

## Chapter 5: First Encounter

Quinn's POV

"What the fu\*k is going on here?" Brianna demanded as she marched towards me and this vast and gorgeous man who had just punched Shane in the face. I knew I needed to answer Brianna, but I couldn't tear my eyes away from the man who had swooped in to save me. He had a dark and dangerous look about him, with his long brown hair pulled into a bun. His dark beard obscured his face, but his mesmerizing brown eyes stared into mine, making my heart utter and my stomach ip. Why did I feel like I had known him my entire life? "Hello! Quinn!"

"What?" I asked, peeling my eyes away from my savior.

"I said, what is going on here? And who the he\*\* is this guy?" Brianna huffed, staring up at the guy in front of me. "I saw Shane with a bloody nose."

"Yeah, he tried to make a move on me and wasn't listening when I said no," I explained, trying to ignore the feeling of this man still staring at me intently. God, why did he smell so good? It was like a late-night bonre, smokey and comforting.

"I heard her yell and came to make sure she was alright," the tall, mysterious man said, looking away from me and at Brianna. His voice lled my head and made my knees weak, causing me to slide down the wall slightly. I think he caught on because he looked back at me, and I could have sworn I saw the sides of his mouth twitch up into a quick smile.

"Oh my god, are you okay?" Brianna asked, looking me up and down.

"Yeah, I'm ne. He didn't get very far before...." I trailed off and looked up at the guy still towering over me and keeping my back pressed to the building.

"Landon, my name is Landon," he told me, staring directly into my eyes. I blushed when he said his name, and I looked down at the ground, unable to hold his gaze any longer. An awkward silence followed, which I didn't know how to ll.

"Well," Brianna said, wanting to end whatever was happening. "Thanks for the help, Landon. Quinn, come on, Tanner's waiting inside." Brianna reached out her hand to me, and I looked up at Landon, not knowing what to say. I didn't want to walk away from him, but I couldn't keep looking at his handsome face.

"Thanks again," I mumbled as I felt my cheeks get hot, as they ushed with embarrassment. I took Brianna's hand, and we began to walk away together. Looking back over my shoulder, I saw Landon still staring at me as he stood, lling out the arms of his leather jacket as if it were about to rip apart from the sheer size of his muscles.

"That guy was weird," Brianna commented as we walked up the stairs towards the front doors. "Hot as all he\*\*, but peculiar."

"What?" I asked, not paying attention to a word she said but instead thinking about my encounter with Landon.

"He was just staring at you the entire time. His energy was also so intense," she commented.

"Yeah, his energy was something..." We entered the club again and made our way towards Tanner, who was talking to a guy who appeared to be very drunk.

"Found her!" Brianna yelled over the DJ.

"Sh\*t, where were you?" Tanner asked, bending down to hear me better.

"I was just outside; it's not a big deal!" I yelled, not wanting to get back into the entire situation in this environment.

"I'm gonna get you another drink!" Brianna told me, squeezing my upper arm. As she walked away and Tanner began chatting up his male friend again, all I could think about was Landon. His erce brown eyes were burned into my memory as his face swam in my head. For some reason, leaving him had me feeling like I had lost something. There was a desperate need deep inside me to be around him again, which confused me. Why was I feeling like this about a man I had met for maybe ve minutes? My emotions ran a mile a minute as confusion and worry set in. I wanted to go home and forget what Shane had tried to do. Brianna had returned, carrying two plastic cups in her hands.

"Here, I got you another vodka soda," she told me, handing me the cold, clear, liquid-lled cup.

"Are you two ready to go home soon?" I asked her without taking a sip.

"Home? What are you talking about? It's only eleven thirty!" she scoffed, looking at me with an annoyed and confused face.

"I think I'm just going to call a car and go home. I'm just a little shaken up about what happened," I explained to her, handing back my drink.

"What? Are you sure?" she whined, giving me a pleading look with her eyes.

"Yeah, I just wanna go to bed," I said with half a smile.

"Okay, do you want me to wait outside with you until your car comes?" she asked, looking over at Tanner, who was locked in a passionate kiss with the man he had been talking to.

"Nah, I'll be ne," I reassured her, handing her my drink. Leaning in, I hugged her and thanked her for taking me out for my birthday. Tanner looked too engaged in his guy, so I gured I would talk to him tomorrow once he rolled out of bed around two in the afternoon. Walking outside, I noticed it was colder than I expected. Maybe everything that happened with Shane and Landon distracted me from the crisp October night. Pulling out my phone, I opened the app I wanted and set up a ride that said it would arrive in a few minutes. The pick-up location I set was on the corner since parking in front of the bar was dicult.

Looking left to right, it didn't look like anyone was around, so I walked a couple of yards down the alley to my pick-up spot on the corner. Beginning my walk, I kept my phone at my side to see where I was going, but the startling feeling I was being watched took over.

"Look who's all alone now," a familiar voice taunted. Stopping in my tracks, I wiped my head around to see someone coming out of the shadows. Shane was making his way towards me, dried blood on his face and shirt, cigarette in hand. His friend, who had been talking and dancing with Brie, anked him, looking at me with a loathing glare.

"My car is going to be here to pick me up in just a minute," I warned, wanting him to know there would soon be a witness to whatever he had planned.

"That's okay; I don't need any longer than that, especially from the looks of you," he sneered, taking a step closer to me. All his friend was doing was crossing his arms and smiling devilishly. He knew what his friend wanted to do. Fear ooded me, seeping into every corner of my mind and making my blood cold. My heart began racing against my rib cage, and my grip on my phone slipped slightly as my palms became slick with sweat.

Running seemed like a good option. Behind me was a clear shot of the street and, hopefully, other people. Shane was probably looking for revenge for saying no and what Landon had done to him. "Your little boyfriend broke my nose," he spat, getting closer as I tried to move my legs but found they didn't seem to respond. I was frozen in place, my body taking the freeze instead of the ight or ght path. Shane was quickly closing the distance, only a couple feet from me; I could see the evil gleam in his eyes.

Why was my body choosing now to freeze in the face of danger? You always imagine how you will react in this situation, but you never picture yourself freezing. Usually, you show yourself kicking a\*\* and having some great comebacks after you overtake them. This wasn't happening at all like my weird fantasy. Shane was almost to me when a giant dark blur came from the side and slammed into him, throwing him sideways, where he crashed into several large trash cans. Landon was once again standing in front of me, but instead of looking at me, I was staring at his prole as he stared daggers at Shane. Landon's head twitched, and he looked at Shane's friend, who quickly backed away, holding up his hands.

He focused on Shane, who was stumbling to his feet, seeming like the wind had been knocked out of him. Still, I was frozen on the spot, watching the ght before me with rapped attention. Landon's hair began falling out of his bun, and I could see the long dark curls framing his face as he panted and seethed in Shane's direction. How was I able to feel the amount of rage emanating from Landon? It was almost like I could see it wafting off him, like heat off asphalt on a summer day. That had to be a trick; my eyes were playing on me with all the fear I was feeling.

Shane began another assault on Landon, running at him with nothing but rage in his eyes. Landon quickly dodged out of the way, catching Shane in the stomach with his sts. Shane fell to the ground, clutching his stomach and gasping for air. Landon towered over him and, in a voice that sounded like it was from another world, said,

"I'd stay down if I were you. You're not going to like the next chapter of this game." Shane was on all fours, trying to ll his lungs from Landon's blow. Walking towards him, Landon picked Shane up by the back of the hair and forced him to stare into his intense, intimidating face.

"Go now while you still can," Landon hissed, dropping Shane onto all fours. He got to his feet and began retreating down the alley, so Landon now looked at me, but his soft brown eyes seemed to have a strange glow. Blinking a few times, they seemed to return to normal as he stepped toward me. My fear was starting to melt away, which was odd, considering this large stranger was lumbering towards me. How could his mere presence be calming me down? Was it his presence? No, it had to be because Shane and his friend were gone, and the danger had passed.

"Quinn, are you okay?" Landon asked as he reached me. "Did he hurt you?" His eyes were looking me all over, searching for wounds or any sign of physical harm.

"No, no, I'm okay," I stammered out, overcome with how good he smelled this close to me.

"Landon!" I heard a voice yell in the distance. It sounded like a growl had come from deep within Landon's chest, but that was unbelievable. He rolled his eyes and turned his head behind him, another man was coming towards us. This man had almost the same intense aura that Landon had. His hair was much shorter, black, and spiked up in the front, giving him an intimidating vibe. I noticed his brown eyes were narrowing the longer he looked at the two of us.

"Rob, what can I help you with?" Landon asked, sounding very irritated at the interruption. Standing there with two strangers wasn't normal, but something kept me in place next to Landon.

"I wanted to know where you went and why you just ran out of the bar!" The man named Rob asked, raising an eyebrow as he looked past Landon and surveyed me. They didn't exchange words as Rob looked back to Landon, but I got the strangest feeling they were still somehow communicating. "I'll meet you back inside in ve minutes," Rob replied, giving me a narrow glare.

"Sorry," Landon said, turning back to me. "That's my friend Rob."

"He seems intense," I added. The sound of my phone going off made me jump, and my phone hit the pavement with a loud clatter. Landon bent down and scooped it up before I had time to react.

"Here," he said, handing the phone over to me. The tips of his ngers brushed my palm as I held my hand out for the phone. An electric shock erupted in my hand and up my arm where his skin touched mine. Gasping, I pulled my hand away and looked at him. He was watching me intensely, reading my reaction. The phone rang again, and I realized my driver was probably wondering where I was.

"That's probably my ride; I called a car," I told him. "Hello?" I answered.

"Yes, Quinn? I'm at the corner waiting for you," the voice on the other end said.

"Okay, thank you. I'll be right there," I told them. Hanging up the phone, I looked back at Landon, who hadn't taken his eyes off me. "My car's here."

"Can I walk you to it?" he asked with a slight smile that almost made my knees give out.

"Um, alright," I replied. Thinking he'd helped me twice tonight, it didn't seem like he would try anything. Did I trust this man that I had just met? I smiled at him and turned to mine my walk to the corner. He stayed next to me the entire time; his arm was so close to mine that it brushed against me a few times. Taking a deep breath, I tried to clear my head as it seemed to get cloudier the longer I walked with him. A silver sedan was waiting at the corner with their four ways on. We didn't exchange words as we walked, but you could cut the tension in the air with a knife.

"Listen," I nally said, needed to break the deafening silence between us. "Thank you for what you did back there. I never thought Shane would return after what happened the rst time."

"You're welcome; I guess I just happened to be in the right place at the right time," he said.

"How did you know I was in trouble?" I questioned, genuinely curious how he had managed to nd me both times.

"I went outside for some air the rst time and heard you yell," he told me.

"And the second?" I asked, probing him again.

"I think we're here," he added, changing the subject. We had indeed arrived at the car to take me home. Landon leaned over to open the door for me. He didn't want to answer my question. Opening the door, he stepped back to let me get inside. Sliding into the car, I looked back out the door at him.

"What's your last name?" he asked, rmly gripping the door handle.

"It's Baker," I told him. He smiled, and this time, it was broad and happy. His eyes crinkled under his thick beard.

"It's nice to meet you, Quinn Baker. I'm Landon Harris." Landon closed the door and stepped back as the driver threw the car into drive and headed toward my apartment. I swiveled in my seat to look out the back window. Landon's large frame was growing smaller and smaller, disappearing entirely in no time.