

Loving Quinn Chapter 56

(Quinn)

The rest of the week went by faster than I expected. I filled it with meetings at both the C&C Enterprises and Mercy General. At the end of each day, Annora, Grace,

I would spend a few hours at her house pocking.

This weekend we plan to rent a moving van so that we can move some of the bigon feces of fumiture that Annie claims she can't live without, Last night, we packed up everything in her home offer. The room Aaron has used as a temporary office in my penthouse will now become Annora's.

After pulling into the garage, I walk over to David to shake his hand. He bands me anenvelope that was delivered while I was at work. From the writing on the envelope, I can tell it is from Gavin Wyatt. These must be the contracts I had hedrine up for Max and his employees.

"Big event tonight?" David asks.

I look down at my black tuxedo, then nod my head. Since I was running late today, get dressed in my tuned at the office. I had Sherry pick it up from the dry cleaners on her way back from lunch. We had back to back meetings today and by the time I left the office, it would give me just enough time to get home and pray Annor was ready when I arrive.

"A charity auction. The hospital is hosting it and all the proceeds will go to cancer research"

"Better you than me

I laugh as I walk away from him. The first charity event that Mercy General has had since G&C Enterprises has taken over is going to be a big one. This will also be the first charity event that I have gone to since being in California with Annoca as my date.

It took weeks to make all the arrangements, but the venue Gayle picked was perfect for it. One of the hospital's biggest donors has an estate that borders a large private beach. Mr. Weston and his much younger wife have agreed to have the event at their home.

The event is for charity, and we will auction off dates with some of San Francisco's most eligible bachelors. The night will start with the auction, then move on to dinner and dancing as the evening progresses. I can already see all the rich socialites of the area clamoring to bid on these bachelors who volunteered their time. All for a date with elite men from San Francisco

The rest of the evening after the auction has concluded will be their date.

Speaking of dates, I can't wait to see Annora in the dress she picked out for tonight peeked at it this morning when I was getting ready for work yesterday. The black garment bag in our closet was just hanging there on the back of the door. The hunter green sequin gown drew my attention quickly. 1

I bought the perfect jewelry for her to wear while I was out yesterday afternoon. I can already see the look on her face when I open the box for her, Emeralds are perfect for her.

When I open the door to the penthouse, I stop in my tracks. It feels like my breath has been knocked out of my lungs as I stare at the vision in the s**y green gown standing in the entrance hall. I can feel my brain short circuit as I just stare at her with my eyes wide and my jaw hanging open.

A throaty laugh makes me shake my head to clear my thoughts. I close the door behind me, then just watch as she gives me a s** smile. The one-shoulder sequin gown leaves her left shoulder bare. I want to kiss the exposed flesh of her shoulder, then all the way up the column of her neck. Her beautiful auburn hair-in pinned up with a few loose curls down the side of her face.

The material is bunched together at her left hip and there is a slit on that side from her hip down. The flash of a long paté leg as she walks to me makes me swallow hard. I am already having trouble concentrating on anything other than my need to peel her out of that dress.

gorgeous in that dress, but something is missing.”

She frowns at me as she reaches into the inside of my tuxedo jacket to pull out the black velvet jewelry box. Her hazel eyes widen when I pull it out, then open it for her. The emerald teardrop necklace and matching earrings fit her dress perfectly.

“Oh, Quinn. They are beautiful. Thank you.”

I take her hand, then lead her to the hall table. Gently, I lift the necklace out of the velvet box, then turn to her. “I may have taken a peek at your dress yesterday.” I step behind her, trailing my fingers along the smooth skin of her shoulder as I do. After I place the necklace around her neck, I lean down to press my lips to her.

“If we don't leave now, I won't be able to resist the temptation to peel you out of the dress.”

“Black lace is all that stands between this dress and my skin.”

I am so grateful for your parents taking Grace to Monterey for the weekend.”

She laughs as she puts the emerald earrings on, then grabs her small black chatch pre. I watch her amazingly juicy a** as she walks to the door. My tuxedo becoming increasingly too tight as she walks away swear to God if I catch any other watching her with hungry eyes tonight, I may commit homicide,

“Is Aaron bringing a date tonight?”

“No. He will be in the auction.

Annie laughs, which causes me to look at her as we get off the elevator. I can see the humer in my best fiel being auctioned off to a rich socialite for a date. He is a heartbreaker and tonight he will be sold to the highest bidder for a date.

Because tonight is a big night for showing off, I walk to the comer of the garage where thrie is a cat covered in a black car cover. I pull it off, then throw it to the ground. Under the tarp is a 1969 Corvette Stingray in Fathom Green. It was my father’s car and I had it rebuilt

“That is a beautiful car”

“It was my father’s. He put it in storage after I was bom. He told me it would be mine one day. Now it is, and he has forgotten that it exists.

“How bad is he?”

“I will take you with me the next time I go. He has been doing better.”

After opening the door for her, Annie slips inside, and I close the door behind her, then walk to the driver’s side. Once inside, I start the corvette then just listen to it for a moment. I shake my head, then pull out of the parking space. I give David a wee as I pull out of the pinge.

By the time we reach the Weston’s home, there are already people milling about at the front and side of the house. Everyone is all docked out in their finest evening wear for tonight’s festivities. The auction starts in an hour, which gives un plenty of time to mingle.

As we walk closer to the side of the house, I spot Rylan and Shawna standing together Annora smiles, gives me a steamy kiss for all to see, then she walks to join her friends. Those three are going to cause all kinds of trouble tonight. The type of trouble that will break the hearts of all the men and women around them.

To my eyes, Annora shines brighter than all the women here tonight. However, I will mit that the two women with her are equally beautiful as she is. Bylan, with her raven left loose to flow down her back, is wearing a striking red gown that clings to all her curves.

Showna's red curls have been straightened and pinned up around her head. She is wearing a black dress that leaves extraordinarily little to the imagination.

The thure of them will turn heads everywhere they go tonight.

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I take one last look at Annora with Bylan and Shawna, then I walk to the bar on the outdoor patio, Weston did well when he bought this place. The house is a two-story Tudor Revival style home. The back lawn is large, with a staircase that descends to the private beach below.

This is a property

erty I would love to own

As I step up to the bar, Aaron walks over to me with a scowl on his face. He keeps glancing towards where Rylan is standing with Annora. The look of utter defeat on his face makes me look over my shoulder to see what is going on.

Rylan has stepped away from Annora and Shawna to talk to someone. That someone is tall, well built, and from the side profile I can see, he is attractive. Aaron is going to have to make a choice tonight. Rylan is single and ready to mingle with all the eligible bachelors this evening. He can either accept that or he can make his

From the way he is knocking back his drinks, I have a feeling that alcohol will decide for him.

"How much have you had to drink tonight, Aaron?"

He looks at me. There is sadness in his eyes. "Why did she have to come here tonight dressed like that?"

"Can you handle being here tonight, or do you want to bow out

The glare he sends my way lets me know that this evening will not be pleasant for him or anyone else that dares to compete with Rylan tonight.

can handle it. All I need to do is stay out of line of sight to her." He downs the last of his drink, then stamps away.

I order a glass of bourbon, then scan the crowd. I spot Gayle speaking to the event coordinator. If this night is a success and we exceed expectations on the goal we set, I think we should give Gayle a raise. After all that she dealt with from the previous owners of the hospital, then seeing us through transition, she has proven her

valor.

In sp**ar faces as more and more people arrive. One familiar face I ser surprises me. This isn't normally Mac's scene. The prefers seedy nightclubs or little hole in the wall bars, Place wher

ce the music drowns out all hopes of conversation.

move away from the bar so I can keep Anne my line of sight. Mac stops beside me. His eyes are alot as he to scans the crowd. I know that a part of both our minds are looking for hidden threats. Once a solder, abcays a soldier, I can't help it

"Those three are dangerous."

Mac points his hand casually to where Annie, Rylan, and Shawna are standing. Relief goes through me seeing Rylan back with the others. Hopefully Aaron is nowhere to be seen.

"That they and will be forever grateful that one of them is mine and has agreed to be my wife"

"No kidding? Congratulations, When is the big day?"

"We have decided to wait until all this**t with Dionne is done. I want that woman out of my life before I take the next steps with Annie."

"I don't blame you there at all. It is nice to see you happy again, Quinn. That c**t did al number on you"

"Oh, there is so much more to her devious nature than I ever wanted to know. Walk with me and I will tell you all I have leanel recently."

We walk around the yard as I ll him in on everything that has happened in the last few weeks. When I tell him why McAllister hates me, Mac clenches his fists at his sides. When I tell him about Logan, he stops in his tracks to just stære at me,

He blinks a few times as if he is trying to process what I just told him. I can't blame him, really. That was a lot of information to digest and understand Mac was one of three men that had my back during the explosion that Dionne caused in my life.

Without them, I am not sure I would have made it through those dark days. I am glad I had them as my friends. Because now, I have two amazing reasons to keep living. Annora and Grace are my lights in this otherwise dark world we live in.

When Mac calms down, he just shakes his head, and we continue to walk around the yard.

“Did you bring a date tonight? | ask.

“No, but I estreted a friendl. From the steam coming out of Aaron’s ears, I think it is wise that I don’t call it a date.”

I glance around to find Aaron. As I suspected, he is at the far end of the yard, but he is storing across the crowd at where Rylan is standing. Even from where I am standing, I can see that his jaw is clenched hard. Any harder and I wouldn’t be surprised if he cracked a tooth,

*1-4 strictly platonic, trust me. She like a sister to me. Besides, even if 1ked her mantically, her heart has belonged to another since we were all in the **it show tube have no desire to die yet.”

is himself. Well, that isn’t true. He is hurting the one he loves by

This causes me to laugh. As volatile as Aaron is right now, the only person he is doing harm to is

“Aaron feels unworthy of her love. He is in a dark place and has been hiding it behind alcohol and women for a long time, it seems. I know how he feels.”

Mar pats me on the back. “We will be there for him like he has been there for us. I call Kimbo. It has been about a year since he has been to the states. It is time the four of us have a nice long chat”

I nod then before I can say anything farther, a few in the crowd catches my allemion What the **k is he doing here? His name was mint definitely not on the invitation lot i gave to Gayle. He is a rich man, and I will gladly watch hamn donate la money for charity.

I just want to know why he is here. What motive does Ethan McAllister have to come to as event that the hospital | own is throwing? Experially since he hates me and believes everything Dionne told him.

What are you up to, lthan?:

Author’s Note I created a Facebook group called North Rose Novels for all my readers who don’t have instagram. You can join that group and I will post update information there and my Instagram.

Loving Quinn Chapter 57

(Aaron)

Today was a biny day but because Quinn asked me to, well, also because I know I new to make this step, I went to my first appointment with Dr. West. When I arrived, I was perpared to be angry the entire time. However, I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly the man just me at esse.

Something about the kindness in his eyes, the soothing quality of his voice, and the quiet atmosphere of his office jest fit well together. Then there was the fact that his wife was a combat veteran. He may not have served himself, but he knows what the other side of the equation in 1kr.

The side of the spouse.

Our first meeting didn't go to the darkness that circles through my mind like a thick wood just waiting to drag me down. Instead, we got to know each other. Then we talked about my goals. The things I want to see happens during our therapy sessions and my ultimate end goal.

The end cool is the hard part.

I want to feel worthy of love.

Not the love I get from my parents. Their love has been unconditional since the day I was born. I feel it from them each time I see them ty mother doesn't talk about my as a soldier. I think she knows I hide so much from her.

My father and have talked about it here and there, but he doesn't ask the hard questions. 1 am grateful for that. Even though I know they will be there when I need to talk about it all, I am just not ready to burden them with all the horrible thing that I saw and did.

My parents are my safe place and if I share all the darkness inside of me with them, it will forever change how I see them. They will be tainted by the darkness that

is war 1 will keep that from then for as long as I can.

However, I know that Dr. West is right, I will need to talk to them eventually. It is one hurdle that I will need to overcome in order to help the healing process. I just hope and pray that they will still be there when I come out of this darkness.

Quinn was right that I need help. I watched him descend into madness after Dinner aborted their baby. To his mind, it confirmed that he wasn't worthy of the love he so desperately wanted. For him, my best friend, I took my first steps to come out of the dark.

The love I want to be worthy of is in the heart of the one woman who drives me out of my mind. When I arrived at the charity event tonight, it felt like I got s**er

punch and kicked in the balls at the same time. My pulse sped up the moment I laid my eyes on her.

Rylan Danvers in a sinen in that form Stting red dress. She left her raven curls loose tonight, and all I want to do is run my fingers through her silky hair. I remember how it felt in my hands that day I kissed her in my office,

I remember the day I met her. Rylan was new to our unit, replacing our medic, whose time was up She showed s**k and a willingness to defend herself against some of the ballbusters in our unit. The fire in her eyes when she is angry is both cry and s**y

Stary when she is tearing into someone verbally for doing something **id, which for those first few years in the desert, we did a lot of s***d s**t to entertain ourselves. Oh, but when she is angry, that fire in her eyes is s**y as bell.

Bylan is angry at me often enough to cause me to burst into flames.

Yet, in my mind, she was always off limits. To me, she is far out of my league. I am not worthy of the love that know she is more than willing to give me. Lam

undean

I would rather f**k a different woman every night, hell some nights I have had more than one at a time, than taint her with the darkness in my soul

When exactly Leralized I love her is beyond me. I know it was long before that day in my office when I kissed her just to shut her up. If I am being truly honest with (myself, I kissed her because I wanted to. The way she was yelling at me just pushed over that fine line I am always on when she is around.

The way she moaned when I slipped my tongue in her mouth made me want to f**k bir right there in my office. When I stepped away, it wasn't because I wanted to; it was because she deserved better.

Now I am in a hell of my making. Yearning for some

someone I won't let myself be with. To be with Rylan in the way she wants, I need to let my guard down for her. I am unclean in so many ways. She deserves for more than I can ever give her.

"How much have you had to drink Tonight, Aaron!" Quinn asks.

I throw back my third bombon, then look at him. I know he means well, but I have a feeling that tonight will be my undoing. All because of one raven haired beauty

in a siren red dress.

“Can you handle being here tonight, or do you need to bow cut?”

“All I need to do is keep her out of my line of sight and I will be fine.” I glare at him, on the next bourbon the bartender slides my way, then I stomp away.

I need a distraction. Scanning the crowd, I catch the rye of a busty brunette. Her t**ts are pushed up high in her chest and are practically spilling over the top of her dress. The promise in her eyes is past the distraction I need. However, as I am walking towards her, a man joins her, and I catch the glint of her wedding ring.

Nope.

kind of distraction.

Married women are not my type of women. If they are lonely, then they can get the needs met elsewhere. From my experience, lonely housewives can be the best sex a man can get. I made that mistake a few times. The sex was mind blowing with the thrill of being caught adding to the pleasure. However, getting caught in bed with a married woman is something I don't want to repeat.

So, I scan the crowd again. My eyes seem to have a mind of their own and gravitate back to where Rylan is standing What would it be like with her? Would her hot temper flow over into the bedroom? I can feel myself harden just thinking about it.

This is not good. I can't be sporting an erection in the middle of this fucking event. Getting away from her until the auction starts is a great idea. So, I make my way to the stairs that lead to the beach below. Some space to clear my head will do everyone some good.

When I reach the beach, I can hear voices from a small group of people that made their way down here. They are off to the left of the stairs, so I walk to the right, then pake my way towards the water. This is what I love about California. The tranquility I can find at the edge of land and sex.

There is something hypnotic about watching the waves roll against the sand. When the sea is calm like it is today, I could stand here for hours just gazing out at al the majestic blue. I love to go sailing. Bring out on the water with just a cooler full of her sounds like a great idea right now.

The sound of laughter makes me look over my shoulder. The group by the stairs is now walking back up to the terrace. When I tum to look back at the ocean, the

is using the h**n. The auction is scheduled to start in an hour.

The idea of standing up on that stage while pampered socialites bid on a date with me makes me want to vomit. Only the knowledge that all of tonight's proceeds going to charity make me willing to put myself through that humiliation.

Knowing my luck, the winner will be a simering blonde who has nothing between her ears but air.

I turn from the magnificent view of the ocean, only to stop in my tracks. Rylan is standing a few feet from me. Her expression is hard to decipher. I want to close the distance between us and just pull her into my arms. However, after our last encounter, I am unsure of how to approach her.

"Why are you down here all alone?"

"It is too crowded up there."

I glance to my right and see that there is a gazebo a little way down the beach. Without waiting to see if she will follow me, I walk to it. As I get closer, I am pleasantly surprised that it is enclosed on all sides except for the side facing the water. Once inside, I turn around, only to bump into Rylan as I do

She followed me.

The momentum of us bumping into each other causes her to pitch backwards. My arms go around her waist to pull her flush against me. Her eyes go round in surprise, but she doesn't immediately pull away. Heat rushes through me when her breasts drop to my lips.

I want to kiss her so badly, but the idea of f**g things up with her more than I already have causes me to let go of her and take a step back. The hurt that flashes through her beautiful eyes makes me hate myself even more than I already do.

F**k it

I have nothing left to lose at this point.

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Chapter 57

Stepping back to her, I pull her against me with more force than intended, then I do what I have wanted to do since I saw her tonight. I sink my hands into her raven curls, then crush my mouth to her. Her mouth opens in surprise, and I take full advantage of it by sweeping my tongue into her mouth.

Passion like nothing I have ever felt before Bates instantly between Fire erupts in my soul as her tongue duels with mine in the most heated kiss I have ever experienced. Rylan wraps her arms around my waist and fists her hands into the back of my tuxedo jacket.

The moon that escapes her lips when I break the kiss urges me to do more. However, Quinn's voice over the PA system announcing that the auction will begin in ten minutes, causes me to just stare into her eyes for moment before I let her go.

"Ry, you deserve so much better than I can give you. I am a terrible choice. Why do you persist in wanting to get closer to me? My voice is thick with desire but Bled with pain

"Why can't you just let me love you?" She cries

The quiver in her voice breaks through the wall around my heart more than I am comfortable with.

"I am not what you deserve. You deserve someone who will always be there for you Someone who will always put your first above their own needs. I am not that person."

Rylan closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, as if she is trying to calm down. When she opens her eyes, the fire that attracted me to her in the first place is blazing bright in her eyes, Lust faces through me, but I ignore it. As much as I want to, this is the time or the place.

"When that p**k Paulson assaulted me and I showed up on your doorstep, what was the first thing you did! You took your jacket of overed me up, then you pulled

the hospital. me into your arms and held me while I cried. Then you drove like a madman all the way to Quinn's, getting me to Annoca because I refused to go You put my needs above my wants."

ecause you were too d**n stubborn to do what needed to be done."

*Yes, I was Aaron, you took me somewhere you knew I would feel safe, where there was a doctor who would take care of me. You didn't leave me until you knew I would be ok. Why? Do us both a favor and tell the f**g truth."

I spin away from her to look out at the ocean. In frustration, I run my fingers through my hair. It is longer than 1 like, but I am getting used to it. When I turn back to face her, there are tears in her eyes. I knew tonight would be my undoing

She is my weakness.

I hate the fact that she can pull emotions out of me that I haven't even fully come to terms with. I hate the feelings of inadequacy that she makes me feel. That is my self-hatred speaking, telling me I will never be good enough for her.

"What do you want me to say, Rylan? Do you want a full confession of everything I feel for you?"

"I just want you to admit to me that these feelings I have for you are not one-sided. Your avoidance and how you react to me indicates something lurking under the surface. Something you are running from. Why are you running from me, Aaron?"

"Because you scare the hell out of me," I yell.

Her eyes widen and her mouth drops open in shock. "I scare you. How do I scare you?"

I let out a shuddery breath as I realized the box in my heart that I just opened by admitting that to her. Well, since the lid to the box is open, I might as well go all in. I have never backed down from a confrontation in my life, and this is important.

"I am in trouble, Ry. The past has a grip on me I can't shake. I have been running from it for years, but it is snapping at my ass back into those nightmares. I have used sex, booze, and beating the s**t out of myself to hold that**it at bay."

Slowly, I close the distance between us, then with a shaking hand, I reach up to cup her cheek.

"The darkness inside, my mind is tearing me apart, and I don't want to drag you down with me. You deserve someone who is worthy of you. I am broken and can't): give you what you deserve until I fix myself."

"Aaron, you are worth so much more than you give yourself credit for. You may be broken, but you are not alone. If t you until you come to me and tell me you are ready to move forward."

is what you need to heal, then I will wait for

With that said, she places a tender kiss on my lips, then turns around and walks away.

"The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." Douglas MacArthur

Loving Quinn Chapter 58

(Annona)

The first hour of the evening has gone pretty so far. Well, for me anyway. I had a few moments in the beginning, as I overheard some women talking about Quinn, I couldn't help listening to them wonder about what he looks like under his clothes

Admittedly, I got a little angry at first, but then I smiled to myself as I know what they don't. I know how smooth his skin is. I have had the pleasure of tracing every scar his career has left on his body with my fingers and my tongue. My hands have left the way his back and stomach muscles ripple when he flexes his hips as he thrusts into my body.

I can feel my face flame as I blush. Now is a suitable time to find a quiet place away from all these gossips to catch my breath. I spot Adam heading to the beach, so I scan the crowd for Quins. He is still at the bar, so I make my way over to him.

As I do, a busty blonde steps up next to him, then pressed her body against his. For a split-second, white-hot rage fills my mind as I see another woman pressed up against him. I want to walk up to her, grab her by her hair, and take her away from my fiancé

However, much to my delight, Quinn steps away from the woman. It is clear from his expression that her behavior disgusts him. Would he have accepted her advances if I weren't in his life? Is this how he met his conquests in the past?

This isn't the first time since I decided to give our future a chance that I am doubting my decision. Will this be my life from now on? Will I have to watch women throw themselves at him at every social function we attend from now on? This is not something I want to have to deal with for the rest of my life. I am not sure I am cut out to be the wife of an ex-p**y billionaire.

Sadness washes over me at the thought of walking away from him. That is not something I am willing to do. However, his past will keep coming back to slap me in the face. Holding his past against him is something I can't really do. Not when I know why he was that way.

After the blonde angrily walks away from Quinn, I take a deep breath, then finish closing the distance between us. When I reach his side, the anger in his beautiful sea-green eyes turns to worry. I guess I failed at hiding my emotions.

"Are you ok, Annie?"

"No, I am angry. Angry with you, with that blonde, and myself. Will I have to watch stuff like this happen at every social

event we go

together?"

I can feel the anger beiding inside me as I talk. I know he can hear it in my voice. When he reaches for me, I step back out of his reach. I am making a scene, but L can't seem to stop myself. Minutes ago, I was laughing about the whispers of other women. Now I feel like a fool.

"I can't control the actions of other people, Annora. What do you want me to do? I pulled away from her the minute she pressed her fake breasts against me. I told her that my fiancé is the only woman I want touching me. As you witnessed, she walked away in a huff."

Some of my anger dissipates, but the stark reality of the situation remains. My fiancé used to be a manwhore, and that fact is now coming to slap me in the face. When Mrs. Taylor gave him the "k me eyes while we were picking Grace up at school, I found that situation funny. I deal with her later and set the record straight that Quinn and I are a couple.

However, seeing that blonde pressed up against him has deflated my confidence.

"Are you going to punish me for the feed before I found you again? Should I have led the life of a mork for the last twehe years? Yes, I had sex with a lot of women, something I have been completely upfront and honest with you about."

"This isn't the first time I have seen how women react to you."

Quinn lets out a sigh, then combs his fingers through his hair. Am I making something out of nothing here? I know his feelings for me are genuine. I feel in every "dey. Maybe we are moving too fast, and I haven't given myself the chance to get used to his past

I love Quinn with all my hratt.

"Ames, I can't control the way other women react to me. I am not interested in any other women. I only want the one who is now doubting my loyalty and herself. Why? Beco other women find me and my checkbook attractive "

The last sentence is spoken with pain in his voice. Now I feel like a show who overted about a situation. There is no doubt in my mind that he will take any of those women up on their offers. Quion has always been true to his word.

Quinn reaches out for the one agricand this time I let him. He pulls me to him, then leads me away from the har. There is bort in his eyes and his body is tense with enger as we walk through the crowd. I am too shocked to ask where we are going because I know my reaction pushed him to this.

When we reach the front of the house, he opens the door and pulls me inside behind him. My eyes widen momentarily at the opulence of the foyer. The floor is marble inlaid with flecks of gold, I am surprised that Quinn seems to know exactly where he is going.

“Have you been here before?”

“Yes. I came here with Cayle when we were deciding if this would be a good place for the auction then the owner who inherited his home.”

Quinn walks to a door, opens it, then pulls me inside and closes the door behind him wild and angry.

He turns around on me quickly. His eyes are like watching the ocean during a storm

“Do you trust me?” He asks.

Without hesitation, I nod my head.

“If you truly trusted me, then you would have known I would have sent that **y away. You are the only woman for me. Not just now, but for the rest of our lives. Yes, I had a past, so did you. Mine is darker than yours, but there is nothing I can do to change it now.”

“I do trust you. Quinn. I just didn’t enjoy seeing another woman touching you. It made me angry and....jealous. I questioned if that is something I can handle seeing for the rest of my life.”

He closes the short distance between us, grabs my hand, then places it over his heart. The way he is staring at me makes me squirm. I overreacted and by doing so; I hurt him with my doubt.

“Do you feel that?” He asks.

I can feel the steady beating of his heart under the palm of my hand. It is a calming feeling. The rhythmic thumping of his heart makes me believe that if I have him beside me, everything will be alright. I gasp when he pulls me flush against his body. My eyes widen when I feel the bulge in his pants.

There is a mischievous smirk on his face when I look up at him. “What about that? Do you feel that?”

I can’t help the shiver of excitement that goes through my body. The desire I feel for Quinn goes so much deeper than just sex. I have claimed him in every way possible. Mind, body, heart, and soul. This man is mine and no other woman will ever have what is mine again.

All the doubt I felt earlier fades as he leans down and captures my lips in a tender kiss. A kiss that starts off slow but soon spins into searing passion. My mind goes

blank as I give myself over to the feelings that he brings out in me. Feelings that I bined in my heart for twelve years.

1

I feel free.

Quinn was the key to the lock I put on my heart.

I break the kiss when he presses my back against the wall near the door. His hand slides slowly down my left side, down over my hip, then lands on my bare leg through the slit in my dress. The way his eyes darken lets me know he approves of my choice not to wear pantyhose under my dress.

“I have wanted to do this since I walked into our home and saw you in this dress.”

Before I have a chance to protest, to tell him we are at a charity function and this is appropriate, he sinks to his knees. My protest dies on my lips when he looks up at me. The dark, hungry look in his eyes sends a shiver of anticipation down my spine.

He places my right hand on his shoulder, then lifts my left leg over his other shoulder. He slips his hand up into my dress and skims his fingers over the lace of my panties. Swiftly he pulls the lace to the side, then leans forward to flick his tongue over my c***.

My body jerks in response. I moan his name as fastens his mouth over my p**y. Closing my eyes, I give into the pleasure he is giving me. However, part of me is all too aware that we are in someone else's home, and we could get caught at any moment. That fact seems to heighten the pleasure.

It is like what we did between the rock at the beach that day. The idea of being caught makes me come faster than I want. So, I put my hands in his hair and hold him right where I want him. I feel the vibrations of his laughter against my core.

“Oh, yes, right there. Fuck, Quinn. I hate his name as he drives up and meets me.”

Quinn wipes his mouth on my inner thigh, then puts my leg back on the ground. “I want to be buried deep inside that juicy p** of yours so badly right now.”

In motion for him to stand up, then when he does, I reach out to undo his pants. His body jerks when I reach into his pants and wrap my hands around his erection. The moment I pull him free of his pants, Quinn's hands are under my mums, lifting me up off the ground.

My arms go around his neck, and I wrap my legs around his waist. He has my dress bunched up around my waist. When I feel the head of his shaft brush against the lace that slid back in place, I growl in frustration. I want him buried to the hilt of me right now.

Quinn reaches between us, slides the lace to the side, then positions his erection at nyepening. "Is this what you see?"

"Yes. Right now

He rubs his c**k through my wetness a few times before returning to where I want him, but not slipping inside.

"Ask nicely. Beg for it."

I growl at him, then pull his mouth to mine. The kiss turns into a war for dominance as he slips his tongue into my mouth. I taste myself on his tongue and it makes me go wild with need. When he breaks the kiss, we are both gasping for breath.

"Please, Quinn. I want you so bad right now.

Much to my delight, he thrusts his hips upwards and enters me. His thrusts start off slow and gentle, which isn't what I want right now. I want him wild and

trained. He must have sensed what my body craves because soon his thrusts charge. Gone is the slow, tender lover.

Quinn thrusts into me hard and fast. I moan louder than intended, but I don't care right now. The please coursing through me at each hand, powerful thrust brings

closer and closer to **. He buries his head in the crook of my neck and shoulder and gives me everything I crave.

"Quinn..." I softly on his name as he sends me over the edge

His body shudders as my core clenches around his shaft. He moans into my neck as he finds his release. We stay just as we are for a few more minutes before he slips free of my body, then lowers my legs to the floor.

"All of me belongs only to you. For the rest of our lives. Don't let those harpies bother you anymore."

I pull his mouth to mine for one last kiss. "I can't promise that I won't get jealous again, but I trust you, and I am sorry for overeating."

"You are the only woman for me. Besides, jealousy on you is so f**g hot."

I slap his shoulder. "Show me where a bathroom is so we can get cleaned up."

Twenty minutes later, we are back outside mingling. Gayle waves to Quinn and he grabs my hand. We walk over to her, and I feel eyes on me as we do. I straighten my back. All the women in the crowd are out of luck. He is mine,

“Quinn, Annora, how are you to doing tonight?” Gayle asks.

We share a brief look before looking back at her. If only she knew what we were doing elit. I am sure Gayle would be blughen,

“This is turning out to be a much larger crowd than I expected. However, we have everything under control. Are you ready to get the auction started?”

Quads his head, then the three of us walk to the stage. I try to pull away when we get to the stairs, but his grip tightens on my hand. I give him a questioning look when he glances back at me.

“I want you by my side. It is time everyone sees I am no longer available?”

He is going to ounce our engagement to everyone here. Am I ready for that? It will put me and Grace in the spotlight. We are going to be eventually anyway, so why not get it out there now? I give him a nod and let him lead me up onto the stage with him

“Good evening, ladies and gentlenes. Thank you for coming out tonight to date logu Murthy cause. We will begin the auction in ten minutes. Will all the bachelors come up to the stage? While we wait, I would like to make an announcement.”

Quinn planers at me and pulls me close to hix tide.

“This amazing woman beside me has agreed to become my wife, Ladies and gentlech, meet the love of my life, Dr. Annora Winters.”

Gasps of surprise ripple through the crowd, followed swiftly by applause. I feel the angry glares of several women in the crowd. Ignore them, then him to Quinn an helens dien to kiss me. Cheers erupt through the crowd as he kisses me softly.

That went better than I expected.

For now.

Loving Quinn Chapter 59

(Quinn)

The auction is in full swing and going better than expected. Aaron will be last in the auction. He wanted to go first, but I told him that if he goes last, he will most

kely gain the highest bids of the night. My reasoning is that all the ladies who lost the earlier bids will be desperate to win the last one of the evening.

Andrew, our CEO, is presiding over the auction. We agreed that since he is the head of the hospital board, it would be good for him to represent Merry General. As he become more comfortable with the role, his sense of humor came out, much to the crowd's delight. As each new bid comes in on the bachelor on the stage,

Andrew makes smart little quis about the amount of the bid and the bachelor's attenutes. O

The general ambiance of the event is lich. Drinks are flowing, money being donated at an impressive rate, and the competition between all the single women is high. Overall, the night is going well.

I leave Anora at our table with Rylan and Shawn while I check in with Aaron before he goes up on stage. He looked calm when he joined the rest of the bachelors in line, but I can see the steady ticking of his jaw. He is anything but calm, I asked too much of him tonight.

This entire event is a stressor for him. Tons of people milling about. Women pawing at him for attention. Bylan dressed to impress in that siren red dress must be driving him crazy. I saw her follow him down to the beach earlier. I hope he was rivd to her.

As I approachim, he gives me a nod, gets up off his stool, then walks behind the bark side of the stage, out of view from the crowd, I follow him. When he turns to face me, there are so many raw emotions in his eyes. All I can do is give him the space he needs to calm down.

"What is going on, Aaron?"

on? Do you need to bow out? I asked too much of you tonight am so sorry."

"old Bylan why I push her away"

The pain in his voice pulls at me. I know what he told her without asking him. That head to have been hand to say to her and even harder for her to hear.

"How did she handle it?"

"She blew me away, Q. Just took me by surprise. I expected her to call me a coward. What she did and said before she walked away was so much worse because now, I have hope."

I can guess what she said.

“Rylan told me she will wait for me to heal, to feel worthy of her, then she will be there when I am ready. What if I am never ready?” He asks. His voice cracks at the end.

That was exactly what I thought she said.

“You will be. It will take time. You will have setbacks. Some days you will want to quit, but you are a fighter, Aaron. Fight to get your life back. I will be right by your

“Promise?”

“I have had your back since we were kids, throughout boot camp, through our first deployment, and I will have your back when we are both old enough to have our kids put us in nursing homes. You pulled me out of the fire, were my guide out of the dark, and now it is my turn to help you.”

ack to me,

Aaron gives me a solemn nod, then turns away from me so he can wipe his eyes. When he turns back to me. “Ok, let’s get back out there so I can make someone donate an obscene amount of money”

“Are you sure you still want to go out there into the lion’s den?”

His eyes are calmer, and the smile he gives me is genuine.

He laughs, then walks past me to go back to his stool. I can’t stop him if this is what he wants to do. All I can do is keep an eye on him as the night progresses. I

4-hope the woman who bids on him is a patient one.

As I head back to my table, Ethan McAllister steps into my path, Great, one crisis averted, now on to the next. Fantastic.

“How may I help you tonight, Mr. McAllister? Are you enjoying the ambiance? I hope you made a donation.”

1/4

Chapter 59

“How do you sleep at night after everything you have done to my wife?” He asks. His eyes are glittering with rage as he blocks

my path.

I glance down at his hands as I contemplate how to respond. He is clenching and unclenching his fists. He wants to fight me, but is restraining himself. At least he is still somewhat rational

“Honestly, I sleep pretty well. Thank you for asking. I am sure you saw my dance. She helps me sleep like a baby.”

Not the wisest thing to say to a semi-irrational person, but I can't seem to help myself

“Are you really that cold-blooded? You abandoned your pregnant fiancée for no reason. Now here you are acting like none of that happened and are parading your new wife for all to see.”

I see red when he calls Annora a wife. However, I know he is just trying to antagonize me into a fight. I will not give him what he wants by playing his game

“I see you are a bigger fool than I originally thought. If you will excuse me, I have better things to do with my time.”

“How can you be so cruel to do what you

have done to

Dionne? She gave

birth to your child, and you refused to answer her calls”

I laugh at the absurdity of his statement. His version of events doesn't fit with what actually happened. At least not from my viewpoint. Maybe that is how Dionne

saw things. If so, then she is just as delusional as Ethan K.

There is a saying about stories and truths. It is said that there are not two sides to a story, but three. Her side, my side, and the truth. Until recently, I always felt the truth was on my side. Now I know Dionne manipulates the truth of any situation to fit her narrative

In this case, for her, she painted me as the villain so Ethan would fall for her selfish story. In some ways, maybe I am the villain. I never loved her, but I used her, -affection to make myself feel better. I admit it was wrong. For that and only that will I ever tell her I am sorry.

“How long before I left her were you two fucking each other?”

Surprise crosses his face for a split second before his features harden with anger again I put a dent in his defense. Suddenly, I am not the only one at fault for how the past ended the way it did,

“You were always too busy with your career to give Dionne the attention she deserved

“So that is the en

excuse you two give yourselves for her cheating on me with you? How about the baby she aborted? What was her version of the story for you?”

“What abortion?” Ethan asks. Confusion flashes across his face.

Ch. That explains a lot. He doesn't know the aborted my child because she is trying to pass off his son as mine. Why would she tell him? That would raise doubt in his mind and make him harder to manipulate. Dionne, you are devious beyond words

“The layers of this drama get deeper and deeper as more is revealed. When I investigated McAllister Industries, you struck me as a smart min. Now I can see that you are a gullible fool. I can tell you from personal experience she isn't worth all this drama. Your level of p**y whipped is mind-bopeling.”

He raises his arm like he is going to throw a punch at me, but lowers it when someone speaks behind him. His face turns red with rage when he's prevented from turning this into a physical altercation. Thankfully, Gayle came around the corner and called my name.

“You walk away now, but I will be laughing in court when you are made to pay for what you did to Dionna and her son.

You mean the child that could very well be yours more than mine?”

His face burns white, and jake that oppportunity to walk away. I step around Ethan, then walk to where Cayle is standing. With one last glance at Ethan, I turn back to Gayle and lead her away. Thit mun is unhinged.

1 positive the thought never crossed his mind that Logan could be his son.

“Do you want me to alert security about him?” Gayle asks.

“No. At least not right now. If he causes anymore scenes, then we will call the point. What did you need to talk to me about?”

“Nothing at all. I heard voices an wn on my way to hand in some donations. I saw on act like he was going to hit you, so I spoke up.”

“Thank you, Gayle gives me a smile, then walks to her seat. I head straight to my table where Annom is waiting. There is a frown on her face as I sit down. I grab her hand, brush a kiss across her knuckles, then tell her what happened with Ethus

Annoyance flashes across her beautiful face when she sees he flinched like he was going to throw a punch. I can tell she wants to say something, but she keeps quiet considering the situation we are in. I am grateful for that. This is not the place to talk about my dirty laundry.

One thing is clear, however, Dionne has twisted that man’s mind to the point that he will believe anything she tells him. Yes, I left her without a backward glance, but that was only after she confirmed the abortion and told me why. Should I have tried to reach out to her after she called me the first time after I left? Maybe. However, at that point, there was nothing she could say to me that would have made her actions go away

If Ethan wants a fight, I will give him one. Just not the way he wants. There is no way I plan on stooping to his level. I am done with physical violence. However, I wouldn’t put it past him to try to hurt me in other ways. He strikes me as crazy enough to go to any lengths to prove a point.

“Ladies, are you ready for our last bachelor of the evening?” Andrew asks the crowd.

Andrew stands up off his stool and walks up onto the stage. A few women in the

audience When he gets loud cheers in response, he motions with his hand towards Aaron. A loud whistle as he approaches. Aaron smiles and flashes his dimples to the ladies. This will be fun to watch.

I glance at Annorac she is leaning towards Rylan and Shawna. When she sits back, there is a smile on her face, same for Rylan and Shawn. Well, this feels like trouble. I knew from the minute I introduced Rylan to Annora that they would become fast friends. Add Shawn to the mix and oh boy, here comes trouble.

“This lucky bachelor is none other than the other half of G&C Enterprises, Aaron Carter. We are going to start the bidding at half a million dollars. Do we

Before Andrew can even finish his sentence, a yell of a million-dollar bid comes from a woman towards the left of the stage. Andrew nods his head in her direction and continues with the auction. The next bidder shocks me.

“Two million,” Rylan calls out.

The look on Aaron’s face is priceless as his head snaps in her direction. Andrew smiles at her, then

en nods his head in acknowledgement. Does Rylan have that much money? I glance over at Annora to see her smiling. Ah, that was what the whispers were about.

“We have two million dollars; do we have two-point five?”

“Two-point five,” the same woman who woman who started the bidding calls out,

“How high are you three willing to push this?” I whisper to Annora.

“It is for a worthy cause. Besides, we are doing this to help our friend, Aaron may have volunteered for this, but that doesn’t mean his evening has to end with a total stranger.”

“Are you three doing this to push Rylan and Aaron together?”

“No, but that didn’t even cross my mind when I told them about it.”

“Three million,” a fresh voice calls out.

The bids go back and forth between the two ladies until it reaches five million dollars, Rylan looks defeated at the price. I can tell she was hoping to win so that Aaron would be a tonight without the pressure of entertaining a random stranger. I will play their game.

The balance of whatever the last bid is, in Hylan’s name,” I whisper in Annora’s ear

smiles at me, then gives Rylan’s elbow a nudge. When Hylan glances over at her or gives her a thumbs up. Hylan instantly raises her hand and calls out her bid of six million dollars. I guess these ladies all have the go big or go home mentality tonight.

“We have six million from the lovely woman in red here. Do we have six million?” Andrew calls out after acknowledging Hylan’s bid. When he gets no response, he falls out once more and then again before he declares a winner.

The look of pure joy on her face makes me smile. While she walks to the stage to claim her date, I pull out my phone to quickly transfer the funds to her bank account. This is probably the oddest thing I have ever spent money on.

No, that isn’t true, but this transaction will stay between the three of us. I am not sure I want my best friend knowing that I helped Rylan win a date with him. Especially after what they talked about earlier. He may think that she isn’t willing to wait like she said, but that she is pushing the issue now,

I know Rylan, and I don’t think that is something she would do. Now that she knows how he feels about her, she will back off and wait for him to come to her. Rylan had always been true to her word. She will give him all the space he needs

After tonight.

I watch as Rylan leads Aaron off the stage, then onto the dance floor off to the right of the stage. My best friend looks both happy and angry at the same time. What a combination of emotions.

I glance at Annora, hold my hand out to her, then ask, "Annie, would you like to dance?"

Loving Quinn Chapter 60

Aarom

As I stand on the stage looking out at the crowd, all I can see is one face staring back at me. Her face. Rylan. I can't believe that she bid two million dollars for a date with me. Part of me wants to be angry at her. After everything I told her on the beach, she told me she would wait for me to feel worthy of her.

This isn't waiting

Another part of me, the more primal part, wants her to win the bidding war the envos right after her opening bid. Why? Because after tasting her again tonight, all

I can think of is kissing her again. I want to get her to a quiet place where no one can interfere

The minute I have her all to myself, I plan to rip that red dress off her. I intend to shred it until it is a mess of satin on the floor. She should stand before me in her bra and panties. I just want to stare at her. Drink in her beauty. Savor the moment.

"Six million dollars," Hylan call out,

This pulls me out of my thoughts. I blink my eyes a few times, then just stare at her, tear my eyes away from her to look out at the crowd. There are a few women in the back that are just glaring in Rylan's direction. My gaze lands on a gorgeous blonde sitting at a table close to the stage. She looks disappointed, but merely nods her head in defeat.

"Sold to the lady in red. Come up on stage to collect your prize," Andrew calls out.

Well, this is awkward. The auctioneer is her half-brother, and I am hiding a raging b**r with my tuxedo jacket. Fantastic. My wandering mind during the auction has had an unwanted side effect. Well, not entirely unwanted, just not right now, I want to be somewhere private with her, with my shast buried deep in his p**y.

F**k. That isn't helping me, Quit thinking about her like that. Put her back in the frind zone. The place where she is safe. Where I am safe from her.

However, the instant her perfume invades my senses, I know that is a pipe dream. My eyes lock on hers as she walks up the steps of the stage. I can hear my heart thundering in my chest as she walks to me with her hand outstretched and a secretive smile on her beautiful face.

“What are you doing, Rylan?” I ask when she stops in front of me.

“Take my hand, lead me out on the dance floor, then I will tell you what I am doing”

I sigh, take a deep breath, then reach out for her hand. Thankfully, my erection gets the memo that now is not the time to stand at attention. With a small tug on my arm, she pulls me to my feet and leads me to the dance floor.

“I thought I was meant to lead you down here?”

“This is easier.”

Of course, it is, because that is just how she is. Rylan is a take charge kind of person I should have seen it coming. I just didn't think I was going to have a date with her. It should be me spending lavishly on her.

How she would spend six million

Wait a damn minute....

“Who gave you the money to bid on me?”

When we reach the dance floor, the D.J. cues up a smooth instrumental number. I put her into my arms and sway her around the dance floor. My mind clouds for a moment as her intoxicating scent hits my senses again. It isn't her eucalypt perfume of the rich cut scent of her shampoo; it is just her. She intoxicates me

“Annora and Quinn helped me.”

“Wait, what? The three of you chipped in together to...”

“Make sure that total stranger wasn't your date.”

Well, **. That I was not expecting. My three friends saved me from a potentially disastrous night. One I volunteered for, even though I am not in the right frame of mind to entertain anyone. Small talk with a random woman for the rest of the evening, possibly ending up with her naked in my lap before the night was over, sounded like a good idea when I agreed to do this event.

Now I am grateful for the rescuer.

“Does this mean I have to dance with Quinn, too?”

Rylan lets out a throaty laugh that sends flames of desire coursing through my veins. This was a terrible idea. However, now that Quinn and Annora are heading onto the dance floor, I feel obligated to see this dance through to the end. As soon as the song is over, I need to get far away from Rylan.

If I don't, I may do something I will regret.

“I meant what I said on the beach, Aaron. I will wait for you to be ready. This idea to buy your time tonight was Annora's idea, not mine. Though I suspect she had this in mind when she gave me the first two million dollars”

I glance over her shoulder to where Quinn is dancing with Annora. He has her pressed close against him and her head is on his chest as Quinn just slowly dances in circles. The look of peace and happiness on my friend's face is something I never thought I would see again

He has been somewhat happy in the past but never with the true peace that he has now. In a way, I envy that peace. I know it can happen. I also know that it will take a lot of work on my part to achieve it. Soon I will face my demons head on

“Do you know that Quinn borrowed a dog from the kennel as a way to meet Annora?”

Rylan looks at me in horror, then chuckles. “What the heck was he thinking?”

“Well, most summers, he spent the first few weeks with my family on our yearly vacation. That summer my father was building the shed and new pantry for my mother. So, Quinn was fishing when Annora's family showed up at her grandparent's place.”

“First meeting. He wanted to impress?”

He came up with the “have you seen my dog” ploy to introduce himself to her. Kon, the dog he borrowed from the kennel, had other plans that day. He got away from Quinn and raced along the lake shore with wild abandon. That was until he spotted a girl and her grandfather sitting on the side of the lake fishing”

“Oh, poor Annora.”

“Ask her sometime about her first encounter with Kong

“I will do that because now I am curious.” Rylan laughs again

That damn throaty laugh again. I can feel my c**k twitch and decide now is a good time to end this dance. However, she shocks me by pressing her body closer to me. So close that I know she can feel my h**n through that thin satin dress she is wearing.

The smile on her face looks like she is gloating. She knows what she is doing to me. What a naughty vixen. She is torturing me. Oh, how she is enjoying it too.

“You are trying to entice me into giving in to you.”

“Perhaps.”

“Rylan, you are playing with fire. I am a ticking bomb. You keep pressing that delectable body of yours against me like that and I might explode.”

Instead of pulling away like I thought she would, the vixen only presses her body closer to me. There wasn't much space between our bodies before, now there is _none. She pressed every inch of the front of her body is to mine.

“What if I give you something to take the edge off? Something to reesember.”

“Baby, you have been unforgettable since the day you entered our camp all those years ago.”

My voice is husky with desire, but there is something more in the way I look at her. I can tell my words took her by surprise. His eyes widen, her lips part in shock. and all I can think about is taking her plump bottom lip into my mouth to bite it.

However, like all good things, reality comes crashing down on me when the music fades and we are left pressed together. Unable to look away. It feels like my entire world has named down to this moment in time.

All there is for me right now is her.

“I am going to let go of you and walk away before I embarrass myself right here on the dance floor.” She whispers.

My chest tightens when she does. The look in her eyes tells me that she wants more, but now is not the time. In that, we are in agreement on that. We are on a now crowded dance floor, in the backyard of a house that belongs to someone else. All I want to do is stay in this moment forever

Right here with her

Trauma Trigger Warning

Two hours later, I am driving home after dropping Rylan off at her apartment. Every part of my being is screaming at me to turn my car around, drive back to her apartment, and pray she lets me in. I avoided being close to her for the rest of the auction. I sat far enough away that there were no accidental touches. Her frustration was obvious as I drove her home.

It felt like the logical course of action after how close we came to kissing on the dance floor earlier in the night. I know for a fact that had I kissed her, I wouldn't have stopped there. I would have dragged her to the first secluded spot I found and hid my way with her.

That is not how I want our first time together to be. In my heart, I know she deserves so much better. I will give it to her when I have significantly defeated my demons. They will never truly be defeated, but being able to fight them in a healthy way is my goal.

Who in their right mind would love such a broken soul? Someone who has killed in the name of justice. Justice that was misguided in so many ways, but as a soldier. I followed orders. I fought for my country.

I pull my car to the side of the road as I feel my grip on the wheel shake. S**t, s**t, **t. This is not good. I let go of the wheel after I put my car in park. Deep breaths are needed. However, the minute I close my eyes to just breathe it out, I am back to that horrible day.

The day that will forever haunt my nightmares.

It started out as a routine recon mission, but they ambushed us. Somehow, the enemy soldiers knew we were coming. They killed two of my squad in the firefight. Had our s**er not been in the right location, I might have died, too. However, it was the mother and daughter that I tried to save that haunts me.

As they ran to me and my squad leader, they got caught in the crossfire. I hear their screams echo in my head as I relive that day over and over. The way they jerked and flailed around as bullets riddled their bodies. The way the mother clutched at her daughter even in death.

their bodies

I blink back the tears as I hear a knock on the driver's side window. In the brief moment before the past sucked me in, I was clearheaded enough to turn my hazard lights on. In the dark interior of my car, I can see the flashing of the lights on the dashboard. When the tapping comes again, I turn my face to the window so I can

see who is out there.

A highway patrol officer is standing at the side of my car with a flashlight in his hand, I jump in surprise to see him standing there. He must have seen my hazard lights flashing and pulled over to see if I needed help.

I do.

Hemotions for me to roll my window down. I comply instantly. I am anything but calm on the inside as I wait for him to speak.

“Is everything alright here?”

No.

Sorry, other I had a terrible night.”

“You look like you have been to a party. Must have been some night. License and registration, please.”

After reaching into the inner pocket off my tuxedo, I hand him what he needs. He takes my information, then moves away, but stops and turns back to me. I can see that he spotted my parking pass for the Army base, I am in the reserve now, like Quinn is

“Are you a soldier?”

“Thank you for your service. Sit tight while I check your information.”

He heads for his cruiser this time without looking back. Of all the places to have a flashback, I had to choose the side of the road at night on a long stretch of highway. There is no traffic, so I glance at the clock on the dashboard.

It is three in the morning

F**k.

I dropped Rylan off at her place around one. The past pulled me back in for longer than I thought. How long had the officer been tapping on my window before I broke free of my memories? When he returns to the window, he hands my documents back to me.

“How long were you tapping at my window before I snapped out of it?”

“A few minutes. You are free to go.”

I give him a nod before he turns back to his cruiser. After he drives off, I start my car, then I turn around and head back to the one place I should avoid. However, is the one place I need to be. All I want is to have her arms around me as I calm down.

The soothing sound of her voice, the smell of her skin. Everything I need to ground scares me. Not her, but the safety, the serenity, and the peace she embodies for me.

to reality is back with Rylan. I have run from her for so long because she

When I Anock on her door twenty minutes later, her eyes are filled with sleep but clear instantly when she sees my face. Her eyes go from confused at sering me at her door to worry as she takes a good look at me.

“What happened?”

“I don’t want to talk. Can you just hold me? Talk to me,

Without hesitation, Rylan steps back to let me inside. No words are spoken between

as she leads me towards her bedroom. Normally I would think about getting

her naked, but for once my mind is on just having her arms around me.

She stops at the end of her bed, then she makes quick work of getting me out of my used jacket. Her eyes are soft as she climbs onto the bed, then pulls me with her. Soon I am laying on my side with my head pressed to her chest and her arms wrapped tightly around me.

I fall asleep to the sound of her heartbeat.