

Loving Quinn Chapter 3

(Quinn)

The skyline view out of my office window always calms me down. With one palm on the window and the other hand fisted in silky blonde curls, I watch the traffic on the streets below. The bustle of activity always seems to help me think. This morning I am stressed out over a business acquisition.

Glancing down at the woman who is busy sucking on my cock, all I can think about is the meeting scheduled for later today. This little stress reliever will get me through the rest of my morning. My secretary has been giving me the 'fuck me eyes' for months. I gave in to my baser instincts and called her into my office.

Hilary sashayed into my office with a smile on her face.

Her moans do nothing for me, but the way she greedily licks my shaft sends pleasure through me. That is all I am capable of these days. Unadulterated carnal pleasure. No emotional connection. Just hot and steamy sex with all the women who throw themselves at me. Nothing but gold diggers, but they suit my needs just fine.

With a grunt, I spill my seed down her throat and, like the greedy woman she is, she takes every drop. Licking her lips, Hilary stands up, smooths her hair down, then tries to press her body to mine. I gently push her away so I can stuff my cock back in my pants, then I walk to my desk. Ignoring the hurt look on her face, I thank her for her time and send her back to her desk.

I am going to have to find a new secretary after the events that just transpired. I had a firm policy of not mixing business with pleasure, but I just broke that with Hilary. She was exceptionally good at what she did, but I won't cross that line again, and she strikes me as a woman who won't take rejection well. It is a good thing all our employees sign non disclosure agreements when we hire them.

Being one of the richest men on the west coast, I have my share of women throwing themselves at me all the time.

Lucky for me, most of the events, charities, and fundraisers I attend are all private affairs with no cameras or journalists allowed. I have a PR team that deals with any unauthorized pictures that show up in the tabloids or newspapers. They are paid extremely well to keep my face out of the media unless it is a planned photoshoot.

Like last night's fundraiser, all the journalists were escorted out of the building after the photos were taken of all the upper elite at the event.

It was good that they were because I had one very audacious lady slip her hotel key into my pocket as we danced. She wasn't wearing a wedding band, so when the night

ended, I took her up on the invitation. Once I left her fully satisfied, I slipped out of her suite, then made my way to my penthouse before morning.

I have never spent the night with any of my lovers. That is another line I refuse to cross. I learned a hard lesson that has stayed with me to this day. Most of those women see me as a bank account, one they want to bind themselves to for social and financial status.

Hell no to that. I have no intention of ever getting married or tying myself to anyone. At least not until I find a woman who sees me for who I am and not for my bank account. Love only ends in heartache, where one person either leaves the other in the end, or does something much worse to cause heartache.

“I am going to have lunch with that pretty secretary of ours,” Aaron says. He enters my office with a swagger and a smile.

I laugh at him. Please distract her for me. We had a little stress reliever session this morning.”

“Well damn, that explains the less tense look you have. How about we hire you another secretary and I will just move Hillary to my office area. We can find you a grandmotherly type.” Aaron suggests as he walks out of my office.

That isn't a bad idea. I pick up my phone to put in a call to the employment agency we used to find Hillary. I give them my requirements for the next secretary, and I am told that they have two people that fit that description. One being a fifty-year-old mother of three, the other is a thirty-year-old man who comes highly recommended by all staffing services. Without hesitation, I tell her to send them both over in the morning.

Having settled that situation, I call down to the HR department to have Hillary reassigned to a different office within the company.. Aaron can do whatever he wants with Hillary outside the office. She no longer works in our office. I sent him a text message informing him of what I did after I emptied her desk and sent her stuff to her new office.

With a sigh, I turn my attention back to Mercy General's financial records and start taking notes. The more I comb through their records, the more obvious the discrepancies become. Why has no one in their accounting department noticed this before? Grabbing the employee file, I flip straight to the accounting department's employee roster. There are only six accountants on file. None of them have been there for more than a year. Why the change in personnel?

To hide something is the obvious answer.

The vibrating of my cellphone pulls my attention away from the file in my hand. I pull it out of my pocket to check who is calling. The number on the screen is familiar. I don't know who it is, but I answer it anyway.

As I answer, the call is disconnected. This is the third time in the last month that I have had calls like this. Each call is the same. I say hello then they hang up. No words from whoever is on the other end of the line. I had a similar situation happen a year ago. It lasted for a few days, then just stopped. It was from a different number than this one is now.

Back then, I had a feeling about who it was. This time I am left with no clue. I haven't had contact with that woman in over two years. Why would she be calling me now? It is time to have Mac look into my mystery caller.

I shake those thoughts away when I hear the elevator signaling Aaron's return. He looks slightly disheveled, making me assume he had more than just lunch while he was out. I shake my head as I know his habits like he knows mine. By the end of the night, we will both have a woman in our arms as we attend a fundraiser for veterans. Neither of us will be lonely for very long by the time the night is over.

"Did you enjoy your lunch?" I ask him with a grin.

"Oh, she delivered what I asked for and then some more. That woman was primed and ready for either of us, it seems. Now that I have that out of my system, let me get freshened up and I will be ready when the board members arrive." Aaron says as he ducks into his office bathroom.

One day, I fear Aaron will meet the wrong end of a jealous husband. He has had more lovers and sexual escapades than I ever thought of having. I know he uses sex as an escape from the nightmares that haunt him like mine do. We may be out of the war, but the war will never be completely out of our minds. The memories are sneaky bastards that creep up on us at the most unexpected times.

We have both used women, alcohol, and extreme sports to distract our minds from wartime trauma. None of them ever work for long, but long enough to have those few moments of peace. I shake my head to clear those thoughts away as I hear the elevator chime. I look at my watch to see that they are early.

Thirty minutes later

"You want to purchase the entire hospital?" Maxwell, just call me Max, Davison asks me.

Max is the group advocate, it seems, as none of the other five members of the hospital board have spoken up since the initial introductions. I know all of them by name and face from our investigation over the last week. To me, the introductions were a waste of

time, but first meetings dictate we follow proper protocol. The hospital board comprises of six members.

The owner, Howard Davison, an older male in his late sixties. His son, Maxwell, the CEO of the hospital, who is in his late thirties. Regina Morgan, the CFO for the hospital, looks to be in her early thirties. I know from our background checks that Regina is older than she looks, oh how plastic surgery keeps women looking younger.

We will conduct an even deeper investigation into her background and finances now that we have learned of those inconsistencies in the financial records. As the Chief Finance Officer for the hospital, she has her palms on the money. I text her name to Mac, so he can get started. I don't think we should move further until we have the complete details of her involvement in the disaster at Mercy General.

Then there are Peter Wright, Frank Gillman, and Dave Green, all of which have extremely secondary roles on the board. Each owns stock in the hospital, but none of them have any substantial authority. They will leave just like Howard, Max, and Regina. It will be a complete house cleaning of Mercy General's board of directors.

Aaron slides a small scrap of paper across the table with our low-ball offer on it. We started low just to observe how they would react. If they snap up the offer right away, they are more desperate than we know. If the offer insults them, we will show our next card. Max reaches for the paper, but is blocked by Howard, who shoots a glowering look to his son. Max may be the group's advocate, but the old man seems to still be in charge.

Point one for Howard.

"The hospital is worth far more than this paltry offer," Howard says. "The offer for the stocks is acceptable. Will this be a full buyout?"

"We originally only planned to fund or buy the Veterans Program, but we decided that we would have more control over how and where the money is spent if we just bought the entire hospital." Aaron answered.

"The building itself is worth more than what you are offering here," Max says.

"Your hospital is in a dire financial crisis. A terrible investment has brought your hospital to its knees. Do your employees know how bad it is? Do they know that there may not be enough money to pay for their next three paychecks?" I ask.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Regina go pale at the mention of how bad it is for them. Max sucks in a deep breath and stands to gather his briefcase and coat. Howard looks at him with anger all over his face.

"Sit down, Max," Howard booms out. "Now!"

Max sits his ass down. Point two for Howard.

“Will you consider keeping anyone here on the board if we agree to sell?” Howard asks.

I look around the room at all their faces. Peter looks green. It is like he doesn't know what he is doing. Frank and Dave look like they just go along for the ride. Yes-men, ones who will do anything they are told, as long as there is a check in it for them. We don't want their kind on our board. They will all go, and if my theory is correct, Max and Regina will face some jail time. They are in this together if the looks Max keeps shooting Regina are anything to go by.

“We shall see about that if we proceed further in the negotiations,” Aaron tells Howard.

“Will you excuse my partner and I for a few minutes to talk?” I ask Howard.

Howard Davison is who I will speak to from this point forward. Max is a weakling who thinks he can fool his father. I think the old man knows what is really happening more than he lets on.

Howard merely nods his head. I stand up and leave the conference room. They will see us through the glass walls, but they won't be able to hear what we are saying. I walk to the reception desk and wait for Aaron to join me. When he reaches me, I pull a small notepad from my jacket pocket, scribble a small smiley face on it, fold it up, and hand it to my best friend.

Aaron, being the man he is, kept a straight face as he looked at the paper. He nods his head, then walks a few feet away to pull out his phone. He isn't calling anyone, but making it look like he is. This is a stalling tactic. We want them to think we are playing their game. We are playing our own game while we wait for Mac to call.

As I watch Mercy General's board members fidget, the elevator dings. I turn to see who could come up here during this meeting. I smile as Jeff Moore, our CFO, steps out of the elevator. His timing is perfect, but the look on his face tells me there is a problem. That isn't what I want to hear right now.

“What's up? You look like you are the bearer of bad news, Jeff,” I say to him as he walks to me.

“Well, nothing bad for us, but all kinds of bad for them,” Jeff says as he nudges his head in the conference room's direction. He hands me a file and waits while I open it.

“Did Mac send you this?” I ask him as my brows wing up at the numbers I see. They are ten times worse than what was in the second file.

“Yes, he has more, but wants to give it to you in person. He said what is in that file will help you negotiate better. The red head, her signature is all over those documents,” Jeff tells me.

“Well, this is good enough to end our negotiations today. Something for them to think over until the next meeting. Thanks Jeff,” I shake his hand, then turn to Aaron, who has joined us.

“Let’s head back in there. We are going to drop a bomb,” I tell Aaron. “Jeff, I would like you to join us for the rest of this meeting.”

“Old man Howard is going to blow his lid.” Aaron says.

Loving Quinn Chapter 4

(Annora)

“No, Grace, you can’t go to the fundraiser. I told you this already, there will not be children there,” I tell her.

Grace just stares at me with those sea-green eyes of hers. Why did she have to get his eyes? I think had she taken after me more in appearance, watching her grow up wouldn’t have been so hard. Having Quinn’s eyes stare back at me through our daughter hits me hard some days.

“Mom, I don’t need Haylie to watch me anymore. I am old enough to stay home alone while you party with rich doctors.” Grace glares at me. She stomps her foot, crosses her arms over her chest then just stares at me.

“Grace, we talked about this. I have obligations outside this house and sometimes they get in the way of what you want.”

“I want to go to the movies or go with you to the fundraiser.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose and sigh. We have been at this same argument since she got home from school. My answer has remained the same yet she just keeps pushing. I want my sweet natured daughter for the night not this angry heathen.

She looks at me once more then runs to her room and slams the door. I glance at Haylie then walk calmly up the stairs to confront my angry child. I am getting increasingly frustrated with her by the minute.

This is the preview show for her teenage years coming soon, I can already feel the headaches to come. At eleven years old, Grace is becoming a handful. I know she doesn’t get any of her spunk and defiance from me. I had one act of defiance and she is the result. I wouldn’t change it for the world.

But oh boy, days like today make me want to ship my child off to visit my grandfather. He will take none of her crap and make her listen. Grace isn't a terrible child by any means, but on nights that my work interferes with what she wants, she fights me tooth and nail. Tonight, I am not budging.

The fundraiser tonight is for wounded vets, and I am going with a friend of mine who was an army nurse. Grace will just have to learn that I can't always pass on things like this because she throws a tantrum. I straighten my spine as I look at her with steel in my eyes. I hate being the bad guy and she knows it.

My ex-husband was never a good parent, but he pretended to be until he became the cheating parent who was sleeping with our accountant. Then he became the asshole parent who said since Grace wasn't his child there was no reason for him to see her after the divorce. It affected Grace hard at first, Kyle had been the only father she had ever known.

Part of that was my fault for not trying harder to find Quinn. I chalk that up to teenage stupidity and innocence. Who the hell knew that I would end up pregnant at eighteen? I didn't. We had used protection, well most of the time anyway. Shit we were fools.

I open the door to Grace's room then just look at her. She is sitting on the bed staring at the door. Her stare turns into an angry glare when I look from her to the door.

"What is the rule about doors in this house?"

"No slamming them," she mumbles.

"Right. So, because you think it is ok to break the rules and throw a fit, there will be consequences. I will tell Haylie that there is to be no video games tonight. You can watch movies or play board games. "

"I want you to do what you promised."

"I didn't promise to take you to the movies, Grace. I said we could go if nothing came up at work. I never once said that we would go tonight."

"But you said," she stopped talking when I held my hand up in a stop gesture.

"Ok, look, I know you want me to stay home so we can go see that movie you wanted to watch. I am sorry that we can't, but you have known about this fundraiser for the last month, Grace. This is something that I am passionate about and I will not miss it because you are having a fit," I tell her.

"But you promised we would see it," Grace screams at me.

“No I didn’t and you know it. We will go on the weekend. Don’t you yell at me like that or we won’t go see it at all. It will be in theaters for another few months, we have plenty of time. Now, I want no more sass from you.” I look at her as she opens her mouth to complain again, but wisely she doesn’t, this time.

I leave her room so I can go get dressed. Being a single parent is a pain in the ass some days but I love my daughter and try hard to give her everything I can. Well, within reason at least.

I take one last look at myself in my floor to ceiling mirror. I pull my auburn hair back into a French-braid, loose curls escaping around my face. The dress I have on is tighter than I like, but the pale blue works well with my complexion. It has a halter-like top, and the skirt flows down in a smooth line of satin. I feel a little overdressed for a fundraiser for veterans, but there will be so many women dressed better than me.

Most of them will try to snag a rich husband, but having been married once, I am not even looking for anything remotely resembling a relationship right now. I step into the gaming room to tell the girls goodbye, then I leave the house to go pick up my friend Shawna. She picked my dress, so I have to wear it tonight.

“That dress looks amazing on you just like I thought it would.” Shawna says when she opens her apartment door.

I smile at her then follow her inside. She tells me that she is almost ready and will only be a few more minutes. Her apartment is painted in bright colors. It has an open floor plan that makes it look bigger than it actually is. There are plants all over the living room to give it that indoor garden feeling.

Shawna’s apartment is very much like her personality. Bright and cheerful yet very down to earth. I wait on her sofa with her cat, Leroy. I tell her about Grace’s attitude while she finishes getting ready.

When she comes back out I smile widely. The green satin dress is form fitting and short. Her fiery red hair is loose and flowing down her back. My bestie is a knockout.

“Are you going on the hunt tonight?” I ask her as she grabs her purse.

“I am always on the hunt but tonight I just want to dance and have fun. I will think about finding a boyfriend another night.”

“One day soon you will find Mr. Right instead of Mr. Playboy.” I tell her with a gentle smile. She looks sad for a moment so I hug her tight. “Now, let’s get this night over with so I can go home to my temperamental child.”

An hour later Shawna and I walk into the ballroom at the grand hotel the fundraiser is in. Classical music is being played through the speakers, people are milling about with

wine in their hands, and my smile fades five minutes later as I hear that shrill laugh of my ex-accountant's. Well, this night just became no fun.

"Want me to punch her in the face later?" Shawna asks me.

I laugh and shake my head, "No, I can handle her. It is Kyle I worry about. Go mingle, Shaw, I will be fine."

Shawna gives me a hug, then she goes off to find a dance partner, leaving me to watch as Lana flirts with a soldier in uniform. I pity her when Kyle spots her. Has she seen his temper yet? Has he slapped her around yet? I hope for her sake he hasn't, but I know if she stays with him much longer, he will get to that point.

Kyle is good at hiding his true face from people. He fooled me the first year we were married. Then the first time I wore something he didn't like, or folded his clothes wrong, I met his temper. I covered bruises for two years until I worked up the courage to file for divorce. Two days later, I walked in on him and Lana in our bed. A restraining order followed and then a swift divorce.

Adultery was in our prenup and pissed him off to no end that he got nothing from me. I learned during the divorce that he had been sleeping with Lana for over a year. A three-year marriage down the drain. The day we finalized our divorce was the day Kyle hit me for the last time.

He spent six months in jail for assault, but he tried again to hurt me, so he is now out on bail until his court date for that incident. Now there is a permanent order of protection against him. I will be forever thankful that he never hurt Grace. Kyle hid his darker side from my daughter very well.

If he is here tonight, he has to stay one hundred yards away from me at all times. I decide that it is a good time to mention this to a security guard, but I am stopped as a hand clamps firmly around my arm, then I am yanked behind a large marble column. From the cologne, I know instantly who it is. Kyle Wells, the worst mistake I have ever made.

"That dress is too tight on you, Nora," Kyle growls in my ear before he turns me to face him. "What have I told you about that? When we get home, I will have to remind you."

He is drunk. Fantastic. I hate that nickname too.

"You are violating the restraining order Kyle."

"The hell I am. You are my wife and no piece of paper or judge will tell me when, where, or how I can talk to you." He slurs the last of his words as he glares at me.

I look around as panic sets in. We are alone in the entrance area and that is a bad sign. I struggle as he pulls me in close to his body. He reeks of booze. I wrinkle my nose which pisses him off.

“Do I offend you?” He growls at me as he leans his head closer to my face. “You used to make the sexiest noises when I fucked you.”

Oh, yes, you really do. Your breath smells and your touch makes my stomach lurch. I faked most of my orgasms with this fool. What did I ever see in this man?

“Let go of me,” I grit out.

“You are my wife, Nora. When we get home, I will show you what that dress is doing to me right now.”

Ew! Been there, done that, not interested in a repeat. Three years of crappy sex was enough. Missionary Kyle, is what I called him in my head. No other positions were allowed.

“Kyle, we are not married anymore. Take your hands off me now and I won’t scream. You remember that you are not allowed near me, right?” I ask him. I struggle to loosen his grip on my arm.

This causes him to tighten his hold and pull me up against him. The smell of vodka on his breath makes me want to puke. “You will always be mine, always. No judge will ever change that. You are mine, Nora, only mine.”

“The hell I am. Let go of me now,” I yell at him.

“No matter how much you deny it, you are still in love with me. I can forgive you for pressing charges against me. We can just forget that ever happened.” His voice was soft as he pleaded with me but his eyes showed malice.

I struggled to get out of his hold and thankfully he was drunk enough that he couldn’t keep his grip on me. I took a step back from him as his face took on a look that I know well. He reached out and grabbed my wrist in a vice-like grip that I should have seen coming.

“You are a pathetic excuse for a man, Kyle. I don’t love you. If you want the truth, I never loved you. No take your fucking hand off my before I scream for help.”

“Don’t you swear at me, you little whore,” he pulls back his hand like he is going to slap me.

I close my eyes, but no slap lands on my face. When I open my eyes, Kyle is twisted around to glare at a man behind him. That man is holding Kyle's arm up in the air like he caught it mid-swing. Tears blur my vision, making my hero's features blurry.

"I believe the lady asked you to let her go," the stranger said.

Oh, my goodness, that voice. I blink back my tears to clear my vision. When I do, I look into a pair of sea-green eyes. Eyes that have haunted me for years. His face is harder, jaw more defined, but I would recognize him anywhere.

My god, it really is him.

Quinn Greyson in the flesh.

Loving Quinn Chapter 5

(Annora)

Quinn?" My voice is hoarse as I croak out his name. Shock and joy courses through my body as I realize who has come to save me.

"Hey buddy, this is between my wife and I, back off." Kyle spits at Quinn, his words slurring in his drunken state.

Fantastic. Kyle has to start on the whole wife thing. Great. All I need now is for my first love to know I used to be married to this drunk **ole.

"That may be, but she doesn't seem to want your hands on her. So, I am going to ask you to back away from her," Quinn says. His eyes look at Kyle with disgust.

His voice is deeper than it used to be and it sends delicious shivers of desire down my spine. Now is not the time for that so I shove those feelings aside. I will think more on it later after Kyle is gone.

"Just who the hell do you think you are? Coming over here butting into other people's business like this." Kyle screeched,

I watch as Quinn's jaw flexes in what I can only describe as suppressed anger. His green eyes glitter with it. This man is far more in control of his emotions than his younger self ever was. The Army did him a favor there.

"Let go of the lady's hand now or I will make you." He growls venomously at Kyle.

As if just realizing he is still gripping onto my wrist, Kyle drops my hand instantly. He looks between Quinn and I then takes a few steps back. Sadly that is where common sense fails him yet again.

He tries to lunge at me but Quinn grabs his arm before he can do anything more than take a stuttering step forward. Rage contorts his features into a disgusting mask as he turns his head to look at the man keeping him from hurting what he has always deemed as his.

Me. The wife he abused and cheated on. The woman who married him despite her misgivings. My mind is more clear on who and what Kyle Wells is now more than ever before. He is a monster in a human disguise.

"I don't think you want to do that, mister. Didn't your parents ever teach you not to hit a lady?" Quinn growls at him.

A look of pain crosses Kyle's face. I look at where Quinn is gripping his arm and see that his grip looks very tight. I should call for security but I am getting too much satisfaction from watching someone put Kyle in his place.

"This is my wife and we are just having a marital dispute. No one asked for your help, so back off a**ole," Kyle hisses at Quinn.

I roll my eyes at that statement and sigh heavily. That was one of his favorite lines when we had a fight. It is just a marital dispute, we will get past it.

"She didn't seem to want you touching her. She may not have asked for help but her body language screamed for it. Now will I need to call security or will you walk away on your own."

Kyle's face paled at the mention of security. He knows that if security gets involved then the police will get involved. I will mention the restraining order and he knows it. For the first time since he came up to me tonight, clarity seeps into his eyes.

"Kyle? What is going on here?" A shrill female voice asked from behind Quinn.

Oh, goodness gracious, just what this situation needs. Lana Wells to join the fray. The new wife who is jealous of the old wife. I can see the look of rage in her eyes when she sees Kyle's hand wrapped around my arm. Yet, with Lana here now, Kyle will put his charming mask

back on. With luck, that will have him leaving me alone to go smooth things over with his

wife.

"This isn't what it looks like, Lana. Annora was flirting with me, and I had to defend myself," Kyle lied to cover his tracks.

“Why can’t you leave my husband alone? Are you so jealous of us that you have to flirt with

him in public? Do you know how pathetic that makes you look?” Lana screamed at me.

Quinn rounded on her while still holding Kyle’s arm. “This man was in the

process of slapping her after she repeatedly asked him to let go of her arm. I don’t know you lady, but if

I were you, I would look a little closer at the situation.”

“Who the hell are you? Oh, you are a soldier,” Lana says as she notices his attire. Her attitude changes instantly. Gone is the angry harpy. Say hello to the flirty s**t. She steps up next to him as her eyes travel over his uniform.

That makes me look at him closer. There he was in his dress uniform. Something about Quinn standing there in uniform made my knees turn to jelly. I never really imagined what he did for our country before. Never really grasped that the boy I knew back then would be a soldier now. Why had I not connected the dots in my head until now?

“Who I am is none of your business. Knowing my name is the least of your concerns. I think you need to get your husband home so he can sober up.” Quinn says with disdain dripping from his voice.

Lana’s face turns red with embarrassment then she looks at me. Anger swiftly replaces her embarrassment. She opens her mouth to talk but closes it again. A smirk forms on my lips as she steps away from Quinn. His eyes are cold as he stares at her.

“Come on, Lana, let’s go back to the party.” Kyle yanks his arm out of Quinn’s grasp. He wobbles to Lana then he pulls her away from us.

Finally, I can breathe again. I take a deep breath then look at my arm. I will have a nasty bruise for sure. It will be the last one I let that man ever give me. I will call my lawyer in the morning.

“Will you be alright?” Quinn asks me once they are no longer in earshot.

I look up into his sea-green eyes as he takes a step closer to me. I feel the air being sucked from my lungs as my dream becomes a reality. Quinn really is standing in front of me after all these years. My knees decide at that moment to give out on me, but before I hit the floor, I am pulled up against his hard chest. Then before I know what is happening, Quinn scoops me up in his arms bridal fashion, and we are walking to a bench that is against the wall.

Quinn sits me on the bench then walks away, leaving me with my thoughts. He is here. The man who stole my heart at eighteen. The man who left at the end of the summer to go join the United States Army. What he didn't know was he left me with a precious gift. Grace, our daughter, whose eyes are replicas of her father's

How am I going to tell him about Grace? Just be like 'Oh hey, remember that summer, yeah we have a kid together.' No, that **t won't work at all. I could have and should have tried harder to find him. I could have hired an investigator, done a DNA search, anything I could have to find him. Instead, I just raised Grace and didn't look for him.

Does that make me a horrible person? My heart says so, but my mind knows I did all I could to make it to where I am now. I got through medical school with a baby thanks to my parents moving to England. I got through residency thanks to my family banding together to help me. They say it takes a village to raise a child. In my case, it was true. I owe them so much.

"Here, drink this," Quinn's voice startles me.

I look up to see him holding a glass of water out to me. With a trembling hand, I reach up and take it from him. My eyes tracking his movements as he sits down next to me. Oh, how his muscles ripple under that uniform. Twelve years did him good. The physical exertion of the army has made his once toned body one of such power that I can feel heat rushing to my cheeks.

I am a renowned Pediatric surgeon, for g**d's sake. One look at him and I am reduced to a blushing teenager again. This man just oozes sex appeal.

"Was that man really your husband?" Quinn asks me.

I hear a slight tinge of jealousy in his voice. He glances down at my hand as if he is checking for a wedding ring.

"Once, but no longer. As you can see, there is an obvious reason for it," I tell him.

"How long?"

"Too long," I tell him as I finally look into his eyes.

"Will I sound like an a***hole if I tell you I am glad you are divorced?" Quinn asks me.

"Not at all. I am happy I am divorced too. Marrying him was a mistake."

"Was he always like that? Drunk, belligerent, and abusive?" Anger shines in his eyes as he asks the question I knew he would.

I shake my head then take a sip of water. “He was charming when I first met him. A little arrogant, It wasn’t until after we got married that he let his mask slip and I saw his true face.”

“Did he ever hurt you physically?” He clenches his fists as he asks me that question.

Telling him won’t change what happened. I don’t want him to know what Kyle did to me, not during our first meeting after so long apart. “I don’t want to talk about this, Quinn.”

“Annie...”

His voice causes things low in my body to tighten. Memories of the past rush through my mind. Then images of me peeling him out of that uniform to get a look at all those glorious muscles. I can feel heat rush to my cheeks, so I look down at my hands.

“Annie, look at me.”

I look back up at him hesitantly. Those beautiful eyes of his were always my weakness. Seeing him again proves that hasn’t changed. The look he is giving me makes me tremble. I would love to just have him hold me like he used to. Spend all night talking to each other.

“Quinn...”

My voice is breathy which makes me look back down at my hands. He reaches over and uses a finger to lift my face to look up at him. There are questions in his eyes that I don’t want to answer. I can tell he wants to know more about the abuse I lived through with Kyle.

“You look good in that uniform.”

Quinn smiles at me. “Do you think so?”

I nod my head as I can’t seem to find the words. It is like my brain is short circuiting just being near him. Forming coherent thoughts seems to be impossible the longer I sit here with him. I keep imagining him t***ss in his hotel room.

“Come walk with me, we can go outside to get some fresh air.” He stands up then holds his hand out for me.

I take it and feel like I have been struck by lightning. He places his hand on the small of my back and leads me to a side exit where a large balcony is. It looks out on the gardens. We walk down a set of stairs and find a stone bench.

The fresh air helps cool me down but it does nothing to stop me from admiring the way he moves as he sits next to me. This new version of Quinn is doing all sorts of bad things to my insides. My heart is beating faster, there are butterflies in my stomach, and I don't want the night to end.

I jump a little when his large hand covers mine. He rubs his thumb slowly over the back of my hand and I relax. I haven't felt this comfortable with another man other than my father and brothers, Kyle never made me feel like this.

"Feeling better?" His voice is soothing.

I look over at him and smile. Relief flashes through his eyes. I want to just throw myself at him so he can just hold me like he used to. I just sit where I am and stare at him instead.

We sit in silence for what feels like forever. I am almost hypnotized by the gentle stroke of his thumb over my hand. There is so much I want to ask about his life, so much I want to tell him about mine. One very important detail about my life needs to be revealed to him.

However, my thoughts just keep circling back to how f**ng amazing he looks in that uniform. I want to see what is under it so badly. To touch his skin, lick a trail down his stomach, and dig my nails into his back as he does what I have dreamed of for years.

"Come dance with me," Quinn says as he suddenly stands up, his hand outstretched for mine.

My thoughts make me look away as he stands up. When I am sure my eyes won't betray my dirty thoughts, I look up at him. There is a small smile on his face like he knows what I was thinking but he doesn't say anything.

Thankfully, "I am not sure that is a good idea," I tell him as I stand up. My eyes flick to the ballroom to see if Kyle is still lurking around.

"He won't hurt you again, I promise," Quinn whispers. How does he know what I was thinking?

"How can you promise that? You will leave after tonight, I will still be here," I tell him.

"Do you really think I will walk away after I have finally found you again?" He asks me in the deep rumbling voice of his I could never resist for long. D

Then before I can react further, he pulls me against his body, but instead of kissing me like I am expecting, he wraps his arms around me in a hug. A hug that sends chills down my spine in a good way. I never knew until now how much I missed being in his

arms, How much just that one action made me relax more than anything else in the world.

I have found my safe place again.

Loving Quinn Chapter 6

(Quinn)

My night is going how I predicted. A little backward in activities, but that works for me. My date was running late, so I waited in her living room for almost thirty minutes. When Rebecca finally came out of her room, things went from polite to heated faster than intended. The next thing I know, I have her pinned up against a wall.

I hold her hands above her head as she wraps her long legs around my waist. I fused my mouth to hers as I pump in and out of her tight pussy. Our kisses muffle her moans of pleasure. Soon I have her bent over the back of her sofa. Hands fisted in her hair as I lost myself to the pleasures of the flesh. Once we finish, we both shower, then get dressed once more. Our two hours of fun makes us late for the fundraiser. I have to say that it was worth it in the end.

An hour after arriving, I leave Rebecca at the bar so I can go outside to have a bit of fresh air. Being at events like this is still new to me. I have been to them before, but always when I was on active duty. Being here as a donor is different. The setting remains similar. Hundreds of people stuffed into formal attire, Food, drink, and musical entertainment. All of that crammed into a large banquet hall, museum, or outside if the weather permits.

I can only handle being at these things for a few hours. After looking at my watch, I see that I have an hour left of the time I agreed to stay. Heaving a sigh of resignation, I turn and head back inside. As I am walking back to the ballroom to find Rebecca, I hear a woman shouting to be let go.

The smart thing to do would be to keep walking. However, after hearing a man's voice yell back, I changed directions. I veer off toward the raised voices.

I see a man and woman struggling. The man has his hand on the woman's arm and is up in her face, screaming at her. I can't see her face, but the sound of her voice triggers something in my mind.

When I see the man raise his arm to strike her, I step forward to catch his hand before he can hit her. This causes him to spin around to glare at me with the righteous indignation of a drunk man. From the smell coming off him, I would say his drink of choice is vodka.

A gasp brings my attention to the woman. The face I see makes my eyes go wide. Holy fucking shit. Annora Winters is standing right before my eyes. My first love and the only woman who has been able to set my soul on fire.

Right here in the flesh this time and not in a dream.

Her auburn hair is pulled away from her face with a few curls left loose. The dress she is wearing shows off her womanly curves to perfection. Her body has matured in a very amazing way. Gone is the teenage girl of the past. Standing before me is the woman she became.

During the ensuing conversation, I learned she was married to that asshole. Chasing him and the overly flirty new wife away was the best course of action. I would love to break the man's for trying to hit Annora, but doing that in a public setting like this is a bad idea. When Annora almost faints, I carry her to a bench, then go grab a glass of water for her.

After she regains her composure, I stand up and hold my hand out for her. She looks up at me with those amazing hazel eyes. I can see the uncertainty swimming in their depths. I can feel the nerves pumping off her in waves.

She takes my hand and I lead her outside to get some fresh air. I find a bench to sit on and I can feel her eyes on me once I sit. It makes me feel a little nervous. It has been so long since we have sat like this together.

I cover her hand with mine and run my thumb over the back of her hand. It used to soothe her in the past whenever she was upset about something. I am happy to know that I can still soothe her like this. I did it to help and mainly because I always had the need to touch her in some small way.

I can see that hasn't changed either.

The way she is staring at me is cute. Her cheeks are flushed and I am pretty sure it has nothing to do with the incident with her ex-husband. Before we came outside she complimented me on my uniform by telling me that I looked good in it.

Officer uniforms are usually magnets for women. Annora is different even though I can tell by the way her eyes travel over my body that she is thinking the same thing most women do.

What will I look like without the uniform on?

I am more than willing to show her.

After what feels like forever, I stand up and hold my hand out to her. "Come dance with me."

This time, Annora smiles at me. It was like everything else in the world fell away in that moment, just having her smile up at me. She took my hand hesitantly at first, then more firmly so I could lead her into the ballroom. I lead her onto the dance floor just as a slow ballad comes through the speakers. Perfect, a song that will give me the chance to hold her close to me again.

As we swayed to the music, my heart pounds wildly in my chest. Running into her tonight is amazing, yet terrible. I get to see her in this amazing satin ball gown as it clings to her body like a glove. The downside is that I now know that I will be fighting an uphill battle from here on out.

“There have been so many times where I heard your voice in my head. Hearing it tonight when you defended me from Kyle was like going back in time.”

Hearing her say this makes bad things happen to my heart. I feel it fluttering it did around her all those years ago. Would it be a bad thing to fall backwards in time? Can I allow myself to be vulnerable to this woman in my arms? Will she be able to handle the demons that chase me? I can't even handle them most of the time. How can I ask her to do that?

No, I can't ask her to do that. The boy she once knew is gone. In his place is a battle weary soldier with too many scars to count. I won't put that on anyone as long as I live. No matter how much my heart and soul beg me to. (2)

“Where will you go after tonight? Where are you stationed?” Annora whispers to me as we sway to the music.

“I am only in the reserves now, currently not on active duty unless called up for action.” I tell her. Now is my time to explain to her I live right here in California.

“Oh, so are you only here tonight for the fundraiser?” She asks, looking up at me.

“No,” I tell her.

“Are you staying longer?”

Before I can respond to her further, the speaker for the event announces that dinner is now being served in the dining room. That was also when my date for the evening made her presence known. Great. I don't want to be separated from Annora yet.

“There you are, Quinn. I have been looking all over for you. Oh, who is this?” Rebecca asks as she steps up next to me to grab my arm.

“This is Annora. I am going to spend some time with her for a while. Can you please go find Aaron?” I tell her.

“What the fuck? You bring me here, ditch me at the bar, now you are choosing this tramp over me?” Rebecca screams. She pulls on my arm to make me face her and stomps her foot.

“I will choose her over you every time. Now don’t embarrass yourself further, please go now.” I pull my arm away from her, stepping back out of her reach.

“You will regret this,” Rebecca says, then she storms off.

I look back to see Annora just staring at me. The look in her eyes makes me flinch. She is looking at me with disgust and disappointment. What did I do? I chose her over another woman? Why is that wrong?

“Did you really have to do that? I would have stepped aside for your date had I known you had one,” Annora hisses at me, her eyes glittering with her anger.

“I dismissed her so we could spend more time together. How is that a bad thing?” I ask in confusion.

“We could have just exchanged numbers so we can meet up before you leave town. However, it is how you dismissed her, Quinn. She isn’t a soldier to give orders to. Are you even human anymore? What happened to that kind–hearted boy from twelve years ago?” She demanded.

“War, battles for innocent lives, that boy no longer exists.” I tell her with no emotion in my voice.

Annora recoils as if I slapped her. My words are the truth, but maybe I could have phrased it better. Hell, this night is going down in flames before it ever gets started. Did I actually think it was going to be that easy to pick up where we left off? What a fucking moron I am being to believe that.

“I am sorry,” I say to her in a low tone.

Without another word, I turn around and walk away from her. My heart constricts painfully as I do. I am an asshole. With a heavy sigh, I decide to find Rebecca to apologize for my harsh words. I made the donation for the foundation when I arrived earlier, so once I find Rebecca I will leave.

As I am looking for her, I find Aaron with his date. They look disheveled as they walk down the hallway from the bathrooms. From the sly grin he gives me, I can assume what their bathroom activities were. Giving him a nod, I continue my search for Rebecca.

I find her sitting on a bench in the hall on her phone. When she notices me approaching, a glare replaces her sad look. I hold my hands up, signaling that I come in

peace. She hangs up her phone, stomps over to me, then slaps me across the face. I guess I deserved that, or worse, in fact, if she kicked me in the balls next, I would accept it.

“Hey, I know I deserved that, I am sorry for what I said and how I said it. I have only one explanation for you, but I would like to tell you somewhere else. Can I drive you home? I will tell you a story on the way,” I say to her as she continues to glare at me.

“I already called a cab. There isn’t anything you can say to me that will make what you did any better.” She yells at me.

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“Do you remember your first love?” I ask her.

My question takes her off guard, making her just gape at me, then she blinks once and nods her head. I take that as a sign to continue.

“That woman in there was mine. Twelve long years ago was the last time I saw her. Right before I shipped off to basic training. I wanted more time with her tonight, but how I went about it was wrong and I am sorry I hurt you.” I confess with disappointment in my voice.

“I can find my way home if you want to go back in there,” Rebecca replies after she blinks her eyes a few times.

“No, I have done enough damage tonight to both of you. I would like to make up for my rude behavior and take you home. Can you at least let me make sure you get home safely after I acted like a monkey’s ass?” I ask her.

Rebecca let out a small chuckle but agreed with a small nod of her head. I hold out my arm for her, then lead her from the hotel. I told her the story of how I met Annora on the her house. I decided halfway there to take her to a small diner to have dinner. There she shared her first love story with me. I agreed to help her find the man that still held her heart. He, too, was a soldier in the United States Armed Forces.

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Even when we “come home from the military... if there's been trauma—there'll pieces missing, broken, even psyches fractured. And there's no putting it back together the w...

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Loving Quinn Chapter 7

(Annora, a week later)

"Let me get this straight. You ran into your first love at the fundraiser, and instead of taking him home for some passionate sex, you went home alone?" Shawna asked me as she just stared at me while making coffee in the staff break room of Mercy General's pediatric wing.

I close my eyes briefly, let out a sigh, then focus back on my best friend. Of course, Shawna would announce that out loud for all to hear. Not that there was anyone else in the room right now, but that had never stopped her. Good grief, why did I tell her anything? Oh, yeah, she is my best friend and will get it out of me eventually.

"First off, Grace was at home. Second, as much as that idea appeals to me, he turned out to

be an a**hole." I shrug as I remember the Quinn that I met a week ago versus the boy I knew

so long ago.

It was like a night and day change in him. One I don't think I like. However, considering the

after I married, Quinn's behavior was tame compared to what Kyle has done to me.

"Are you not going to give him a second chance? I mean, he was your knight in shining armor, rescuing you from Kyle like that," Shawna finished making her coffee and headed to the door.

I followed her out. "How will I even do that? He doesn't even live in California." I pause as I look around the nurses' station we were standing next to.

"Where is everyone?"

"Oh, they all probably headed to the staff meeting early," Shawn told me.

"What staff meeting?" I ask.

I look at her with a frown on my face. Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I check my email. Sure enough, there it was, an email from the hospital's director, Gayle Jorgen. I open the email, skim through, then turn to Shawna in shock.

"Did you know about this?"

"The meeting? Yes. Why? What is

it about?" She asks me after she takes a sip of her coffee.

"You didn't read the actual email, did you?" From the look on her face, I can tell that the answer is no. I laugh, that is so like her to just get the gist of the email and not read any further.

"I just read the part about a full hospital staff meeting, then stopped. I figure they will tell us what it is about when we get there," she tells me with a dismissive shrug of her shoulders.

I shake my head then tell her the news, "The hospital has been sold."

"What the actual **? When?" Shawna sets her coffee on the counter of the nurses' station, looking like she was about to blow up with her anger.

"Yesterday. The new owners are here today to explain, set us all at ease, then go over their plans for Mercy General. You should really start reading your emails fully, Shawna," I tell her with a shake of my head.

Sometimes it is like Shawna is my child rather than my grown adult best friend. She just laughs at me as she turns toward the elevators. I guess we are heading to the large lecture hall the meeting is being held in. Mercy General is a teaching hospital. There were three lecture halls, but the one we are heading to is the only one that will fit all of this morning's staff. Doctors, nurses, residents, orderlies, and cleaning staff would be crammed into seats and along the walls for this meeting.

Why are we only just now finding out that the hospital was in negotiations with a buyer? Hell, I didn't know the hospital was even up for sale. How long had this deal been in the works before today's announcement? Those are questions I will have to ask. I can move my practice outside the hospital if things with the new owners turn sour.

I have been contemplating that idea for the last six months. There is a very nice building that I have in mind for it. All I would need to come to the hospital for would be for consultations with patients who are already hospitalized. Or to do surge: when scheduled. I do that in other hospitals around the county already. I will think about this idea further if this meeting looks like it will lead to a full-on s**t show.

We make it to the meeting with two minutes to spare. There are so many whispered conversations going on around the room as doctors and nurses cluster in groups. No doubt. they are all wondering the same things that went through my head as Shawna and I came down here. How the hell are the new owners going to explain what went down?

Who the hell are G&C Enterprises? Their logo is on a few signs around the room as I look around. Vaguely, the name rings a bell somewhere in my mind.

Then, before I can examine where I have heard the company's name before, a familiar face

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Chapter 7

steps up on stage with Gayle. A face I haven't seen in twelve years. What the hell is Aaron Carter doing here in California?

Gayle taps on the microphone to get everyone's attention, then she waits as the room quiets. down. "As you are all aware from the email that was sent out late last night, Mercy General is now under new ownership. I would like to introduce you all to one of the new owners now," Gayle lifted a palm up to motion to Aaron as he stepped forward. She steps back to allow him at the microphone.

short and sweet while I

“Hello everyone. I am glad you could all make it, I will make my part short and wait for.... oh, never mind, he is finally here. My name is Aaron Carter, from G&C Enterprises. The man you see coming down the stairs is my partner, Quinn Grayson.”

Oh! Holy **s**! My eyes go wide with shock as I watch Quinn walk down the center aisle towards the stage. As if he senses my staring, he stops, looks back over his shoulder directly at me, then gives me a small nod. Why the **k** did he not tell me this **t** a week ago at the fundraiser? Oh yeah, he walked away after I called him out for being an **hole**.

When Quinn reaches the stage, he walks up and stands next to Aaron. “Sorry I was late. I had to deal with a family issue. How is everyone doing this morning?”

Voices from the crowd murmur their hellos, then a silence settles back over the crowd. I can tell they are all just as eager as I am to know what the hell is going on. Quinn and Aaron watch the faces of all those assembled for a few moments more, then Aaron nods to Quinn. to continue. They conveyed something between the two of them in a way they always seemed to do in the past. A part of my mind itches to know what it was, just like it always used to.

It is nice to know that some things stand the test of time. Their friendship was proof that the two of them would follow each other everywhere. That thought make ne smile. The summer we spent together still holds a place in my heart.

“Alright, let’s get down to the nitty gritty of what has transpired behind the scenes of your hospital, Maxwell Davison made a horrible investment that tanked Mercy General’s finances to the brink of bankruptcy.” He paused to look around the room then he continued.

“He wasn’t alone in that investment. He had help from the board of director’s CFO Regina Morgan. Together, they siphoned the remaining funds to offshore accounts in a name they thought no one would link back to them. Then they used some of Howard Davison’s money to invest in a more stable cash flow to recoup the losses.” Quinn explains as he looks out at us all, but I feel like he is staring at me alone.

“We were originally only interested in your veterans’ program, but we did some figures, and offered to buy the entire hospital instead. Our investigation during the negotiations turned up the rest. So, here we all are now,” Aarons speaks up where Quinn left off.

“Where does that leave all of us?” A male’s voice spoke up from the crowd.

A question echoed by others in the room. Followed by ‘Are we getting fired?’, ‘Will the board be replaced?’, and more questions of that line in rapid fire succession, one after the other. Then someone asked what was on my mind. Why were we not informed by the board of directors about the financial crisis?

“I suspect the reason for that was they still had hope to recover. Mercy General is a teaching hospital with a once renowned veterans’ program, all of which has a very high operating cost. One that would have depleted all the finances, then killed this hospital before they could have begged investors to help or reaped the positive benefits of the investments recently made.” Aaron answers.

“As for the board of directors, we have cleaned house completely and will replace each member with new ones that we have already interviewed. They will join the team here within the next week,” Quinn responded to another question.

“Your jobs are all safe. Please do not worry about that. Gayle here is staying on as director and will answer questions you may have,” Aaron gave the answer to the one question I know most of the doctors, nurses, and orderlies really wanted to know. Would they need to look for work at another hospital or not?

The tension in the room immediately dissipates. A collective sigh goes through the room, then indistinct murmurs fill the room as colleagues reassured each other. The overall mood in the room is lighter now that it was when we all first arrived. I look at my watch, curse low under my breath, then head for the door.

I have a consultation with a patient in twenty minutes. I am stopped in the hall by a deep rumbling voice from behind me, making me turn around to glare at him. What does he want now? I let out a sigh because I know I am being unfair to him, but I can’t seem to help myself.

“I didn’t know you were on staff here until we finalized the deal. I handled things badly with you and I hope you can forgive me,” Quinn says. The look in his sea-green eyes is apologetic and sincere.

“You call dismissing your date the way you did handling things badly?” I asked him, surprised.

“Yes, I do, I made it up to Rebecca after you stormed off. I dropped her at her house with a smile on her face a few hours later,” Quinn replies.

Oh, well, if that isn’t a clear enough statement that he slept with his date that night, I don’t know what is. What happened to this man? What happened to that fun loving, sweet-natured, larger-than-life boy from all those years ago? The one who melted my heart with just a look. What happened to him during his time in the Army? One thing that I know for certain is I want nothing to do with the man he has become now.

“Well, I am happy that you and your date had a good evening. Now, I am late for a consultation with a very sick little girl,” I tell him. I turn around to walk away from him, but he grabs my arm to pull me back to him. I flinch at the way he grabs me. He notices instantly and drops his hand.

“I am sorry. I will leave you be, but maybe we can have lunch later today or the next time you are free.” Quinn asks me as he steps away from me.

The pained look in his eyes makes me blink back sudden tears. There in his eyes, I finally saw that boy I knew. That Quinn would never hurt me. It makes me happy to know that the boy he used to be is still somewhere inside him. My heart wants to give him the chance to prove to me he isn't the a***hole from a week ago. My mind knows that there is a minefield of issues that will be uncovered if I spend time with Quinn.

I will have to tell him about Grace, yet I am not ready to open that door to the past. Will he be angry with me for keeping her from him? I would be if I were him. This is something I

need to prepare for. I need to talk to Grace first. Holy hell, that is going to be a nightmare.

I look up

at Quinn to see his sea-green eyes almost pleading with me to say yes. That f**g look makes my heart melt despite my brain screaming at me to walk away right now. “Look, I have work to do, but I will call you when I have a free lunch h***

“Why do I have the feeling that this is going to turn into the brush off I deserve after how I treated Rebecca last night?” Quinn asks me with a frown on his face now.

“Honestly, you do in fact deserve something like that, but that wasn't what I was doing.” I tell him as I turn to walk away again.

“Annora,” Quinn calls to me after I have taken a few steps away.

I stop walking to turn to look back at him. He walks to me, his hand coming out of his pocket as he does. Instincts on high alert from being married to Kyle. The wariness in my eyes makes Quinn shake his head as he comes to a stop in front of me again.

“Hold out your hand, palm up for me, please,” Quinn asks me.

Hesitantly, I do as he asks. He places his hand on my, his thumb sliding over in the my wrist same way he used to do. My heart flutters in my chest as he stares into my eyes. My goodness, the feelings he brings out in me now are the same as they were twelve years ago. I unconsciously take a step closer to him, but to my surprise, Quinn steps back..

“I held a part of you with me all this time, hoping to one day find you again. I have found you and I will wait for as long as you need to decide. You are worth waiting for, Annora.” Quinn leaned in, placed a kiss on my cheek, then walked down the hall.

What the hell am I to do with that? I look down at my open palm and the tears I felt earlier slip free. There, in the palm of my hand, rests the St. Michael's medal I gave Quinn the night before I left him behind. The night Grace was conceived. He kept it all these years. My heart broke the day I drove away from him with my family.

He kept it with him.

Loving Quinn Chapter 8

(Quinn)

I walked away from Annora without hesitation. The necklace I left in her palm wasn't something I would normally part with, but because it was her gift to me, I feel fine letting it go now. I know she will keep it safe. I hope what I told her before I left her will be enough to make her want to meet with me soon. It feels like I have waited forever for her, yet I know in my heart I will keep waiting until she is ready.

I look at my watch to check the time, then I make my way to the wing that housed the veterans' program. Aaron and I are to meet the staff of doctors, physical therapists, massage therapists, nurses, and counselors. All trained in helping veterans recover from wartime trauma. We will keep everyone in the program on staff, taking recommendations for fresh staff to replace those that were let go, and interviewing candidates for head of the program. Though if none stand out, we have a plan to bring in someone we already know can handle the job.

Major Rylan Danvers was the medic assigned to my unit when I first enlisted. Rylan wasn't a major then, nor was she the surgeon she is today. There was a point in time where she had a crush on me, but I set her straight by letting her know I had a girlfriend. Me not having one at the time wasn't important. We became good friends. I believe she has a thing for Aaron, so that may be an issue, but I think it will be fine.

I walk into the reception area to see a few patients waiting on benches, pale blue chairs, or in their wheelchairs off to the side. Phones ring somewhere behind the reception desks, music pumps out of the physical therapy room, the sounds of weights clattering against workout equipment echoes through the halls. All that takes me back to the many times I

went through recoveries of my own injuries.

Part of my mind knows that being here could trigger my own trauma, yet know that being

here is better than running from those memories. I hear Aaron's voice from down the hall to my right, so I turn in that direction to see who he is talking to. I push through a set of swinging doors to find the physical therapy room. Aaron is standing with a woman I know

well but didn't know was on staff here.

Dr. Dionne Masters. My ex-lover and ex-psychiatrist. What the **k is she doing here? We both crossed the line between patient and doctor during our session one day. It led to some good times in my life, but the way it ended made me regret ever crossing that line.

"Ah, there you are. I was wondering where the other half of this duo was, but now I have my answer," Dionne exclaims as she noticed my arrival.

Nothing about her has changed at all. Her chestnut brown hair is left loose to flow down her back in waves. Her clear hazel eyes are assessing me in the same way I am her. Only her stare is shrewd, and a little cold. The flash of a smile let me know she was thinking the same thing that flashed through my mind as I look at her.

That first time in her office, the day we went from doctor/patient to lovers. My hands all over

her extremely toned body. Dionne is an avid runner, yoga enthusiast, and hiker in her spare time. We **ed all over her office that day. We had the time since I was her last session of

the day. No secretary to hear Dionne moan my name as I pounded into her.

I take a deep breath to clear my head. This woman is toxic and trouble to my system. I give Aaron a hard stare as I walk further into the room. "What is she doing here?"

"That was what I was asking her before you walked in," Aaron replies.

"Well, would you like to ask me that yourself, Quinn?" Dionne asks me. She steps up next to me, her perfume bringing more memories to mind.

"You're not listed as being on staff with this program or anywhere else in this hospital. Why are you here?" I question her. My anger is clear in my voice.

"There is that anger I remember," she laughs in that dismissive way of hers that I always hated.

"Alright, stop playing games with us and answer the f**g question," Aaron demands.

"His protector, as always, Aaron. Things with you two never change. I'm not here in any professional capacity, don't worry." Dionne takes a step away from both of us, pulls up the sleeve of her jacket, then shows us her left arm. From her elbow to her wrist, there is a scar

that looks to still be healing.

She is a patient here. Well, f***k. This is going to suck..

“What happened?” The question popped out of my mouth before I could stop myself. I don’t

want to know. I shouldn’t have asked. This will make her think I still care about her.

“Aw, are you asking because you genuinely want to know or out of reflex?” Dionne asks with that f**ng smile back on her face.

“I don’t have time for this s**it.” I spin around and stalk across the room to the doors.

This day has been fantastic so far. The love of my life thinks I am an a**ole for how I treated my date a week ago. Now the woman who came so close to being my wife is standin In the hospital that I now own. What else can go wrong today?

I back track to the reception area and ask for directions to the staff lounge or offices of the doctors on staff. With that information in my head, I take off in the direction I am given. A few minutes later, I found my goal. I make my introductions to all those around and wait for Aaron to join me.

I feel bad for leaving him behind to deal with Dionne, but she brings out a dark side of me I would rather not deal with today or ever again. Some lines should never be crossed. Some things just can’t be undone. At some point, the boundary between doctor and patient got so

blurred I can never recall which one of us made the first move.

The lingering looks she would give me when I was leaving her office let me know she was attracted to me. I never thought she would act on it or even reciprocate my mild flirtations. Then, when we took things too far, there was no going back for either of us. What for me started out as purely sexual, a release of tension, soon turned into something deeper.

Spending time with Dionne outside her office was when it all went in a more serious direction. Lunch dates turned into dinner dates. Dinner dates turned into breakfast the next

morning. Soon we were going on morning jogs together, hiking on the weekends, or even camping when our schedules allowed.

The five-year age gap didn’t bother me. We had so much in common that the age difference meant nothing to us. The day I asked Dionne to marry me was also the day

she told me about our baby. She was pregnant with my child. It stunned me, and I didn't know what to say. That was the beginning of the end for us.

"Hey, are you alright?" Aaron's voice brought me back to the present.

I look at Aaron. His expression was one I am awfully familiar with. Worry. I hate that the situation with my almost-wife put that look in his eyes again.

"I will be. Let's go talk to the chief here so we can see what needs to be done to put this program back on the top of the list."

"We could ban Dionne from the hospital," Aaron suggests to me as we walk towards the meeting area.

"That would be satisfying, yet unprofessional. As much as I would enjoy that, we have so much on our plate to deal with first. If she makes any moves to cause problems, I will deal

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Chapter 8

with her then," I explain to him as we stop in front of the door to our meeting with the program's staff.

"What are you going to do about Annora? I saw her in the crowd during the meeting earlier. I know you talked to her afterwards. Are you going to talk to her further?" Aaron's question made me stop reaching for the doorknob.

He was the only person here who knows about my relationship with Annora. He was there

that summer with us as we fell in love with each other. The closest I have ever come to telling anyone else about Annora was while I was with Dionne. That was when she was just

my therapist.

I told Dionne that there was a woman I loved and lost long ago, but left it at that. Dionne assumed that the woman I referred to was dead. I let her believe that so she would not pressure me to talk about Annora. She did anyway once our relationship became more intimate. I refused to talk about it further. There was no way I was going to share my relationship with Annora with any other woman.

I wasn't trying to keep Annora's existence a secret by any means. I just didn't want to talk about her with anyone other than Aaron. It was sharing something special with people who didn't need to know. Sharing something I had hoped to rekindle once I found her again.

"I met her at the fundraiser last week," I confess to him.

"Oh, really? How did that go? No, wait, don't tell me now. We will talk about that later over beer and nachos as we go over the list for who to hire for the last seat on the board of directors." With that last statement, Aaron opened the door and greeted the doctors inside.

The next two hours went by slowly as we went over every detail of how the money for the program had been spent. We asked each doctor to make a list of equipment, tools, or anything they were lacking. Anything that would be needed to provide top-notch medical care to those veterans who came to the program. Then we asked them each for a wish list of items they thought would make the program and their areas of expertise work better.

We told them to give us both lists in a week. That would give plenty of time for each doctor to decide what they needed and wanted. Aaron and I want this program back to full working order as soon as possible. The work it used to do can be achieved again. As Aaron and I walked out of the meeting to go to our next one, we both agreed we would hire Rylan to head the program.

After our last meeting of the day, we were both sporting massive headaches and full briefcases. All I want to do is take my suit off, kick my feet up, then devour a plate of nachos with a beer. I told Anton I would meet him at his place as we pulled out of the hospital parking lot. I call Rylan from the car but get her voicemail. I will try calling her again once I get to Aaron's place. With luck, Rylan will be available and open to our job offer.

I stopped by a store for beer, but as I was walking back to my car, my phone beeped, signaling I have an email. I put the beer in the back seat, hopped into the driver's seat, then pulled my phone out of my jacket's inner pocket. My brows lifted in surprise at the number that showed up. Annora sent me an email. I took a deep breath before I opened her message. My mind goes crazy about what she will say. I pray it is not a rejection. Opening the message, I read it aloud.

Quinn,

Your appearance back in my life has taken me completely off guard. Your being back in my life will upset the balance I have worked years to achieve. I think it would be best to keep our relationship strictly professional. I have enough drama in my life with an ex-husband and his new wife. I don't want to add more to an already full plate.

There are so many happy memories of that time, but that is just what they will stay as. Sweet memories of my first love. That is all you can ever be for me, Quinn. I am sorry. I know from the look on your face today you are hoping for me. The children we were then are not who we are now. I will always love that boy you used to be. The man you showed me last week is not someone

I want in my life.

Thank you for rescuing me from Kyle last week. I wish you well in all things and look forward to seeing the good you and Aaron do for Mercy General.

Please respect my choice.

Respectfully, Dr. Annora Winters.

Well, isn't that a kick in the nuts? Rejected after finding her after all those years spent apart. What a blow to the heart and ego. Somehow, I figured it would be like fitting two lost puzzle pieces together. Turns out that we are pieces of two different puzzles.

The door to the past has been closed.

I drop my phone on the passenger seat, place my head in my hands, and just sit there in the dark interior of my car. After all these years, I have finally found the love of my life again. She wants nothing to do with me. I f***ng ruined my second chance in one night of hopeful thinking. I slam my hand on the steering wheel, then go back into the store for something stronger to drink than beer.

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Tonight will be a long night of drowning my memories in whiskey.

As I drove to Aaron's new house, a beep from my phone signaled another email, then a few seconds later the sound of a text message. I ignored both as I continued to drive. Whoever they were from could wait until I was safely parked in Aaron's driveway. I never touch my phone or receive calls while driving. I find it both irresponsible and distracting.

I have enough to think about now to distract my mind from the road. Between finding the love of my life again, and Dionne showing back up, things have gone from positive to straight up gloomy as f**k. Time to compartmentalize my life again. Focus solely on business and business only.

Don't know what happened with this baby issue but seems that Quinn not knowing about Grace will turn things upside down for Annora.

Jazmine Schwark

Wait wait wait! So he has a kid with tis Donnie chick?? and zero mention of

Loving Quinn Chapter 9

Chapter 9

(Annora)

I sit at the kitchen counter in silence. Grace is at a friend's house for a sleepover, since school will be out for the rest of the week for teacher conferences. I have the entire house to

myself for the first time in weeks. Yet, I sit in my kitchen staring at the necklace I placed on the marble surface hours ago rather than relaxing with a book. My mind is racing through all those memories from that long ago summer.

I sent Quinn an email before I left the hospital to tell him I needed to keep professional between us this time around. I regretted it instantly as my thoughts were consumed with images from the past. My mind kept going to that last night with Quinn. That was the night I gave him the St. Michael's medal.

We spent that night talking about how we envisioned our lives in the future. Planning out what we would do after we went our separate ways. We planned to meet up in England. anytime he had leave from his duties and if my schedule was free. We both knew it was just a dream, but we dreamed it anyway.

Then we spent the rest of the night tangled up with each other on the small bed in the room's corner. Much later, before I had to sneak back to my grandparent's house, I gave him the medal. The look in those sea-green eyes made me happy. He put it on right away, then told me he would keep it with him always.

I now know that he was true to his word.

I blink my eyes as I feel tears fall onto my hand. Brushing my cheeks with my hands, I am surprised to find that I have been crying while I remembered that last night with Quinn. I pull out my phone to check for a response to the email I sent him. There is no response from him, which makes my heart constrict painfully. He is doing what I asked by not responding, so why does it hurt? I quickly compose another email telling him we need to tai.

I need to tell him about Grace before he finds out another way. Quinn needs to hear it from me. We have a daughter together. I also need to talk to Grace about her father.

What will it be like to finally introduce her to the man that helped create her? Will he be angry with me for not trying harder to find him?

** it. I text him my address, then tell him to come over as soon as he gets the message. I will tell him tonight. In a state of panic, I stand up off the stool and rush up to my room. There is no way I am going to have Quinn in my house while I am in my pajamas. Yes, he

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Chapter 9

has seen me naked before, but that was over twelve years ago. Before my body went through

motherhood.

I take a shower, leave my hair to dry, and dress in casual clothes. I pick out a pair of gray pants and a black silk shirt. Ok, maybe that wasn't casual, but I am going with it. When there was still no response from Quinn, my resolve wavered.

Wine will help me drown the disappointment. I wouldn't blame him if he decided not to come by after the email I sent. Playing it cold and safe then hot and demanding is just s*id. I** never should have sent that email in the first place.

y way down to the kitchen to pour myself a glass of white wine. As I pass the door,

I make my

the doorbell rings. My heart flutters as I hope it is Quinn on the other side of the door. With a shaky hand, I open the door, disappointment and anger flood my body as I see Kyle on the other side of the door. Fantastic, just what I don't need.

"No, you are not allowed to be here. There is a restraining order keeping you away. Why are you here?" I demand from him. I put one foot on the inside of the door as I close the gap to show him less of the foyer.

"We need to talk. I want you to drop the restraining order and let me come home." Kyle smiles at me as he whips a bouquet of roses from behind his back.

I sigh heavily at his words. This isn't the first time he has tried this in the last two weeks. "Kyle, we are divorced. Remember? You are remarried now. Go home to your wife. You know, the woman you cheated on me with. If you don't leave, I will call the police. This violates the restraining order and your probation."

"I don't care! I love you, and we will be together again. Let me in now!!" Kyle screams at me as he tries to push his way inside.

Before he does that, an enormous figure steps up behind him, pulling him back. The light from the front porch shows me Quinn's face. His face is contorted in anger as he turns Kyle around to face him. "I believe she told you to leave."

"Who the **?" Kyle stuttered before his face showed recognition. "You are that a**e. from the fundraiser. What the f***k are you doing at my house?"

"This isn't your house, Kyle! It never was," I tell him as I step into the doorway.

"You are still my wife, so that makes this my house, you f**g b**h!"

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Chapter 9

Quinn punches Kyle in the nose, the gut, then pushes him over into the grass. The look he gives me afterwards is apologetic, like he is sorry for punching my ex-husband. Hell, I find it s*y despite myself.

"I am going to call the police," I tell Quinn. I reach into my pocket for my phone.

Kyle groans as he stands up off the grass. "I will leave. Don't call the police, please."

"If this were the first time you have violated the restraining order, Kyle, I would let it go. It isn't, and I am done with you coming here." I call the police, explain the situation, then thank them for sending someone out.

Kyle lunges at me, but Quinn steps in front of me to block Kyle's efforts. "If you want to hit someone, how about you hit me? I promise you will not like the result of me defending myself against you."

Kyle lunges at him anyway. The result was amazing to watch. Quinn hit him once across the causing him to crumple in a heap on my front stoop. To say I was satisfied with the result is an understatement. Kyle getting knocked out made a shiver go up my spine in excitement. If that makes me a bad person, I will deal with it later.

"I think he will be fine right there until the police get here," Quinn says with a laugh.

Oh, goodness, I am in trouble already and he isn't even inside.

'Hey, I have an idea. Have you had dinner yet?' Quinn asks me.

"No, I was going to fix something, but then he showed up." I tell him as I point to Kyle.

“I will go grab something and then when I come back, we can have that talk that you wanted to have.” Quinn stepped off the front stoop and jogged down the sidewalk to his car before could think of what to say.

Well, it is nice to know that some things don't change. He always did stuff like that, and it used to annoy me so much. He would decide something and then just go do it, whether or not I agreed. Tonight, however, I find it useful. This would give me space to have Kyle carted away by the cops without feeling embarrassed in front of Quinn. The police arrived twenty minutes later. While one officer put Kyle in the back of the squad car, the other asked me all the typical questions.

“This violation will get him some jail time,” one officer said.

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Chapter 9

Quinn came back as they were asking me how I knocked Kyle out cold. I sighed and pointed at him as he joined me on the porch. He gave the officer his version of the story, his name, and contact information. After a few more questions, the police left. They gave me a copy of the report, then drove off with my crazy ex-husband.

“Well, this wasn't how I was hoping tonight would go,” I told Quinn with a laugh.

“How did you want tonight to go, Annora?” Quinn turned to me with a lift of one eyebrow.

Why does he have to sound so**y when he says my name like that? Why am I still so attracted to this man after all this time? “Well, I will tell you that over dinner. Is that chicken I smell?”

“It was the closest thing I could find,” he says with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Come on inside then.”

I let him inside then lead back to the kitchen. My mind whirls as I walk, hoping he won't look around at any of the pictures on the wall of Grace. I will tell him after we eat. That will give me time to work out how to tell him.

“Your home is cheerful,” Quinn tells me as we walk back to the kitchen.

*F*k, he looked around.

“Tell me why you sent me that first email, Annie,” he cut straight to the point like always.

“Sit down while I get plates so we can eat.” I point to the booth-like table in the kitchen’s bay window.

Quinn sits down where I told him to. Seeing him sitting at my kitchen table in his business suit makes me pause on my way to the cabinet. I must blink a few times to clear my head. He has changed in so many ways, yet he is still the same in others. His face is leaner, more defined. Those beautiful eyes are that same sea-green, but with a guarded look to them. His hair is darker than it used to be, yet it still looks as silky as it always did.

Oh, that body of his is all new.

A low chuckle pulls me out of my musing. “You are staring at me, Annie.”

Can a girl be blamed for ogling this man?

I move to the cabinet to grab two plates, open a draw to grab forks and spoons, then with a

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Chapter 9

blush still on my cheeks I walk to the table. I sit the plates on the table and go to sit down, but Quinn stops me in my tracks as he grabs my hand. Looking down into his eyes, I find them no longer guarded, but full of emotion. My heart beats faster as he stands from the

c***ed seat.

up

I haven’t had another man look at me with that look in, well, since he did that long ago summer. Things low in my body tighten in anticipation. I lick my suddenly dry lips as he pulls me in close to his body. Quinn’s eyes follow the movement of my tongue with his eyes. Holy heck, I am in trouble. I would love nothing more than for him to take me right here in my kitchen.

He wraps his arms around me, but instead of kissing me like I thought he would, he just way and holds me close to his body. I feel his lips brush over my hair briefly before he steps away sits back down.

“What was it you wanted to talk about?” Quinn asks. “In one moment, you tell me we need. to remain professional, then in the next you want me to come over.”

I guess

I deserved ice water dumped on my libido.

I sit down across from him, swallowing hard as I compose myself. “I panicked when I sent that email to you earlier. When you handed me that medal, all I could think about was how

life will never be the same.”

my

“I didn’t come here to upset the balance of your life, Annora,” he tells me. Then he opens the takeout bags to serve us.

“Why did you come here?” I must know his reasons for moving to California now.

“Aaron and I settled here because it is a central location for most of our businesses. Then when we heard about the veterans’ program at Mercy General, we knew we made the right choice. We want to do everything we can to give back to fellow soldiers. This program was once the best on the west coast,” he tells me. He plates up a piece of chicken, some mashed potatoes, and a biscuit for us as he talks. He places one plate in front of each of us.

“Oh, let me get you something to drink. I have white wine, tea, water, or orange juice.” I jump up and rush to the refrigerator.

Water will be fine, thank you.”

I grab two glasses and fill them both with ice water. “I was shocked to see you today.”

5/6

Chapter 9

“I found your name in the employment records for Mercy General while we were negotiating the sale.” Quinn looks up at me as I sit back down at the table. “Running into you at the fundraiser was like being hit by a bolt of lightning.” Quinn took a drink of water, then just

stared at me.

He felt it too then. That same jolt I did when I looked into his sea-green eyes for the first time after all these years. It was just like the first time I saw him by the lake.

“Do you think we have a chance?” I ask. I push my plate away since I no longer have an appetite. All I can do is focus on him.

“For what?” The unguarded emotions in his eyes gives me the courage to continue.

“To recapture what we had that summer? After all these years, all we have been through while apart?” He studies my face as I talk, then his eyes flicker to my lips as I lick them

again.

“If you keep licking your lips, I am going to kiss you,” his voice got deeper in that s*** way it used to when he was aroused.

“Then kiss me already,” I demand. –

Quinn takes me at my word. He stands swiftly from his seat, walks to me, then pulls me up from my seat until I am flush against his body. The second his lips touch mine; I know nothing will ever be the same again. I will not let him walk away again.

This man is my home. I have been lost without him all this time this book is really good so far. But how often will we read, this summer and 12 years ago? And how was it possible that he didn't see the pictures and that a child is living

Heidi Kärblane

Quinn, dont mess up! Be a gentelman, and grateful after big news

Loving Quinn Chapter 10

(Quinn)

The moment my lips touched Annora's, all the pent-up feelings for her came rushing back to the surface. I kiss her gently instead of with the passion I know is buried deep inside me for her. This is the first kiss after being starved in the dark for so long. Gentle is what she deserves. Her hands cling to my jacket as she holds me to her.

I wrap my arms around her, one hand on the small of her back, and the other up between her shoulder blades. Nibbling at her lower lip, I slip my tongue in to explore her mouth when she gasps in surprise. Annora moves her arms up to wrap them around my neck. The kiss takes on a life of its own as she kisses me back with just as much pent-up hunger.

I move my hand under her arms, turn her around until her back is against the kitchen island, then I lift her up and place her on the counter. My mouth never once leaves hers until she takes initiative by wrapping her legs around my waist. I tear my mouth from

hers to trail kisses down her neck. Reaching my hand up, I catch her head as it falls back, allowing me full access to her throat.

The moan that slips from her lips as I graze her soft skin with my teeth has my already hard member pushing against my pants. I want to strip her naked and take her right here

on the

counter. I continue to lick, nibble, and suck on her neck as I remove my suit jacket. The sound of my phone ringing stops me for a moment, but Annora moans my name, setting me on fire. I drop my jacket on the floor behind me,

Breaking the kiss, I pull her silk shirt up over her head, and the sight of her pale skin takes my breath away. The white lace bra cupping her amazing breasts makes that fire roar higher. When her hands cover her abdomen, I frown at the stretch marks that she is trying to cover.

She is a mother. She had that a**ole's child.

I push that thought aside as I move her hands out of the way. The lines are there as a reminder of motherhood. An odd thought occurs to me as I run my hands over her stomach. What would it be like to watch her belly grow with our child? The thought was almost sobering until she reached up and brought my lips back to hers.

I groan into her kiss, then fist my hands in her hair. Just like in the past with her, the wave of passion threatens to consume us. Cupping her breasts through the lace, I stroked my thumbs over her erect nipples. Then my greed took over. I pulled the lace aside to reveal the pink bud to the air. I tear my mouth from hers, lean down to flick my tongue over one of the rosy tips.

"Oh, my god, Quinn!" The sound of her moaning my name in that throaty way of hers made me almost o**m on the spot.

Before I can latch onto her other nipple, my phone rings again. This time I frown again. That ringtone is one that is important. With a heavy sigh, I take one last look at the feast in front of me, then I step back from her. Just like that, the bubble we are in bursts back to reality. Annora pulls her clothes back in order as I lean down to pick up my phone.

"I have to take this," I answer that call as I walk away from her.

over me. I end the

What I hear through the phone feels like a bucket of ice water was thrown call after telling the nurse that I will be right there. Turning back to Annora, I see her cleaning up

our partially eaten dinner. I can see the questions in her eyes as I walk to her. Grabbing her hand, I stop her actions to turn her to face me.

“I am sorry for the interruption, Annie, but I have to go.”

“That sounded serious?”

“It isn’t life or death, but if I don’t show up to calm him down, he might end up hurting himself.”

Annora frowned at me. “Who are you talking about?”

“My father. He is in an end-of-life care facility near Mercy general. He has nightmares sometimes and gets rowdy when he wakes up.

“How long has he been there?”

“This one? About a year. I had him transferred here when I moved.”

“What happened to him?”

“He destroyed his liver and d**n near died from cancer. He can’t live on his own anymore, so I had to put him in a care facility.”

“Did you eventually work out all your problems with him?”

“That would require actual conversation. Something my father was never great at.”

“Well, then you should go.”

“I’m not done with you, Annie. I don’t think I ever will be. From the way you kissed me, I don’t think you are done with me either.” I yank her to me, then fuse my mouth to hers again

In her shock, her mouth opens, and I delve inside. The kiss took on a life of its own, with our bodies pressing tight against each other. I wanted very much to lay her on the floor, strip her naked, and have my way with her. Reluctantly, I break the kiss, but I don’t let go of her. I kiss her nose as her eyes close, then just lean my forehead down to hers.

“You don’t know how much I have wanted to just hold you in my arms like this again.”

“If it is anything like what I have wanted, then yes I do.”

“I want to see where this can go this time around, Annie.”

“There is something I need to tell you first.” She leans back to look up into my eyes.

“You have a child, I figured that out earlier.” I give her a smile. “Her father is an a**hole, but that doesn’t mean it will scare me away.”

“Quinn, you don’t understand. There is more to it than what you think.”

“Relax, I am not running away. The army is in my past, Annie. My life is right here in California, and I am not going anywhere. We have all the time in the world to get to know each other again. There will be plenty of time for you to explain it to me.”

“I really need to tell you this. It is important, Quinn.”

My phone rings again, making me look down at it. It was the care facility again. With a heavy sigh, I step back from Annora. “I need to go, or they will just keep calling. I don’t want

them to have to sedate him.”

“Then go, but we really need to have a conversation if this thing between us can move forward. I want this too, Quinn, more than I have wanted anything since the day I drove away with my family.”

“When are you free next?”

“I am busy all week until Friday. I have the weekend off. We can talk then.”

“Alright, come to my office when you are free, and we can have that talk.”

“No, I don’t want to have this kind of conversation in that setting. Meet me here at five on

Friday.”

3/7

Chapter 10

The fear in her eyes makes me wonder briefly what it is she wants to tell me. I debate my options on what will happen to my father if I just let them sedate him so I can stay here. I know I should go to him, but my heart is right here in my arms, and I want to stay with her more than anything else.

“Okay. Hey, listen, no matter what it is, just know that I am not going anywhere. I have waited ten years for this.”

“Me too, Quinn. I just hope you still feel that way on Friday.”

“Come on now, it can’t be as bad as you are making it out to be. So, you have a child with that a**le. I can handle that as long as you let me try.”

“Even if my child isn’t Kyle’s?”

That thought stopped my heart for a moment, then I realized that no matter who the father of her child is, it is none of my business. “What happened during the time we were apart is none of my business, Annie. There are things in my past that are ugly too, but I want you, Annie. I will take the time we both need to get to know each other again. That includes

getting to know your

child.”

“Oh, Quinn, it may not be that simple.”

“To me, it is. We have waited all these years to find each other again. Here we are with the chance to see if what we had then is still as strong as it was all those years ago. Are we the same people we were back then? Hell no, but this feeling I have in my heart, and the one I feel from you, is worth exploring.”

“It is, but there may be some things that will be hard to handle.” Annora waved her hand when I opened my mouth again. “Now, go to your father. I will see you here Friday at five in the evening.”

I kiss her one last time, grab my jacket, then walk away from her. There is a feeling of foreboding in my heart, like whatever she must tell me will change how I look at her. With that thought in mind, I leave her house to go calm my father down.

(Annora)

The second the front door closes behind Quinn, I feel my knees shake from all the feelings he brings out in me. On unsteady feet, I make my way to the front door to lock it behind him. On the way, I spot Grace’s smiling face looking at me from her picture on the wall in the hallway. Quinn must have glanced at her picture, but not truly looked at her.

4/7

Chapter 10

He would know the truth the moment he sees her eyes.

How am I going to tell him? Will he be angry that I didn't look for him? With a shake of my head, I walk to the door, flipping both locks into place, then stepping to the side, I set the security alarm. Kyle may be in jail for that night, but that doesn't take my fear away that he could get out before morning.

If that happens, he will come here to yell at me for not letting him into the house. He will blame me for what Quinn did and no doubt call me a ***e for cheating on him with someone new. Regret fills me deeply, knowing I willingly married him.

Shaking my head, I walk through the house, turning off all the lights, one room at a time. Slowly, I make my way to my room, peel off my clothes, and put on my pajamas. Once I am comfortable in bed, images of what happened in the kitchen tonight flood my mind. My body is still on fire where his finger, lips and tongue touched me.

It was a fire that no other man has ignited in me since I was eighteen and Quinn touched me. Kyle always called me a prude when it came to sex. What he never knew or understood was that I was ruined for any other man the moment I gave myself to Quinn. My body craved his all summer, and it still craves his touch to this day. The events of tonight proved it.

I am in so much trouble. I need to be stronger this time around. To not succumb to him so easily, so completely, as I did in the past. The fear of getting burned alive by the fierce desire we have for each other is strong. I know that there was our relationship than sex.

more to

The love we had was so intense that I didn't know where I started, and he ended. It was like

we were one soul in two bodies.

Breathing deeply, I push those thoughts out of my head so I could try to sleep. The ringing of my cellphone makes me sit up, instantly alert. Please let Grace be fine. Reaching out for

phone on the nightstand, I glance at the caller id. It is not Grace.

my

"Hello, Lana, what can I do for you?" I answer the phone with a heavily audible sigh-for her to hear. I am annoyed with her calling me at all, knowing exactly why she is calling.

"Put Kyle on the phone!" Lana screams. Her voice is shrill and loud in my ears, making me

pull the phone away.

I roll my eyes at the ceiling and shake my head before I respond to her. This happens every single time Kyle shows up here or comes home late to their house. She calls me up and accuses us of cheating on her. Ironic considering, she was the one he was cheating on me

with.

5/7

Chapter 10

“He isn’t here, Lana.”

“How

long ago did he leave? Did you two have a fun time behind my back?”

“Didn’t you have an enjoyable time behind mine all those times you two snuck off together while he was married to me?” I countered her with the truth.

“Where is he, Annora?” She asks.

“At the police station being arrested for assault, t**g, and violating a restraining order.”

“What!”

If I hadn’t already had to phone away from my ear, her scream of disbelief would have made me pull it away. How blind to his faults can she be? I can’t say much myself since I too was blinded by him in the beginning.

Oh, did he not tell you about the restraining order I have against him? He isn’t allowed within two hundred feet of me or Grace. That means coming to my home to beg me to come back to him. It violates not only his parole but my restraining order. He tried to hit me but got dealt with swiftly by my dinner guest.”

“You had him arrested? How cruel are you? Can you not leave us to live our lives?”

“I will do that as soon as your HUSBAND leaves me and my daughter alone.”

“Grace is his daughter. He has a right to see her.”

“No, he isn’t, and he knows it. The judge denied him visitation and signed my restraining order. Kyle’s name is not on her birth certificate because he isn’t her father. She was born before I ever met him.”

“He told me you two met before, had an affair, then lost contact.”

He told Lana my story about Quinn. Why am I surprised by that? He has always twisted the narrative to suit his needs.

“Listen up, Kyle is not Grace’s father and if you want a DNA test to prove it, I will happily give it to you. Now, if you want to bail your husband out of jail, that is up to you. I am blocking your number. You want me to leave you in peace to live your life, here you go.”

I hang up the phone as she screams at me again. F**k you, Lana. Going into my phone settings, I swiftly block her number. I am so done with that woman being in my life. She took the husband I didn’t want, which I will be forever grateful for. Kyle is her problem now.

With my phone still in my hand, I lean back against my pillows. I sent a quick text to Grace telling her goodnight and I will pick her up in the morning. Her goodnight reply is fast, letting me know she will be ready when I pick her up. Closing my eyes, I try to let sleep take over, but images of Quinn’s sea-green eyes keep me awake.

Loving Quinn Chapter 11

Loving Quinn Chapter 11

The first face I see when I noh into the core facility is Grow, my father’s night nurse. Her expression is fill of aggravation. He must be in a particularly bad mood tonight. I can hear her sigh of relief as I walk towards her. I Know my father is getting wese daily. It makes me angry at how he set all of it in motion with his drinking.

“Thank God you are here,” Ginny says as I finally reach her.

“How bad is it tonight?” | ask.

“He has been calling me by your mother’s name all night. Each time I tell him I am not her, he gets increasingly agitated. I stopped correcting him and decided it was time to call you.”

I nod at her, then take a deep breath to prepare to talk to my father. With the state he is in now, I know it will be like talking to a brick wall. I give Ginny a pat on room. I hesitate for a second. Nights like the shoulder before walking down the hall that will take me to my father’s room. When I reach for the door handle of his this usually end up with him being sedated when he gets violent.

with one last deep breath. Itum the **b and push the door open. My father is sitting with his back to the door in the recliner I bought him for Christmas. On the elevision in the comer, is a football game. College football, from the looks of it. I can sense his anger the instant 1 step into the room.

I walk to the side of his chair so I can see his face and he can see mine. "Pop, the mine called me again."

His once raven black hair had now gone gray. His forest green eyes have faded in color as cataracts have started to steal his vision. There are now deep fibwn lines hieves and etched on his forehead. The way he has aged over the years still staggers me from time to time. Before my mother died, he was strong, healthy, and

of life. The day she died; all life drained from him. The rest faded as time marched un

We were never close as I grew up. My time away from him made things better for me. Gave me time away from his abuse. Neglect is abuse. From what I was told by Aaron's mom, the day I left, my father climbed the rest of the way into his whiskey bottle. Not reming back out of it again until his body began to fail him.

By the time I went home for the first time, he was already in a care facility. He was forced to get sober and treated for cirrhosis of the liver. Eventually he was cleared to be a candidate for a liver transplant, but so far none have come up as a match for him. Transferring him to California with me has been a challenge.

The change of scenery, nurses, and not knowing anyone here has taken its toll on him. Most days, he is very lucid and tries to charm the staff. It is the nights while is alone to think that he has problems telling the past from the present. I know he will miss my mother until the day he dies. All I can do for him now is to be there when he needs me.

"What are you doing here? Where is your mother? Tell her I want my dinner."

"Mon is out right now, she had to run to the store." A lie I tell him every time he is like this.

He huffs out a breath before going back to watching his football game. I sit in one of the extremely uncomfortable visitor chairs and wait. This will not be the end of hists tonight. Moer will come when mom doesn't bring his dinner even though he ate dinner in the dining room with all the other residents earlier this evening.

An hour passes and, like I expected, the fireworks start again. He looks up from the game and his expression is wild. Anger that my mother isn't here with his dinner. Stumbling from his chair, he screams her name as if she will just magically appear. My heart goes out to him over her loss. His pain differed from mine on so many Jevels.

I lost my mother, friend, and my shoulder to lean on. He lost so much more than that His friend, confidant, lover, wife, and mother to his son. Her death rocked us to the core and shattered the foundation that our small family was built on. It could have been repaired or ruin if my father hadn't climbed into a bottle of

whiskey instead.

By the time I returned home, there was no way to repair all the damage. Being here for him now is all I can do. No matter how hard he makes it for me.

“Beth, g**it, where are you!? He yells. Loudly.

“What is taking her so long at the d* store?”

I can either try to calm him down by telling him she will be back soon, or I can break the awful truth to him again. Neither option ever ends well. The third option is one that I hate doing to him, but sometimes it is the only way to calm him down. Tell him I will go look for her, leave the room, then find Ginny to have him sedated

That option always leaves me with a sick feeling in my stomach afterwards.

“She probably went to the bakery too on the way home. You know how she can get to talking to Lori while waiting.” Lori was the baker’s wife. They used to live above the bakery when I was a kid.

A satisfied look comes over his face when I mention the bakery. He loves their blueberry m**n for breakfast and their apple pie after dinner. This pacifies him for now as he sits back in his recliner and goes back to watching college football. Looking at my watch to check the time, I see Ginny will be in to help him into bed in an hour. I will stay until he is settled into bed, then a little longer until I know he is sleep.

Seeing that my father

my father was absorbed with his football time, I stepped out into the hallway to call Aaron. I was supposed to be at his place hours ago

– After three rings, he picks up. The sound of feminine laughter in the background let me know he figured I wasn’t coming over and sought another form of

companionship.

“Yo, where the hell did you go tonight?”

“Which stop do you want first?”

“That bad, huh?”

“Well, let’s just say the night didn’t go the way I wanted, but it headed that way.”

“Who did you almost score with?” Aaron is a perpetual teenager in some ways.

“Will you give me one guess?”

He let out a low whistle as he made his guess without the need to say her name. "I was curious about how long it would take you two to get back in the same orbit."

"We didn't start the night out well. She shot me straight to the work colleagues in an email as I was leaving the liquor store. That sent me straight to that dark place in my head, so I headed to your place." I fill him in on the rest of what happened after I arrived at Annora's house, s*the almost getting her naked on the kitchen counter part. I ended with telling him where I was now.

y the old b**d?" Aaron's voice is harsh, but I know he cares more than he will let on

"Demanding to know where my mother is and throwing tantrums."

"I am sorry he goes through that all the time. I don't know how you handle him."

"One day at a

y at a time."

Aaron fills me in on the events of his night. When his date giggles in the background, I bid him goodnight, then tell him I will see him at the office tomorrow. After hanging up the phone, I notice Ginny waving me over. I peek in on my father before thead to her desk. He has fallen asleep in his recliner. That is a good outcome. There would be no need to sedate him.

Joining her at the desk., I informed her of what I saw in his room. She calls for an orderly and between the there of us; yarput my father to h choice to give him a mild sedative to help him stay asleep. As much as I would like to avoid sedation, I know he will wake again on his own

Ginny makes the

Is it selfish of me to just want him to sleep through the night so I can go home? My guy conscience says yes, but I allow Ginny to do it. I want a shower, my bed,

ha-decent night's sleep.

Having had a taste of Annora again tonight, I know my sleep will be full of memories of that long ago summer.

Fourth of July – the past

Laying by the lake on a blanket with Anne snuggled close to me must be my favorite time of day. The stars t**ed overhead in the night sky. The sound of the water lapping along the edge of the lake. Sounds of laughter floating to us from acro the lake as the Fourth of July festivities begin.

Knots form in my stomach as I think of how fast the summer has flown by. Sean Sember will be here, and we will have to say goodbye to each other. I don't want that day to come, but I know it will come all too soon. Annora will go off to England to be a doctor and I will go to Fort Jackson in South Carolina. Walking away

from her will be hard.

We are

only eighteen, but I know that if we gave this thing between us more time, it could be something worth fighting for. She is worth not getting on that plane in September. I could follow her to England, find a job there, and make a life with her. She will let me.

"Hey, what are you thinking so hard about?" Her yase brings me out of my thought; as I look down at her upturned face. Unable to resist, I bend down to give her a quick peck on the lips.

"Not much, why?"

"asked you if you wanted to go grab a burger, then go find a seat for the fireworks play."

"Oh, how about we

watch it from here?"

"But the food bents are over there," she says. Then she pouts and points across

"Ok, how about we go eat then come back here?"

*You just want me

to yourself while the fireworks distract everyone."

"You bet I do."

"Join me and my family for burgers and fireworks now, then later, when no one is looking, we can sneak away to the cabin. You can have me all to yourself for a few hours before my parents notice I am missing"

The way she presses her body against mine makes me agree with anything she wants. With a laugh, she stands up and pulls me up with her. She gives me one long kiss before bending down to fold our blanket. My mind is in a fog as she tugs my hand to guide me to the other side of the lake. She knows exactly what she is doing to me and is using it to her advantage.

Throughout dinner, my mind keeps wandering to the end of summer. Coming up with many activities for the two of us to do before we have to say goodbye. I want to give her the best time of her life so that she never forgets me. I hope she never forgets what we have here and now.

Later, while the fireworks are going off in the night sky, she slips her hand in mine, then whispers seductively in my ear. "Let's go to the cabin now."

She didn't have to ask me twice.

We made love to each other for hours, then we spoke about all the dreams we have for our future. Dream that we both knew may never happen. We let our young hearts beat as we fell asleep.

Present Day, Quinn's bedroom

with me

I wake up sweating profusely as the sounds of Annora's moans follow me out of my dream. That was the same night she gave me the medal that I carried

til today. Looking down at my sweat covered body and my raging erection, I know that I have only two options tonight. Take my hard c**nd take a cold *sheer.

I think the latter will be the wiser choice. I haven't been reduced to m**n in years. Not going to start now. Not with Annora pight my way and the way I know she wants them to, we will recreate those memories and firses ones soon. Friday afternoon if I have may way.

If things go Right after, she tells me whatever she wants to discuss with me. The image of her laid out on that kitchen counter, maked for my eyes only, has me growing stiffer. Shaking my head, I get out of bed and set about getting that cold shower out of the way and back to bed. Five am comes entirely too soon for my liking.

Loving Quinn Chapter 12

(Annona, der 15).

Out of all the places to go on my summer vacation, this was the one place I didn't want to be. My grandparents' lake house. Don't get me wrong, I love it here. The view of the lake from the deck is amazing. Watching the sun set over the trees beyond was always the highlight of my summer nights in my teen years. My grandmother's **g and fishing with my grandpy. Those me all the things I love about coming here. This summer, however, I have more on my mind than sumets, swimming in the lake, and fishing.

In the fall, I will be off to medical school. I will move far away from my parents-uch to their distress, and much to my delight. I got accepted into a very prestigious medical program at Hudson Medical College in England. The day I got my acceptance letter, my father was all smiles, while my mother was in tears. England is a long way from California. The furthest from my parents that I will ever go on my owl.

I am overjoyed.

Not that I don't love my parents, I really do, but they are too overprotective. I am one of five children and their only daughter, not to mention I am the youngest. So, between my four older brothers, my mother, and my father, I had little time to have ten with life. Not that I wanted to. Studying was all I ever seemed to do.

I have always wanted to be a doctor like my father, only I want to go into pediatrics instead of cardiology. Children have always made me smile. I want to one day be able to help take care of them. For now, however, I must endure this five-hour car ride to the lake where my grandparents live. Five hours in a car with my twin brothers and my parents was going to be hell.

I am just grateful that all my brothers are not on this trip. My oldest brother, Max, is on a trip to Europe with his friends Eric, the middle brother, is going to his girlfriend's place to meet her parents. So, I am stuck with the twins, Daniel and Kristopher, who are a year older than me, all summer. Their antics to get me out of the house are going to drive me insane.

Lucky for me, I have my earbuds, a long playlist, and the excellent ability to tune them out. The only thing I am half paying attention to is the quiet argument between my parents, who think their whispering can't be heard over the wind coming through Daniel's open window. They have been fighting for the last month. For my father setting up my living arrangements in England.

He agreed to rent my flat there, set up my spending account and arrange for a driver to take me anywhere I needed to go. My mother, who is still in denial about my

surprised she still gets upset when he decides things leaving, is upset that he did it all without talking to her about it. After over thirty years of marriage, I am without telling her about them.

That is just how Dr. Alexander Winters did things. He was used to making snap decisions, consulting no one while he was at work. That rubbed off into his home life, much to my mother's distress. How they had five children and stayed married for all this time is a mystery to me. I know they love each other because I can see it in their eyes every day. Someday I want to find someone who looks at me the way my father looks at my mother.

Like she is the only thing he sees when he looks at her.

For now, I will settle on not killing my idiot brothers, then moving away for school. Will I miss my brothers? For killing bugs and taking out the trash. For everything else? Not one bit, well, maybe a little, I will miss Daniel's stories during thunderstorms and Kris's grilled cheese sandwiches when I am feeling sad. They are not always a pain in my a**. They love me and know that I love them too. We just fight like all siblings do. That I will miss too.

my I change my playlist to relaxing music so I can tune out the world for a nap. We still have three hours to go on this lovely car ride to Lake Crescent, where n grandparents have a cabin. It is really a large house, but they like to call it a cabin. I hall see what the summer has in store when we get there.

Three hours later, I am woken up by Daniel ripping my earbuds out and yelling that have arrived at our destination. I slap him hard, then on stretch. The long as drive out here is always full of choos between my brothers. Thankfully, it is only the twins on this trip. I am so ready for a shower and some of grandma's chicken parmesan. She always cooks it when she knows we are coming. My grandmother's cooking was one of many things I look forward to coming out here for

"Annie!!" my grandfather called from the porch.

Gola is one of those reasons. He always makes time just for me when I am here. Being the youngest of the children, some would think I get all the attention. I dans. Sometimes I like that I don't get all the attention, other times I wish they would pay more attention to me. Grandpa finds the balance.

He takes me fishing or lets me hang out with him in his woodworking shop, and we talk about anything but school. He is happy that I am going away to medical

bool, but he wants me to be happy more than anything else. That is why times with Grandpa are the best for me. This will be the last summer I will have with him

I climb out of the car and race to the porch for the bear hug that will soothe

"Tomorrow we will go fishing and you can catch me up on everything that has happened since Christmas, ok?" Grandpa said after he released me

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Chapter 12

"That sounds like an amazing plan, tandpa," I smile at him, then head into the house

The minute I step inside, I am hit with the tantalizing aroma of chicken parmesan. The entire house will mell like Grandma's cooking for the rest of the night. I smile as thead up the narrow stairs that lead to the second level of the house. There are three

bedrooms at the front of the house for us kids when we come for the summers and holidays. There are two bedrooms at the back of the house facing the lake. Mom and dad sleep in one of them anytime we stay here.

My favorite room in the entire house is the attic room Grandma converted into her library. They made one entire wall at the back of the room out of glass, and it gives the best view of the lake. My mother has to pay me out of there for meals, or when she wants me to get out of the house for fresh air and sunshine. I never really mind when she does that.

I head to the room I always stay in to dump my bags, I smile to myself as I open the door to see that nothing in the room has changed at all since Christmas. It is dust free and immaculately clean, like always, thanks to Grandma's vigilant cleaning going to miss coming here every summer once I move. Medical School will

keep me far too busy to get away for regular visits. I can feel the tears form in my eyes as I think of all the time I will miss with my family

I will miss the way my brothers fight over trivial things, like which one of them ate the last of the O**s. My parents will continue how they always have been for as long as I can remember. Father will spend all his time at the hospital with his patients, going to important charity events, and making all the decisions for everyone My mother will work in her garden, go to meetings for all the charities she works with, and spend what little time she can with her husband.

I love my parents, but I don't want the life they have. Becoming a doctor is all I have ever wanted, but there needs to be a balance between medicine and family. A balance that my parents haven't seemed to find in all their years of marriage. To achieve what I want out of life, know I will need to spread my wings to fly free.

I look out at the water as I cast my line out yet again. I have been out here for the last two hours and all I have to show for it is a small bucket with two lousy fish. That will feed me and dad for the night. I will give myself another hour to catch a few more then I will make my way home. I am counting the days until I leave this place for good.

Nothing in this town ever changes. Tourists come and go with the changing of the seasons, leaving behind their trash and unwanted pets. I can't wait to leave here at the end of the summer for boot camp. I signed up for the Army without telling my father. He wouldn't notice if I were gone, so why bother. He spends all day at the bar, only coming home when he gets kicked out for being too rowdy or they close for the night. Most nights it is the latter.

He has been like that every day for the last ten years. Every single day since the accident that killed my mother. That was the day that my father lost his will to fer, but instead of killing himself fast, he chose the slow route with bourbon. So deep is his grief that he forgets half the time that I exist, the other half is spent trying to make up for

ignoring me. Which only ends up with both of us yelling at each other He forgets I lost her too.

I lost both of my parents when I was eight. My father is already dead, his body just hasn't caught up with his heart and soul.

am fine with him not being in the house all day. When school is in session, I only spend enough time in that house to cook dinner and sleep. I spent the rest of my time with my best-friend Aaron. He lives two houses over from mine. His parents krunk about my living situation and have told me I am welcome in their home

anytime.

Aaron and I repaired the small cabin at the back of his parents' land. It was used as a hunting lodge twenty years ago, but now it is our own private hideaway. That is where I intend to spend the rest of the summer. Tonight will be the last night I spend at my father's house. I will go back with today's catch, make dinner, then pack the only possessions I intend to take with me to boot camp. All my clothes are already in the cabin.

One framed picture of my mother, a smaller picture of the family we used to be, and the ring the left me to pass down to my future wife. I scoff at that idea, but there is no way I will leave that behind for him to find and sell. He will use it to buy bourbon to drown his pain in. My mother would be sad to see what we have become. To save myself from watching my father slowly kill himself, I have to get as far away from this town as possible.

The Army is my way to serve my country, make something of my life, and a ticket out of my depressing life. Aaron signed up too, his parents and will miss them when we leave in September. Until then, I will spend as much time at their house as possible. They have been more like parents to me since I was ten

out of him. I in neighbor

Other than Aaron, they are the only good things in this town for me. They are the only people that I will miss when I leave this town and never look back.

Laughter from across the lake caught my attention, bringing me out of my thoughts look up to glance across the water. The house over there is owned by the Winters' couple. What catches my attention right away is the flash of auburn hair and long shapely legs as a girl runs up to the house to hug the old man on the back porch.

Was she one of their grandchildren? Why had I not seen her before? I thought all the kids were boys. Jesus, that family has five kids? Guess they never used condom and f**k like rabbits. Knowing that one of them was a girl wouldn't normally get my attention right away, but there was something about her laugh that pulled at

It was so full of joy. Her excitement

her grandfather made me want to know more about her. Her long auburn hair made my
Engers itch to dive into. I want.

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Chapter 12

steps, and into her grandfather's

want to see more of those long legs of hers. All of th

the time

for a summer fmg, or if she in I know it isn't a suitable. Ein

there about this girl that makes me

that kind of girl, know her? With a righ, I reel in my

I can't help the feelings her sudden appearance in P

- line, gather my gear, and leave the edge of the lake.

hile trying to keep my eyes from traveling across the lake to catch

the only thuner |

the "Have you seem

ith many excuses to take ine across the water to 'I don't even own a dog, so that one
won't work if she asks me to

talk to her. What lime excuse will I try first? Me describe it How about I say someone
stole my bag? That one could work.

I would be ok with that as long as I get to see het.

uminen if every lame excuse I have fails me.