up before you got married. We plainly outlined it in the prenuptial agreement he signed. He has no case to get access to any of that.”

“Thank you for getting back to me, Lori. Also, thank you for going above and beyond, as always.”

“It is my job, Annora. Besides, you are more than a client to me, and you know that.”

She has a point.

My pager going off in my pocket makes me end the call sooner than I planned. Looking at the number on it, I grab my stethoscope and my spare cellphone, then rush to the elevator to head back to the emergency room. I put my sim card from my shattered phone into the spare cellphone as the elevator descended.

I call my mother to ask if she will pick Grace up from school, then tell her I will swing by on my way home. I get the expected guilt trip from canceling our lunch date, but she agrees to my request. My mother never passed up the opportunity to spend time with her granddaughter.

What I didn’t expect to see when I arrived at my parents was my brother Max walking out of the house when I pulled up. Max lives in New York with his wife, who is either still inside or not with him on this trip. What has brought him to California?

“Well, you are a sight for sore eyes.” I ask as I get out of the car.

The look on his face when he sees me is briefly happy. Then he glowers as he looks away. That isn’t a good sign for Max. It means that something is bothering him. For him to fly to California to see our parents means that whatever is bothering him is bad.

“Hey, what’s going on, Max?” I walk up to him as he stands rooted in place, staring at the ground.

“Leita and I are getting divorced.”

That is a statement I never expected to hear from him. He met Leita when he was in college. They dated throughout college, broke up for a year, then got back together. When they got married, it was the happiest day of their lives. Or so I thought.

“What happened? I thought everything was going well with you two. Leita sounded so happy when I spoke to her last week. What about the baby?”

“If you two are going to have that conversation, I suggest you come inside so the neighbors don’t know our business.” My mother’s voice calls from the open front door.

Heaven forbids, what will the neighbors think of our family drama!

Max shakes his head at me. “Can I meet you at your house after you get Grace?”

“Yes, you can also take the spare room rather than stay in a hotel like I know you are planning on doing.”

He nods his head then rushed to his car. I hear a quiet sob, then a few choice words as he gets in his rental car. My mind is in a whirl, trying to figure out what happened to my strong, stoic older brother to have him close to tears.

Without waiting for my mother to call me inside again, I walk to the door. I can hear Grace’s laughter echo down the hallway. Ignoring my mother’s angry scowl, I walk back to the kitchen, where I can hear Grace talking to my father. His voice makes me remember all the times throughout my childhood where he sat in the kitchen doing crossword puzzles on his rare days off.

When he sees me, I can tell that whatever Max had to say wasn’t good. His eyes look sad, but he smiles as Grace cracks a joke. I will just have to wait until later tonight to get the truth out of my brother.

I catch the look that my father sends towards my mother’s back as she is making tea. The love that shines through his eyes when he looks at her is something I have only experienced for myself once. It makes me look back at my daughter as she lays her cards down on the table and lets out a peal of laughter.

Grace is the spitting image of her father. Quinn Greyson. Every time I look into her eyes, I remember them in another face. The face of a young man on the cusp of becoming a soldier. That face still creeps into my dreams at night.

That long ago summer still haunts me to this day. Every time I look at my daughter, I wonder where he is right now. Is he safe? Is he happy? Does he think of me the way I think of him? With longing, not just for the past, but for what could have been if things had gone differently.

What will I say to him if we meet again? Will I fall back into his arms like no time has passed? Twelve years is a long time to miss someone. Twelve years is a long time to still feel that rush of love when I think of him. Love that I thought would fade away as I got older.

It only got stronger as time went on. I miss him so much it hurts. I tried looking for him using my father’s contacts in the Army. Nothing ever came of my inquiries. Maybe now

is a good time to try harder to find him. If not for my sake, but for the sake of the child we created between us.

The child that took me by surprise and changed my world for the better. She was conceived in love when nothing else in the world mattered but me and him. During a summer of exploration, budding romance, and the beginning of a love so pure and sweet that I have never been able to forget it.

Nor could I ever forget him.

Grace is my forever link to my one true love. The father that she has yet to meet because I don't know where he is now. The father I robbed her of. What will he think of me if we ever meet again?

Quinn, my love, where are you?

Please come back to me.

I miss you.

I never stopped loving you.