

## Chapter 9: First Date

Quinn's POV

I seemed to catch a break having to go in today because, so far, it had been a tranquil day. Since it was so quiet, I didn't see why I had to come in, but I was getting paid to do minimal work.

"Quinn, can you do a bandage change in room 2?" Astrid asked me. I was standing at the portable computer inputting new patient information before I took it into the room for their insurance information.

"No problem, Astrid," I told her from over the top of the computer. There was only a bit of information to add, but I was suddenly struck with the feeling of being watched. A familiar scent hit my senses and smelled like a smokey re. That was the same scent I smelled when I was near..... "Landon..." I breathed, looking to my left and seeing him staring at me with a soft intensity.

"Hey Quinn," came his deep raspy greeting, causing my knees to buckle slightly. My eyes were locked onto his deep brown ones, unable to think of anything else around me.

"How... How did you nd me?" I stammered, confused about how he gured out where I worked. "Why are you here?"

"You have where you work listed on social media," he reminded me. I had given him my name; nding me probably wasn't dicult. "And I'm here because I wanted to see you again." My heart was beating a mile a minute, and the more he talked, the foggier my head became.

"How did you get back here?" I asked, unsure how to proceed with the information that he wanted to see me again.

"I might have swindled Lilith at the desk a little," he smirked, turning my legs to jelly as I clutched onto the portable computer stand for dear life. "I wanted to see if you wanted to get dinner with me." My brain exploded at this point; this God-like creature wanted to have dinner with me. Why?

"You want to have dinner with me?" I questioned to make sure my hazy mush brain understood him correctly.

"Yes, tonight, actually," he smiled. This had to be someone's idea of a joke. I waited for someone to jump out of the shadows and tell me it was just a prank. There was no way a man like him would want to go out to dinner with me. I had been in this position before and knew how it would all end. Yet, he and I did seem to have some weird connection; I could feel it. Still, that didn't take away from the idea that something like this would never work. I opened my mouth to tell him no to that date, but something else came out.

"Okay..." Taken back by my answer, Landon smiled a dazzling smile that stretched from ear to ear.

"Great, I know this amazing Italian place near here. When do you get nished?" Landon asked as if this happened every day, getting asked out by the hottest man I had ever seen in the middle of the emergency department, a place he wasn't even supposed to be.

"Six," I croaked, my throat dryer than the desert.

"Should I pick you up from here or your place?" he asked, still staring at me with an intensity that made me feel like he was X-raying me.

"Oh, um, I guess my place. I don't have anything with me here," I explained. I was getting asked out by my savior while at work, which was the last thing on my mind when I got ready today.

"Okay, why don't I give you my phone, and you can put your number in?" he asked, handing me his phone from inside his jacket pocket. It was the same leather jacket he had worn last night, and in the daylight, I could see his very dened muscles just about to burst from the fabric. "I'll just send you a quick message, and you can send me your address."

"Sure," I told him as I fumbled with his phone. A distinct chuckle came from him as I attempted to remember my name to type in, let alone my number. Why did he make me feel so nervous yet so secure simultaneously? Were those emotions even possible to feel together? I gave him the phone back, and he hit a couple of buttons, and I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. Pulling it out, I saw a new message from his number. Opening the message, I typed in my address and sent it to him.

"Got it," he smiled, looking down at his phone. His voice hit something in my soul, and I felt like I could listen to him talk every day and never get tired of it.

"Quinn!" Astrid called to me. "Did you get that bandage change done in room 2?"

"Oh, no, sorry," I responded, embarrassed that Landon had distracted me to the point that I forgot everything else.

"It's my fault," Landon said, giving her another dazzling smile. "I distracted her."

"Oh, that's okay," Astrid chirped with a hit of a laugh. "Wait, who are you?"

"He's my... Um, we're..." I struggled to nd words to describe what was happening right now.

"I was just visiting someone, and Quinn caught my eye," Landon told her with a wink. "I'm leaving now, though."

"I'll see you tonight at seven," Landon said with another wink, causing my grip to slip on the stand as my legs threatened to surrender completely.

"See you tonight," I breathed, unable to believe what had happened. I watched as Landon went to the double doors leading back into the waiting room. He paused a second and turned around to ash me a heart-stopping smile before disappearing as quickly as he'd come.

"Okay, who was he, and where do I get one?" Astrid asked, coming to stand with me. Landon's smokey scent still lingered in the air, and I heard her question, but it sounded far away.

"What?" I asked, nally giving her my attention.

"Who the heck was that?"

"He's just a guy that came over to say hi," I lied, not wanting to get into the entire story.

"I nd that hard to believe; he was looking at you like you're the love of his life," she said, with a hint of jealousy in her voice. I smiled and looked down at the oor.

"He just asked me on a date," I told her. She looked at me surprised and with an open mouth.

"Holy sh\*! Did you say yes? Cause if you didn't, I'll chase him down and go myself," she laughed.

"I said yes, I wasn't planning to, but it just came out," I admitted.

"Make sure that's not the only thing that comes," she laughed with a wink.

"Oh, gross!" I huffed, turning my attention back to the computer.

"What?" she asked, touching my shoulders and shaking me. "When's the last time you went on a date, let alone got laid? Like four years?"

"It hasn't been that long," I told her, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized I hadn't been on a date in a long time. This began to bubble anxiety in my stomach at the notion of going on this date. Landon seemed so condent and sure of himself. Those were two things I could improve on. I spent the rest of my shift with my stomach in knots, thinking about tonight. Brie would have an entire fashion show, helping me decide what to wear.

I had texted her, letting her know I needed help, and even in her text, I could tell how excited she was. I knew I would come home to about ten outts on my bed. The drive back home seemed so short, and when I walked through the door, Tanner and Brie were practically jumping up and down excitedly. Immediately, she ushered me upstairs and began throwing me into outt after outt.

"I still think you should go with the mini dress," she huffed as she leaned against the bathroom doorway, staring at me while I did my makeup.

"I know you do, but I like what I picked out," I told her. She looked my outt up and down but didn't say anything. It was getting colder in October, so I picked a white sweater, relaxed-t jeans, and tan boots. If Brie had it her way, I'd be in a mini skirt and heels higher than a skyscraper. The clock was ticking closer to seven as I put the nishing touches on my makeup. There was a knock on the front door, and Brie jumped, looking towards the door and then back at me as a smile spread across her face.

"He's here!" she sang. "And he even came to the door instead of just texting you that he was here. What a gentleman!"

"How did he get past the security door?" I asked, following her out of the bathroom and into the living room.

"Someone probably let him in. Now, look at me," she said, turning me to face her. "You're amazing, you look hot, you're a bada\*\*." I love you!"

"I love you too," I told her. "I should probably open the door before he thinks I'm standing him up."

"Right," she responded, letting me go. Tanner was standing in the living room, just in sight of the door, holding back a big smile. Brie went to stand with him as I went to the door. Taking a deep breath, I opened the door, and Landon's handsome appearance and smell hit me right in the face. He looked even more attractive, if possible, with his long dark brown hair down just past his shoulders. He was sporting a black sweater, jeans, large boots, and the same leather jacket I had already come to love.

"Hi, Quinn," he said, making me forget everything around me.

"Hey," I said in a horse whisper.

"Are you ready?" he asked, looking deep into my eyes.

"Yes," I told him, glancing behind me to grab my purse off the coat rack, only to see Brie and Tanner craning their necks for a good look at Landon.

"Have fun!" Brie and Tanner yelled in unison as I closed the door with a soft click.

"Are those your roommates?" Landon asked as we walked down the stairs to the security door.

"Brianna is, but Tanner is just a friend. He spent the night last night because they got in so late," I explained. Landon held the door open for me, and I walked past him but waited for him to lead me to his car because I didn't know which one was his. He took me to an expensive black-looking sports car and opened the door for me.

"Thanks," I said, sliding onto the brown leather seat. The only smell in the entire car was Landon's smokey scent, and it washed over me and calmed the anxiety that was aring up inside me. He got into the driver's seat and started the car, exiting the parking lot. I hugged my purse tightly, trying not to show my nervousness.

"I'm happy you said yes to this date tonight," he told me, glancing sideways.

"I am, too," I said, which wasn't untrue. The need to see him again and be close to him had been so strong since I left him last night.

"Do you like Italian?" he asked. "I just realized I never actually asked you that question."

"I love Italian; it's my favorite, actually," I said with a smile.

"I had a feeling," he said, with another sideways glance that made me blush. I admired all the buttons and knobs his car possessed. From the look of it, this car had to be brand new, with every bell and whistle possible. My car was nearly twenty years old, and the power windows were the most exciting feature to me.

The drive to the restaurant took around ten minutes, and Landon parked his car on the main road. Before I had unbuckled my seatbelt, he opened the door at my side of the vehicle. How did he get over here so fast? I wondered as he put his hand out to help me out of the car. Taking his hand, a static electric sensation shot through my hand and up my arm. Gasping out loud, I looked at Landon, who smiled softly. He kept our hands intertwined as he took me to the front door. Part of me almost pulled my hand away from the shock of his new sensation, but a more significant part was thrilled he was touching me, even in a small way.

The smell of garlic and fresh bread lled my lungs when we entered the restaurant. I got the impression this was a mom-and-pop type of place. The walls were peppered with black and white photographs and knick-knacks that looked like they came from an antique store. It was hectic, with loud chatter from every corner of the large room. The hostess was looking at her computer in front of a tall wooden podium.

"Hello," she said brightly. "Do you have a reservation?"

"I do; it's under Landon Harris," he told her, holding tightly to my hand as tingling sensations continued to pulse up my arm.

"Perfect, let me show you to your table," she told us, grabbing two menus from the large stack on her right. We followed her to a small square table on one side, against a wall. She set the menus down and said our server would be right over to us. Both Landon and I thanked her as he pulled the chair out for me, nally lettingting go of my hand, which made me sad.

"Have you ever been here before?" he asked, taking his seat and picking up his menu.

"No, I've passed it a lot, but I've never been inside," I told him, picking up my menu. "I'm guessing you've been here before?"

"Yeah, my parents used to let my sister and I pick a restaurant for dinner every year on our birthday, and this is the place I always picked," he said.

"That's a nice tradition," I told him with a smile.

"Thanks. My sister would always pick the newest place in town, but I picked this place for its small-town feel," he explained. Our conversation was interrupted by our waiter.

"Hi guys, how are we doing tonight? My name is Alonso, and I'll be taking care of you tonight. Can I start you with something to drink?"

"I'll have a water and a glass of Riesling, please," I told him.

"Okay, and for you, sir?"

"I'll have your most popular beer," Landon told him.

"Alright, and did you want to put in any appetizers?" Alonso asked.

"I haven't even looked at the menu," I told him with an apologetic smile.

"Do you like spinach artichoke dip?" Landon asked me.

"Yeah, I do," I said.

"It's excellent here. Would you be okay with that?" he asked.

"Yeah, that sounds great!" I smiled.

"Okay, perfect!" Alonso said. "I'll put that right in for you." He walked away, leaving Landon and me alone again.

"You said you had a sister," I said, trying to break the awkward silence that fell once the waiter walked away. "Is she older or younger?"

"She's older by a year; she's thirty-four, and I'm thirty-three. Her name is Evelyn," Landon said. I suppose six years older than me wasn't too bad.

"Do you have any siblings?" he asked.

"Nope, just me, myself and I," I told him, nally looking at the menu for the rst time. Silence fell again as I tried to decide what I wanted to eat.

"How long have you worked in the emergency room?" Landon asked. I looked over the top of my menu to realize I didn't think he'd taken his eyes off me since we sat down.

"Five years. It was my rst job out of college. That's where I met Tanner," I explained.

"Did you go to school around here?" he asked, setting his menu down and folding his arms on the table to lean slightly closer to me.

"I did, but I'm originally from Charleston, South Carolina," I told him. I was closing my menu, having picked out what I wanted to eat.

"What brought you up here?" He did seem like he wanted to know everything about me, and I wanted to tell him. For some reason, I wanted this man to know every truth and secret about me.

"Well, my parents died when I was about seven in a car accident, so I moved in with my grandmother, who lived in the city. She passed away a year ago herself," I explained.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that," he told me, looking genuinely upset for me.

"Thank you. It wasn't even all bad; their death inspired me to become an emergency room nurse. My grandmother told me the hospital they transported my parents to wasn't very good, and their staff didn't do the best job. I didn't want other people to have the same experience I did. I wanted to be the one to help save lives." Landon looked at me with the tilt of his head. What was that behind his eyes? Caring, understanding, admiration? He was looking at me in a way that caused my heart to utter and my stomach to jump. I did jump when Alonso interrupted my inner thoughts.

"Okay, I have your drinks here," he said, placing them all on the table. Did Landon chuckle?

"The spinach dip will be right out. Are you two ready to order?"

"I think we are," Landon told him, looking at me for conrmation. If only I had known then what our rst date would lead to.