

Loving Quinn Chapter 13

Annom de 15)

I pulled my hair sp into a messy bun, pulled my tennis shoes on, then called myself ready for the day. I am not out to Impress anyone. So, my cut-off jean shorts and faded red * **Mouse t-shirt will do for my afternoon of fishing with Grandpa. We normally fish right off the boat dock behind the house, but today he wants to go across the water to a new spot. It is farther away from the house, and I think he chose that spot to give us more dantance from my parents.

Mom and dad spent a good portion of the night in their mom arguing over my living situation for the fall. I was tempted to pull my mom aside and ask her to give it a rest. There is no stopping dad once he makes a decision. Nothing be arranged fee is bad, well except the driver, I don't need a babysitter. That is what Hank, my driver, will be. A glorified babysitter.

I want to know if my mother would rather have me on the medical campus in student housing. I wouldn't mind that, but my father set up my space, so I will take it. To be able to study without all the other students around will be nice. To have my od shower, where no one will barge in while I am naked, will be the best part. I can't count how many times over the years my brothers have done that to me. Much to their instant regret,

Iron down the stairs to meet Grandpa on the back porch. He wanted to go at sunrise, but cominced him to wait until ten am, to head out. I open the screen door to see that he is waiting for me like he said he would be. Two fishing poles, his ratty old tackle box, and a little blur igloo cooler. Inside that cooler will be two cans of root beer, two turkey sandwiches, and a single apple turnover. It is the same lunch Grandma has packed us every time we go fishing

I will miss her apple turnovers, but knowing my grandmother, she will send me some once a month to remind me of home.

"You ready to head out, Annie? Grandpa turns to me when he hears the screen door close behind me.

"Let's get going. Pops." I tell him as I

I grab one of the fahing poles and the lunch bas

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We set off to walk around the lake to his new fishing spot. I know he has something he wants to talk to me about since he keeps fidgeting with his watch. For Grandpa, that is a telltale sign that he has something weighing on his mind. I wait for him to speak, but he

stays silent the entire walk around the lake. This worries me since he is not known to keep much to himself for long

When we finally reach the spot, I can tell that it has been used recently by the boot prints in the dirt. They are bigger than Grandpa's, so I know it wasn't him. There is a long log pulled up close to the bank. This will come in handy as we fish. Grandpa sits his tackle box on one end of the log, and I sit the lunch box on the other

end

Within a few more minutes, with our lines!

we both cast out. I glance at Grandpa, and he is Edgeting again with his watch. I wait some more. He will say what is on his mind when he has finished working out how to say it. We have all afternoon to talk. I am in no rush to know what he is so concerned about.

"Why is your mother so upset that Alex is setting you up well in England?" Grandpa finally asks.

Everyone in the house heard them arguing last night. I am not surprised that Grandpa would want to know why my mother is so mad. I honestly don't understand myself. I thought she would be happy that my father made the arrangements so she wouldn't have to worry about it. I guess not, but knowing my mother there adds more to her anger than my living arrangements.

"I think she is angry that he set it all up without asking her. I am sure she would have loved to help pick out the flat, help decorate it, and all those minute details only she can get right. He just bulldozed over her and did it all on his own. You know, like he always does with stuff like that." I tell him as I watch the water.

"He tends to steam roll right over people, doesn't he? After all this time, I would think your mother would be used to it, but I can understand the sting of it could still hurt her. How long have they been fighting about it?" Grandpa says. Then he reels in a fish.

First catch of the day goes to him. Point one for Grandpa.

"They have been arguing every time he is home for about a week now. I have no idea why she keeps bringing it up when he is home. I let out a chuckle when I hook a fish and reel it in.

all arranged and done." I replied to

Two fish in our bucket. Tied soon.

"We, I think later tonight when you.

the boys go out to the fair in town, I will sit your parents down and have a chat. They need to realize how their bickering is affecting you” Grandpa said as he reeled his line in to add more bait. One greedy fish got away.

“But I’m not really. I start to say, but the look he gives me has me shutting my mouth.

“know you won’t say anything, Annie, and that is part of the problem. I can see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice. They are hurting you with their fighting

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and it needs to stop. You are going of to England alone. To Medical School alone. Are you scared?” Grandpa looks over at me with those big brown eyes of his

This is exactly why he knows me better than anyone else in my family. He sees and ears more than they all know. He listens to me about everything I say to him. Grandpa is my protector, my guide, and my safe place. My heart hurts knowing that he will not be going with me on this journey, but I know that he will only be a phone call away if I need him.

“There is so much that I fear, Pops,” I whisper as I

my head onto his shoulder.

“I can only imagine. Call me anytime you are lost not there, Annie, I will reel you back in.” He leaned over and kissed the top of my head

We spend the next few hours talking about my first year’s classes, all the things I want to accomplish at the end of the term, and how I will deal with being on my own in England. Knowing my parents as I do, they will both be making plenty of trips to visit me. My mother will not be able to stop herself.

I will never be truly on my own over there until they see that I no longer need a babysitter.

I hope to show them I can be without them. I even thought of finding a part-time job somewhere to pay for any expenses that I may have that are not school related. Earn some money on my own to be independent. Grandpa says that I’d plan, and he supports my ideas. I will gain my independence one way or another

Grandpa lets out a whistle of appreciation for the large fish he pulls out of the lake. See one for Grandpa. We are now two to one. Come on, Eshies, got with the program and nibble on my line. After he casts his line back out, we settle into that comfortable silence we have between us. The sun shining down on us, that sounds of the water lapping

against the shoreline, and the occasional sounds of the surrounding wildlife make the afternoon seem so serene,

Then it happens, the inevitable. Something breaks the silence and rains the peaceful moment. A loud bark from my right side lets me know the dog is near just seconds before it barrels into me. My Eshing pole dies into the lake, the bucket of fish is knocked over, and a wet dog tongue slaps the right side of my face. Then I am knocked off the log, ending up flat on my back with my arms full of a gigantic squirming dog.

"od**t Kong, get back here!" I hear a voice yell.

I pray that voice belongs to the dog's owner, Grandpa is laughing as he tries to pull Kong off me. I am not finding the humor of the situation. I just received a French kiss from a dog. That is straight up nasty as f**k!

"Get him off me!" I scream

Mercifully, Kong is pulled away from me. I open my eyes and the first thing I see makes my heart somersault in my chest. Holy wow, where did this Greek God come from? Standing above me is a man with sea-green eyes, wavy black hair with chestnut brown highlights, and a face that could have been carved in marble. Strong chiseled cheekbones, a finely sculpted nose, and lips that make me want to know how they will feel on mine.

He seems just as starstruck as I am, then the spell is broken as Kong barks, then yanks free of his owner's grasp to streak down the path away from the lake. The man looked at me then in the direction Kong ran off too, indecision clear on his face on whether to chase after his dog or stay here with me. Grandpa clearing his throat made the man look away from me, then he took off after Kong

Well, my summer just got more interesting

"Well, now that you have had your first kiss, Annie, let's get that pole and our fish so we can get home" Grandpa said as he held his hand out to help me up.

"Papa!!" I yell at him as I let him haul me up. The t***le in his eyes as he held his laughter back made me let mine out. We joked about the doggie kisses all the way back to the house.

The need to brush my teeth propelled me up the stairs as soon as we got inside. I spent the next few hours daydreaming about Kong's owner. Who the hell was he? Did he live around here? If so, why had I never seen him before? Unless he was new to the area and had never been here any of the other summers before this one.

I can feel heat rush to my face as I imagine those green eyes boring into mine right before he kisses me. Oh, please have mercy on me. This summer now has a mystery to solve. Who is my stranger by that lake?

“Annie!!” Grandpa yells for me from downstairs.

I hop right up off my bed to rush downstairs. It is dinner time and the entire house smells like grilled fish. Yum, I skid to a halt at the bottom of the stairs as I see

o is standing on the porch with Grandpa. My Greek God. Oh, holy s**t.

Annie, this is Quinn, he is the gymer of your dog crash Grandpa laughs and then steps off the porch

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check my email and my voicemail. A glass of wine will help soothe my nerves before deal with my daughter,

I head to the kitchen to pon myself a glass, my phone to my car as I do. Five voicema wait for me. The first one is from my mother reminding me about a dinner next week with her and my father. The second one was from my father asking me if he was something I could de inget out of coming to dinner. He wants to uprise my mother with an early nerary gif

This makes me laugh before I move to the next voicemail. This one is from Lorelai, he doesn't say what it is about but that I need to call her as soon as possible. By the tone of her voice, she is angry. What is happening now that is making her angry?

So, instead of listening to the remaining two voicemails, I hang up, then dial her number. She drawers on the second ring. Meaning she was waiting for my call.

“Are you sitting down?” She asks. From the tone of her voice, I can already tell that

not like what the bas to say

Knowing Lori, I take her advice and sit on a stool at the kitchen counter. “What la going on Lori?”

“Did you check the email I sent you earlier?”

“No, I was with Grace and a few of her friends. Movie and lunch deal. I haven't had time.”

“Kyle and Lana are filing for joint custody of Grace.”

I hadn't known it was possible for this day to get any worse. Again, I was so very wrong "How is that possible? Grace is not his daughter. He isn't on her birth certificate. She was born before I ever met him."

"You were married for three years and together for five, Annora. Kyle is the only father she has ever really known. He is using that as a basis for this custody suit. H**o think of her as his."

This is not happening. Then a thought pops in my head. Grace's real father is right here in California. He was at my house last night. "What if her real father was in the picture?"

"I thought you didn't know where he was?"

"He is right here in California. His company Just bought Mercy General. We met a week ago at a fundraiser."

"Would he be willing to step in and help you fight this?"

Honestly, I do not know what Quinn will do. Will he hate me when I tell him about Grace, or will he be happy that we have a child together?

"He doesn't know about Grace."

Cue the dramatics from my lawyer. The questions she asks are ones I have asked myself over and over throughout the years. Now I just have to figure out how to tell him about the child we created together. However, before I do that, I need to talk to Groce

It is time to come face to face with my past.

Saturdays have too much free time in them. I have been to the gym, had a long swim, and on a hike. It is now six p.m., and I am alone in my penthouse. Not a situation I want to be in. Normally, I would get dressed for going to a nightclub to find my next distraction.

Then I would spend the rest of the night with the woman who caught my eye. However, since I tasted Arora's lips again after so long, I have no intention of sleeping with another. She is the only one I want in my bed, on the floor, up against a wall, or anyway I can get her. I want my hands fisted in her hair as I pound into her. The way she moaned my name last night had me ready to explode right there on the spot. That would have been beyond embarrassing had I creamed

pants before I had her naked beneath me.

The sound of my shell ringing rudely interrupts my thoughts. Who the hell could that be? I take my time walking to the door. Whoever it is on the other side better have a

good reason for knocking on my door on a Saturday. A bark of laughter leaves my mouth when I see who is on the other side of the door. I open it to greet my best friend.

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“What are you doing beie?”

“There is a sover game on I figured you would either be stuck in your own head or hit trying to distract yourself. So, I hrought pizza and beer.”

“Well, since I have literally no plans tonight, why the hell not.”

I open the dom for bins, then close it behind him as he walks to the kitchen with his joms full. I grab the twelve pack of beer from him, then place it in the refrigerator, pulling out two cold ones. Then back to him

Dammit, he has that look on his face. I hate that look the is just sitting there on a tool, staring at me with one eyebrow raised. It is his “I know what you are thinking” face. I hate that look. Well, not always, but I really hate it when he knows something that I want to keep to myself.

“Spill it, Greyson”

beer, and the game

e first-

“Tizza, beer, and talking. Then if the game is still on, we will watch it.”

is always the negotiater.

“Fine, come on.”

We grab our beers, and he grabs the box with the pizza. He puts the game on, then we sit in silence as we eat the fast few slices of pune. I decide it is time to break the silence as I put my empty plate on the coffee table.

“She is like a drug man. A drug that I couldn’t get out of my system back then and now that I have tasted her again, I know I won’t be able to walk away

“How do you see this going now that you are back in each other’s path again? What are you planning to tell her about your time in the shit

“She had a kid with someone.”

This new gets h father?"

his attention. He places his beer down on the table, then turns to face me. "Who did she have a kid with? What about the ex-husband? He isn't the

"She asked me how I would feel if I knew Kyle wasn't the father. That makes me believe heat. Why would she say that if he was? She wouldn't tell me, but going to meet her at her place on Friday to talk. I have a feeling that I will not like what she has to tell me."

"How do you feel about that? Her having a kid?"

How do I feel about it? I know I told her I will love any child she has as long as I can be with her. What we had back then and what I felt from her last night less me know it is still there now. Am I willing to take on her child as my own to be with her

"I want this Annora's child will be part of the deal. If she will explore our feelings for each other with me now,

then I will try to get

try to get to know her child,"

hile we were apart..

My mind wanders as Aton falls silent. I can tell the game has caught his attention. Thad to know that Annora had other lovers over the ye have had more than my share of lovers just in the past year. Can I really be upset with her for being with other men?

Part of my heart wants to be upset, but that would make me a hypocrite. What am I going to tell her about my history with women? The way Annora reacted to how I treated Rebecca let me know she already thinks poorly of me for how I treated her. Imade up for it, but I can also assume Annora thinks it was with sex.

Telling her that happened earlier in the night seemed a little uncalled for

"What are you going to do about Dionne?*

I turn my attention back to Aaron. I completely forgot that we ran into her at the hotal. Having both women from my just back in my life at the same time to ghing to be a minefield to wade through, One-being the love of my life, while the other almost became my wife.

se did to our baby."

"I have to admit that I am curious about how she got that nasty cut on her arm. That doesn't mean she is welcome back in my life after what she

“Well, since she is a patient at our hospital, you will have plenty of time to find out.-

There is no plan to speak to her again. I want nothing to do with the woman who aborted my child because it was invonesies It was my baby too. She didn't tell me she had already had the procedure done until a week before the wedding. That was only called the house to schedule a follow up appointment. I was livid when I heard the message on the answering machine.

“Dionne can go to hell for all I care.

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[Annora)

My week is going by at a snail's pace. I spent Sunday with a very moody Grace. I spent most of the day cleaning. To give me time to figure out how to talk to her about Kyle's custody suit. I chickened out on Saturday night. I was angry with myself for even putting us in this situation

Had I known what Kyle was like before I married him, I would have walked away in heartbeat. I thought if we got married, I would give Grace a more stable life. What I gave her was a father who secretly resented her for being another man's child,

Quinn's. The biological father I have never spoken to Grace about even though she knew Kyle was not her father. Kyle knew I had a child when we met. It was only after

we married he showed his resentment.

Now, here I am on a Wednesday afternoon, with a clear schedule. Now is a perfect time to talk to Quinn, but I don't want to do it at the hospital. As I gather my courage to pick up the phone, a knock on my office door makes me look up.

“Come in,” I call out.

It was as if my thinking about him summoned him to my door Quinn walks into my office like he is on a mission. There is a storm brewing in his sea green eyes. One that I have seen before. It used to make my knees weak when he looked at me like that. This time is no different.

“What are you doing here?”

The sound of the lock clicking in place makes my heart rate skyrocket. Then he is beside my chair, pulling me to my feet. “I am doing what I have wanted to do since Saturday night.”

“Quinn, we are in my...”

He doesn't let me finish my sentence. His mouth fuses to mine in a toe-curling kiss. Heat instantly pools in my belly. The kiss spins wildly out of control as he slips his tongue into my mouth. Just like in the past, the fight for dominance is instant. The passion between us explodes as his hands roam my body.

Throwing caution to the wind, I reach my hands up to fit into his hair. The desire to have him right here in my office is all-consuming. I want him to sweep everything off my desk, lay me flat on my back, then have his way with me right here.

Right now

"I thought nothing else but how close I came to having you naked in your kitchen."

Then his mouth is back on mine. As he kisses me, one of his hands finds its way to the hem of my pencil skirt. A moan escapes my lips as he glides it up my outer thigh until he reaches the edge of my thigh highs. My skirt is being pulled up as his hand goes higher.

"I want you so bad, Annora."

I have absolutely no idea what has come over me at this moment. What we are about to do in my office is so wrong, but I want this more than anything else right.

"Then take me."

Quinn pulls back a fraction of an inch to look at me. "Are you sure?"

In reply, I pull his mouth back to mine, capturing his lips in a searing kiss. Quinn groans into my mouth as he lifts me up. I wrap my legs around his waist as he carries me toward the bookshelves along the back wall of office.

When he has me firmly against the bookshelves, I make quick work of loosening his tie. Soon, our clothes litter the floor as we ravage each other's mouths. Quinn's mouth mauls over my exposed flesh as each article of clothing is removed. His hands softly stroke my flesh, causing me to shiver in anticipation.

Quinn spins me around, causing me to laugh into his mouth. The sound of clattering makes me look over his shoulder. He swept my desk clean of everything that was on it. Holy**it, this was exactly what I wanted him to do. As he sits me down on my desk, I shiver as my ass**makes contact with the icy surface.

My head drops back as he kisses and nibbles his way down my throat until he reaches my breasts. I gasp louder than intended as the second his tongue flicks over my bare nipple. Then my body jerks as his other hand lands on my bare sex.

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Quinn lets out a proal of approval before his fingers dip inside. "You are so wet for me I want to taste you again, Annie."

Before I have time to realize what he intends to do, Quinn sinks to his knees, h**ks my legs over his shoulders, then fastens his mouth to my core. I moan loudly as he goes to work on my c**is. He slips two of his fingers deep inside me.

With one hand gripping my desk and the other buried in his hair, I throw my head back further as he ravages me with his tongue. "Oh, f**k, Quinn."

"Moan my name, Annie."

ble, and suck at my***t until I am a writhing, quivering mess. A cry of pure

I give him what he wants as I feel my ***m sip through me. He continues to lick, pleasure tears from my throat, followed by his sale as he sends me over the edge for the third time. All I can hear is my panting as he stands to his feet. In the next instant, he has my leg wrapped around his waist as he looks down at me. Lust shines out of his eyes with something else mixed in with it

"Quinn, I need you now..."

After I speak those words, he slips inside me. Bliss fills me as he slowly slides deep. Drce he is buried to the hilt, he stops moving. The way he is breathing lets me

know he feels it too.

That earth-shattering connection we always shared

I open my eyes when both his warm hands up my face. "Look at me, Annie. I want to watch your eyes while I make love to you."

"Oh, god, Quinn," I moan as he moves. Slow, deep strokes.

Then there were no more words as he fused his mouth to mine. All lean focus on is his mouth on mine. The tender way he kisses me. emotion he feels for me into our kisses. His kisses m**e every moan that comes out of me as he makes love to me.

Like he is pouring every

Every stroke of his hands over my body, each sinful thrust of his hard **k into my eur, makes me wish for this moment to last forever, I can feel my body tighten as I climb to the peak of pleasure. Quinn groans as I spasm around him.

Slowing his pace, he rests his forehead against mine. Quinn rocks his hips against mine in i and out of me

erotic dance. My body feels like it is on fire as he spins the pleasure up

“Open your eyes, Annie.”

My eyes fly open at his husky command. He leans up, braces both hands on the desk, then looks down at me. Those beautiful sea-green eyes of his are staring right into my soul. I want to give this man everything he deserves and then some more. To make up for all the lost time we missed together.

“I want to watch your eyes as you c**m for me, Annie. Release all you have been holding back.”

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At each word, he thrusts harder. Jamming me against the desk. Oh, but how good it feels to have Quinn pound harder into me. I want to make him lose control and let go just as much as he is asking me to. I feel he is holding so much back.

“I will let go if you do.”

“That is for another time, my love. I promise.”

The sound of that promise sends a thrill down my spine, making me quiver in anticipation. Something about the thought of the next time sends excitement through my bloodstream. I want this man any way I can get him. On all available surfaces. In any positions he puts me in, or I put him in

Oh, f**k, all my frantic desire for Quinn can now come to fruition.

stare into his eyes as he picks up speed. By the sounds my desk is making in protest they did not design it for this kind of activity. Both of his hands come up to cup my face as his pace returns to the slow and lazy. The love shining through his eyes is my undoing.

The**n that rips through me is the thing I have ever felt before. Not in the past, and certainly not since Quinn and I parted ways. I cry out his name before he thrusts his mouth back to mine. Then, a few strokes later, he follows me into the abyss of our shared pleasure.

With his forehead resting on mine, these powerful arms wrapped around me like I am in a cocoon, I feel I am home in his embrace. Something I haven't felt in →[twelve years. We were more than sex back then, and I can feel all that right below the surface.

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“There is more to this than

Though this was a manid,

more from. More from us both. Can you accept that? Are you willing to give what we

“Yes, Quinn, I want that as much. There are things we need to talk about, though. Things you need to listen to.”

I am beyond happy to hear that she wants to try Sin. Her words afterwards bring me crashing back to earth. I am not ready to have this conversation just yet, but I can see by the way she is looking, it is important to her

Reluctantly, I free of her to get dressed again”) hand her clothes to her as I find mine. The shyness I feel from her as we get dressed makes me chuckle. Where was that shyness when she was pulling my clothes off, raking her fingers through my hair, or dragging her nails down my back in her passion?

“What is so funny?” |

I look at her as she shields her breasts with her shirt. “Your sudden shyness is adorable

Annora’s cheeks flash red as she turns away from me to put on her bra

As she does, I pocket her white lace panties. These are now mine.

After her pantyhose are back on, she slips her feet back into her heels. Once her clothes are back in place, she grabs a brush out of her desk

desk drawer.

“Watching you do all

The look she sends me, shows me she is thinking the same thing, but then something else abides into her eyes. A emotion I never thought to see on her face when she looks at me. An emotion that causes my heart to break a little for whatever put that look on her face

“Annie? What is in 3a

(to be here ka thai cotomati

"Where do you want to

you want to go? Back to your place like we planned for Frid

Aissora looks away from me as she gathers her purse and briefcase. "My place is a good idea. Can we go to your place?"

"Fine. What about your car?"

"I didn't drive today. I ride in with one rose on staff on Windowsdays."

my hand on the small of her back, I cut her

I nod my head when she looks back at me, then I follow her out of her office. She locks the door behind us. Placing my hand down the hall to the elevators. Silence filled the elevator as we rode down to the lobby

Annora gets with her hands as she avoids my pace. There are so many questions running through my mind about what she wants to tell me. How had it be to

some asshole? put fear in her eyes! Did someone hurt her while we were apart? Was she assaulted

Both thoughts cause anger to rise through me. To think of her at the mercy of some predator makes me see red. Knowing that there was no way for me to prevent it from happening causes me to feel unbearable sadness for her.

The ride to my penthouse was tense as neither of us spoke a word. Derad settles over me as I pull into the garage. When I open her door, she looks up at me, startled, but she places her hand in mine without hesitation. That makes me feel slightly better about what is coming.

"I want to try something before we get upstairs. There is nothing you can say that will make me change my mind. I want you, Annie. We can figure out whatever

this is if you just have faith in me"

She looks away for a moment, then back at me. Tears spill down her cheeks before she speaks. "I really hope you mean that,

"Come on, let's get upstairs, then we can have that talk."

I lead her to the elevator, then press the button for my floor. My penthouse takes up the entire top two floors of the building

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They are both soundproof and only visible from this elevator. The elevator in the building's lobby only goes to the floors below Aaron's.

"Do you own this building?"

"Not at the moment, but that is a good idea."

When we reach my level, I escort her off the elevator and to my room. Nothing seems to be out of place, so I turn her to face me

1. The gasp of surprise from her as we enter the entrance way makes me look back around.

"What is it?"

"This place is gorgeous, Quinn. I want to see the rest of it"

"Later. We can have that tour after we have that talk"

Her face falls, and I regret my words instantly. However, I know it is best to get this shut out of the way. Leading her into the living room, I guide her to one of the large black leather sofas. Then I leave her to go grab something for both of us to drink

When I get back, there are tears on her face again. you may make you look at me differently."

1. Her lips tremble as she opens her mouth to speak. "Quinn, I mind to tell you something. What I am going to tell

Oh God, please don't let her say the word. Let it be anything but that, I can handle anything but that.

"What happened to you, Annie?"

Confusion man

her beautiful face for a moment, then her eyes widen as understanding dawns on her. "Nothing like you think happened, I promise."

"Then what is it?"

"The child that I gave birth to isn't a product of rape. I conceived her in love."

That was a punch in the gut. She loved the father of her child. Annors fell in love with someone else. "I see. Who is her father and where is he now?"

"Right here in this room."

Loving Quinn Chapter 16

[Annona)

The silmer that settles over the room feels suffocating Suddenly, I feel the need to run. To run far away from the mess that I created. I should have tried harder to reach him back when I learned I was pregnant, I should have tried until my message got through.

I watch him as so many emotions flow through those sea green eyes of his. Shock is the first. I know what I just told him has come as a surprise to him. We haven't seen or spoken to each other since that September day,

A week ago, we came back into each other's Eves after so many years apart. When I saw him that night at the fundraiser, I thought he would leave to go back to wherever it was he was stationed. I never imagined that he would be staying. Already living right here in California,

Would I have told him if I knew he was leaving? Maybe, or maybe I would have chickped out just like I did with Grace on Saturday. Now, I have no choice but to expose my secret to him. Especially not after what happened in my office between day.

"Can you repeat what you just said

"We made a child together, Quinn."

Anger is the next emotion to cross his face. This I expected as well. I knew he would be angry with me for keeping our daughter from him. I can't blame him at all because if I were him, I would be livid.

"Explain it to me. Annie. Why didn't you write to me when you found out?"

knew this was coming, even expected his anger, but telling him now after all this time is harder than I imagined. "Can we sit?"

"You can sit. I need a drink."

Quinn spins on his heels to go fetch a drink. I can only assume that it will be alcohol, I could use sonie myself, but this needs to be done sober. When he comes back, he sets a tumbler with ice on the table in front of me, then puts a bottle of whiskey next to it.

I can see his taste in alcohol has changed. He used to abhor the stuff when he was a teenager. I figure that was because of his father's love of it. When did he start drinking?

"How long after we parted ways did you find out you were pregnant?"

His back is to me as he asks. He walks to the floor to ceiling windows then just stares out at the city below us. I can see his reflection in the glass. Those beautiful eyes of his are glittering with anger. A muscle in his jaw is ticking as he clenches it tight.

"At first I thought I caught the flu that was going around campus. Then I chalked the fatigue I was feeling up to long hours spent between classes, studying, and labs. Then when I realized how late my cycle was, I went to the clinic on campus."

"How long, Annora?"

"Two months."

"Then what did you do?"

I swallow hard at the anger in his voice. With a shaking hand, I reach out and pour myself a drink. After I drag the glass, I look back up at his rigid back. "I called

my mother."

"How long after that did you even think to reach out to me?"

"I couldn't remember where you were. Then, when I did, you were no longer in boot camp. They wouldn't tell me where you were sent since I wasn't family. I tried to have my father find you, but you know how the Army works."

"You could have called Aagon's parents. They would have told me. I would have been there for you anyway I could have."

That was something I never thought of. I didn't have their phone number, but I could have found that out easily from my grandparents. I am a f**king idiot. All that

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Chapter 16

ture wasted because I didn't think of the two people who were more like family to than his
ou

"Tall you have a bag of a pill

Emily

To answer his question, I get up from the sea and walk in when I hopped my purse
Pulling out my w shaky Jensen, I walk to stand next to him at the window

wallet, I slide Grace's picture from the plastic holder inside. On

"Here, see for yourself."

the sound of my voice, he turns to me. The glittering anger in his vestors make a step
back, for the first time. This man is capable of violence, and I know .

him as a teenager, I am afraid of

When Qame Lake a step back, something shifts in his eyes, Beget maybe. However, he
says nothing, but looks down at my hand and the picture I hold out to him. He takes the
picture from me, and the second he sees our daughter, I know he knows the truth.

"We have a daughter,"

His voice in bone when he speaks. It is no longer filled with anger. Instead, it is full of
wonder. I can see the joy in his eyes as he studies Grace's face. I want to be happy for
him at this moment, but guilt swamps me

I feel immense guilt for all that precious time with our daughter I robbed him of Herth.
The way she learned to walk. Her first words. I can bring none of that time back. I stole
something greatly profound from him. If he chooses not to forgive me, I will understand.

A breath, I will try

What is the rate?"

"Elsabeth Grace Crepsion 1 call her Grace."

Q**m looks up at me for the first time since he took her photo from Surprise is written all
over his face. "You named her for my mother?"

tele night."

Before I have time to process it, he closes the gap between us, pulling me into a fierce
embrace. By the way his body is shaking, I can tell that he is crying. So, I do the only
thing I can do around him and hold on tight

I'm not sure how long we stood there clinging to each other, but as he breaks away. I
can see that the storm is not over yet. When he steps away from me,

tell him anything he wants to know. there will be more questions to ask.

"Now is the time to have that seat. I will be right back I need to call Aaron to let him know I am not coming back to the office today."

I know

Once he leaves the room, I sit down on the sofa again. My eyes wander the room as I wait for him to return. Quinn filled the walls of the living room with artwork. One painting stands out to me. Standing from the sofa, I walk to it

It is a Japanese cherry blossom tree. At its base sits a soldier with his rifle resting next to him on the ground. Beside him, blossoms from the tree form the body of a woman, with some blossoms blowing away in the wind. As if the woman is fading away

It itches my throat as I look at the soldier's face. I can see a single tear rolling down his cheek. Is this what Quinn felt like all those years we were a

"I drew that in a sketch pad one night. One man from my unit painted it a few years later and gave it to me

apart?

At the sound of his voice, I spin around to look at him. He ditched the suit while he was gone. Now he is in a faded pair of blue jeans with a black t-shirt. What draws my attention is all his tattoos. One stands out above the others.

A cherry blossom tree.

I was

distracted earlier while we were in my office to notice anything other than the way we fit together. Perfectly. Just like two lost pieces to an old puzzle. Finally, one again with the entire image.

I am sorry for my anger, Anders. Even more sorry that I scared you. The way you stepped away from me made me regret it instantly. Can you forgive me?"

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Chapter 16

He stays a respectful distance from me, which makes me smile, but I understand.

"There is nothing to forgive. At least, not from you, I should be the one to ask for forgiveness from you"

Quinn looks away from me, then walks to the sofa by the coffee table with whisky bottle on it. "Come sit down. We have a lot to discuss, it seems..

This was not how I was expecting our conversations to go today."

I join h

him on the sofa, then I turn to him as I sit. "Did you really think I was going to tell you I was raped?"

(Quinn)

Just hearing that word from her makes my heart constrict at the thought. It is a painful thought, and it is one that I am ashamed to have thought of. When she told me Kyle wasn't the father of her child, but there was fear in her eyes, I jumped to conclusions.

"I did, but I am ashamed of myself for even thinking it was a possibility."

At her silence, I look over at her. There are dried tears on her cheeks. Some streaks are still wet. I put those streaks there with how I reacted to the bomb she dropped on me. Her next words make my heart break for her

"If you don't want to be with me now, I get it. I won't stop you from meeting Grace or spending time with her. She is your daughter too."

Does this change how I feel about Annora? No, but I am still angry at her for keeping our child from me all these years. I do the only thing I can think of to wipe the sadness from her eyes. Closing the distance between us, I fuse my mouth to hers.

Her sharp intake of breath allows me to slip my tongue into her mouth. Passion ignites instantly as she clings to me. Reluctantly, I break the kiss. Sex is too easy. What we need now is more conversation. There is an emotional minefield to get through here.

"As much as I would love nothing more than to strip you naked again, I think it would be a bad idea right now."

Her lashes lower to cover her beautiful eyes. I place my fingers under her chin to make her look at me. My thumb is running over her lower lip. I lean back in to place a soft kiss on her lips. When I lean back, the sadness in her eyes is gone

"There is a lot that we need to talk about, but make no mistake here, Annie. I very much want you. I want the life we talked about as kids. Now that I know we have a daughter, I want it even more. You had my heart at eighteen and you still have it."

"I haven't told Grace that you are here in town."

"Does she know about me?"

This surprises me,

"She knows Kyle isn't her father. I haven't really told her about you. It was painful to think about you. I couldn't share you with our daughter. It was selfish of me She looks so much like you, Quinn. Her eyes are so like yours."

"Thank you for naming her after my mother. She would have loved it."

"The minute they placed her in my arms; I knew what I wanted to name her. You loved your mother so much. I wanted to honor her memory with our child."

"I have a confession. When I had you on your kitchen counter and I saw your belly belce you tried to cover yourself. I imagined what you would look like round with cur child.-

Sadness and willt

her eyes as she looks at me. "I robbed you of that and so much more. How can you forgive me for that?"

I cup lart face in my hands. "Annie, you gave birth to my child. I can never be angry with you for that. I am sad that I missed you growing round with our baby. All things missed from her early life. What I missed from back then I can ever have, but what I can have is the time we have now. I want to get to know ben, Will you give that?"

She pulls away from me, then stands to walk to the windows. "There is one problem (haven't bold you about. I lovedyyn. Kyle and his wh Lana."

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Chapter 16

"The fake b**h from the fundraiser?"

Her throaty laugh has just shooting straight to my**k. Shit, I missed the sound of her amazing laugh. Now is not the time for erotic thoughts.

"Kyle and Lara filed a custody suit against me Saturday,"

What the actual **k? Rage sp**es through me faster than I can stop it. The thought of that man having

g custody of my daughter makes me see red.

“There is no way in hell that fucker is going to have anything to do with our
ur daughter.”

Hope flashes through her eyes as she turns back to me. Then a nasty thought crosses my mind. Did she tell me about Grace, hoping I would use my money and influence to stop Kyle from taking her child? Would she do anything to keep her daughter from her ex-husband?

I stand up off the sofa and walk to where she is standing. My body is stiff as I walk to her. I can't believe I fell for the tears.

“That is why you told me now, isn't it? You know I have the power, the money, and my outstanding military record to stop Kyle. That's it, isn't it? You never planned on telling me about Grace, did you? Now that you are facing this custody issue, you come to me

Annora spins around at my words. Her mouth is open in shock at what I just said. Shocked that I am right, I imagine. Then the raw naked hurt in her eyes registers in my mind second before her palm connects with my cheek.

“You really are the b**t*rd that I thought you were at the fundraiser.”

With that said, she races across the room to where her purse and briefcase is. Before I fully recover from her slap, she is out the door. I rush after her but reach the elevator just as the doors close. Frantically, I stab at the button to recall the elevator. When that doesn't work, I run back inside to grab my cellphone.

My call goes straight to her voicemail. Knowing she doesn't have her car here, I go back to the elevator to chase after her. With luck, I can still reach her outside. Then throw myself at her mercy as I beg forgiveness for being a total jacka**.

Loving Quinn Chapter 17

(Annora)

White fiery rage propels me out of Quinn's building right into the rush-hour foot traffic on the sidewalk. The rush of bodies press against one another as everyone makes their way home from work. It makes blending in with the crowd easy, as I hear Quinn call my name a few minutes later.

When I glance behind me, I see his frantic eyes searching the moving mass of bodies. Ignoring his calls, I rush into the sea of people as I make my way towards the nearest café. As soon as I step into the café, the smell of fresh coffee calms my nerves.

I pull out my cellphone and call Shawna to come pick me up. The next call is to my mother to have her pick Grace up from her violin lesson. I ask her to take Grace home

with her and I will be by to pick her up later. She asks me if there is anything wrong, but I tell her everything is fine.

That is a lie, but she doesn't need to know that.

After ending my call, I find a table to sit at, then order a coffee when a waitress comes by. As I wait for Shawna and my coffee, my mind drifts back to everything that happened since Quinn stepped into my office today.

Oh my ** I have dreamed about Quinn so often in the past. All the times we spent tangled up with each other, all naked and sweaty that summer. The past pales compared to what I experienced today.

The power of his arms as he held me against the bookshelf. Every ripple of his muscles under my hands as he thrust into me. The way he destroyed my control as he slowly made love to me. That was what he did. Quinn didn't f**k me, not at first. He tenderly made love to me.

Oh, how I loved it when he went from tender to rough. The way he pounded into me had me moaning his name much louder than I should have. It was glorious.

Shame washes over me as I think of all the people who could have overheard my moans of pleasure. I will never live this down if there was anyone who heard me. can hear the rumors now. Dr. Winters had sex in her office yesterday. By the sounds of it, she was fully satisfied.

They would be right on all accounts.

Quinn had more than satisfied me. What made it worse was that he left me wanting more. Even now, my body aches for his touch. Something that will never happen

again. Not after how he treated me in his penthouse.

1

The accusations he flung at me hurt beyond anything else he could have said. To accuse me of telling him about Grace now because what Kyle is trying to do is horrible. Claiming that I told him about Kyle so that he would use his money and power to stop the custody suit from happening. That is something I would never

do.

I don't need his money, nor do I need his influence to help me. Money, I have. Influence I have. Yes, having Quinn at my side will help, but that is not why I told him about our daughter. Grace deserves to know him.

They both deserve to have a relationship with each other. One I robbed them of for so long. Fear crawls through my veins as I think of what Quinn may do next. Will he take his revenge by fighting for custody of Grace himself?

That thought makes me stand up from the table just as Shawna enters the café. "Can you take me to my parent's house?"

"Yeah, but you have to tell me what happened on the way."

Once we are in her car, I tell her to hurry. I need to reach my parent's house as soon as possible. The need to make sure my daughter is safe is the most important thing right now. Fear of losing her makes me cry as Shawna gets on the highway,

"Annora, what is going on."

"Kyle is trying to take Grace from me. Then I told Quinn about her and now he wants to take her from me too." I tell her in fits and starts as I sob.

"What the hell? You told Quinn about Grace? Why would he try to take her from you?"

Holding nothing back, I spilled everything that happened since Saturday until I ran from Quinn's apartment. Shawna is outraged when I stop talking. She called both Kyle and Quinn a**s and threatened them both with bodily harm.

"Now all I can think of is getting to my daughter."

1/4

Chapter 17

"Does Quinn know where your parents live?"

"I don't think so, but there isn't anything stopping him from finding out."

What can I do to stop Quinn from taking Grace. I refuse to speak to him again unless I am forced to. All my dreams of the life we dreamed of together are now ashes in my heart. That life will never happen. It causes me immense pain, as that has been the one dream that I have wanted more than anything since Grace was born.

To have Quinn with us as we build our lives together would have been bliss. Now, after his hurtful words, I no longer want that dream. All I want is to keep my daughter.

The sudden sound of my phone ringing causes fear to clog in my throat. The name on the screen makes fresh tears spill down my cheeks, followed swiftly by anger. I sent the call straight to my voicemail. There is no way I am talking to Quinn right now.

Not after everything he said to me before I left his penthouse. I know he will only call back, so I turn my phone to silent, then shove it into my purse. There is no way I will be able to have a rational or civilized conversation with him now or anytime soon.

** him.

Before we pull into my parent's driveway, I wipe my face clean. There is no way to hide my red, puffy eyes, but I can always blame it on allergies when my mother asks questions. I am not ready to tell them about Quinn.

My father has disliked Quinn since I told him the news about my pregnancy. When he asked me who the father was, I told him the truth. They both claimed to have had their suspicions we were sexually active but had hoped we were safe. We had been. Mostly.

Except on the last night that we spent together.

"What are you going to tell your parents?"

I look over at Shawna as we pull into the driveway. "I will tell them about Kyle, but not about Quinn. Let them focus on one thing at a time. I may be overreacting, thinking Quinn wants to take Grace, or I may be correct. I won't know until I listen to the voicemails, he left me."

"Do you want me to stay with you?"

That makes me love Shawna even more. Her willingness to drop everything just to stay by my side. I have done the same thing for her since we met. It helps to know she has my back.

"Thank you for the offer, but I will be fine."

"Will I see you at work tomorrow?"

"No. I am going to take the rest of the week off. There is a lot that I need to get prepared for. Kyle and Lana may fool themselves with this custody thing.

I would rather be prepared just in case they actually have a chance."

Shawna reaches over, then pulls me into a fierce hug. I return her hug with a laugh. When I pull away, she reaches up to wipe a tear from my eye.

"Call me if you need anything. I am off this weekend, so I can help you with anything you need. I can watch Grace at my place if you need space. My parents are in Europe this weekend. That leaves their condo empty. Grace could use the pool."

That is a great idea. Grace loves to swim. She also begs to spend more time with Shawna.

“Yes. Let’s do that. Grace will be so excited to spend time with you at the condo. Are you sure you want to take her all weekend?”

“She is my favorite girl. We will have a blast, I promise.”

With that decision made, I got out of the car. “Thank you for coming to get me today, Shawna.”

“Always.”

As I turn away to go into the house, I see my mother standing in the doorway. Her face is grim as she watches me walk towards the house. I never like it when she

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Chapter 17

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“Always.”

As I turn away to go into the house, I see my mother standing in the doorway. Her face is grim as she watches me walk towards the house, I never like it when she has that look on her face. The news I will tell her will only make her expression worse.

Damn you, Kyle,

(Quinn)

After losing Annora in the sea of pedestrians on the sidewalk, I head back to the penthouse. Guilt swamps me as I ride the elevator up. I can't believe I accused her of using our daughter like that. The Ancora remember wouldn't do that.

I am surprised with myself for even thinking she would do anything i aruand her of Maybe it was the shock of finding out that we have a daughter. The girl who has owned my heart and soul since I was eighteen gave birth to my child.

Our child.

Perhaps it was also the knowledge that she kept our daughter from me for all these years. Not knowing where I was is one thing, but there were other ways she could have gotten the news to me. Aaron's parents still live in the same town her grandparents did.

Annora knew their names and with one phone call to her grandparents, I would have known about my daughter before she was born. All she had to do was pick up the d**n phone. I would have been there for both her and our baby at every chance I had.

Instead, I learned about it twelve years later.

Now, here I am, rushing around my penthouse looking for my d**n car keys. I have called Annora like twenty times since I lost her in the crowd. Each time I called; it rang endlessly until finally being sent to voicemail. The last time I called her, it went straight to voicema

Which means I either filled the box with all my messages, or she declined the call.

I should have taken more time to think before I spoke these hateful words. Had I done that she would still be here with me. We could discuss how I am going to meet our daughter.

Elizabeth Grace Greyson

Closing my eyes, I imagine my mother's face. What would she think about all this? How would she feel about my daughter being named

her1 want to believe that momuna would be beyond happy. Now, I need to repair the damage I did today.

Aaron calls as I am searching for my keys. I have been expecting him to call since I told him I wasn't coming back to the office today. I am * even sure where to start when he asks if I am ok

3/5

Chapter 17

"Annora had my child."

"What? What the actual f**k, Quinn. When did she tell you this?"

"Today. We came here to the penthouse after we spoke at the hospital."

Aaron swears profusely on the other end of the line. "What was her reasoning for keeping this from you all this time? How do you know she is telling the truth?"

I repeat the conversation Annora, and I had when we arrived here. When I finish, all I can hear from my best friend is a steady stream of cursing. Then I told him what I said to Annora before she stormed out of my penthouse.

"You are such an a**ole, Quinn. Are you out of your mind?"

That question crossed my mind right after Annora slammed my door. "Aaron, I have wanted this for so long. At the first opportunity, I f**d it up. She won't answer my calls. I am going over to her house as soon as I find my d**an car keys."

"If I were Annora, I would make you beg for forgiveness, or kick you in the balls. I wish you luck, my friend, and I can't wait to meet your daughter."

"Right after I meet her."

Aaron hangs up and I go back to searching for my keys. My mind goes through all the things to say to Annora to express how sorry I am. I wouldn't blame her if she made me wallow in my misery for a few days.

Can I give her that much time? Logically, yes, but my emotions and impatience may prevent me from giving her any time at all. I want to meet Grace. To get to know my daughter after all this time.

What is she like? What is her favorite color? Does she have hobbies? Does she play sports? There is so much I want to know about her.

Then my insecurities sink in, making me stop in my tracks as I head to my bedroom for the sixth time. Will Grace hate me for not being there for her? Will she accept me as her

father or will she continue to call that b**d Kyle, her father? How will she react to all of this?

Please don't let my daughter hate me.

Finally, I have located my car keys. I shove them in my pocket, grab my cellphone, then head to the door. My only thought was to get to Annora's house to beg her for forgiveness. If she will even let me through the door.

The ringing of my phone makes me growl in frustration as I look at it. The call is from that same unknown number. Pressing the butto. for the elevator, I answer the call.

"Hello?"

"We need to talk, Quinn."

Rage fills me when I hear her voice say my name. It proves all my suspicions about who has been calling me correct. What the f**k does she want? Why has she been calling me like this?

"No, we don't, Dionne."

Yes, we do. I think you will want to hear what I have to say."

After everything this woman did to me, there is nothing she can say that I will want to hear. So, rather than give her any more of my time, I hung up the phone. It is time to have my number changed. Again.

For the second time in a matter of days, the same sentiment crosses my mind. The same one that crossed my mind when she told me about our baby.

The child we created was an inconvenience to her life.

Dionne Masters can rot in hell for all I care.

Loving Quinn Chapter 18

(Annora)

The sound of my father's furious bellow echoes through his study. His outrage at the situation pales compared to mine. Only right now I am angrier at myself than at Kyle. The position I am in now is one of my creations.

Thank God I listened to my father when he insisted I make Kyle sign a prenup. A legally binding document stating all my property, stocks, and the rest of my finances were to remain mine in the case of a divorce, Kyle signed it without reading it. At the time, I

hoped that was a positive sign. I assumed it meant he loved me for me and not for my wealth.

During the divorce, when the court denied him all that he demanded from me; Kyle's face was crimson with indignation. The judge asked him if he even read the prenuptial agreement. From the expression on his lawyer's face, I could see that he had, but Kyle hadn't.

The divorce was granted, despite Kyle still seeking to argue with the judge. Later that night, Kyle violated the restraining order again. Thankfully, Grace was with my parents that night. She didn't need to know what the man she called dad did to her mother.

I pass my fingers over the scar on my arm as I recall that night. My neighbor heard my cries of agony and called the police. When the cops showed up, Kyle had just slashed my arm with the b**r's knife. He was seeking to murder me, but I blocked him with my arm when he

swung at me.

That is the man that is now seeking to take my daughter from me. The man who never wished to be her father in the first place. Now, he and his current wife are working to take her from me. I have no doubt at all that this is Lana's suggestion. Kyle wouldn't have thought of

this on his own.

"With his arrest record, I extremely doubt there will be any court that grants Kyle custody. They imprisoned him for attempted murder, assault, not to mention all the times he violated the restraining order. For this last time, he will go back to prison."

My dad is telling me what I already know.

"Speaking of the last time. Explain to me how that took place?"

"Pardon me?" I ask slightly confused.

"He showed up to the house, struggled to get inside, but was blocked by who?"

**Shit. Quinn stopped Kyle from slapping me. How do I explain to my father that Quinn is back?

"I have a photocopy of the report, Annora. There is no point in hiding who was there with you. Did you expect I would be furious that Quinn Greyson helped you?"

Shock crosses my face as I glance up at my father. "Why do you have the arrest report?"

"I had Lorelai fax it over while you and your mother were preparing dinner with Grace earlier. Why was Quinn at your house? Does he

know about Grace yet?"

"He does."

"Great, that will help. Grace deserves to get to know the man. I am sorry that I could never locate him for you."

can't have this discussion with him right now. Quickly rising from my chair, I leave the study. My father, taking Quinn's side, sends a twist of guilt through me. He is correct. Grace deserves to know her father. Even if I can't stand the man right now.

Grace is in the living room at the rear of the house with my mom. They are at a wide table working on a ji**w puzzle. My mom is telling her a tale about my older brother, Evan. From the tone of her voice, the story is lively.

1/5

Chapter 18

"Mom, did Uncle Fric really break your arm?"

Ah, the day I fell out of the treehouse. "He didn't break my arm. I fell out of the treehouse at our old house. He shoved me, but he didn't realize that I was so close to the railing. It was an accident. Mom, can you get Grace some juice? Then when you come back, there is Something I require your help with"

"Alright."

While she is gone, I draw another chair up to the table to help them with their puzzle. This discussion is going to be tough, so having something to do with my hands will steady my nerves. Grace realizes that Kyle isn't her father, so that part will be easy.

"Here you go, Grace."

After sitting the glass of juice on a coaster, my mother sits back in her chair. When her eyes find mine, I see she knows what I am about to do. This conversation has been a long time coming.

"Grace, honey, we need to talk."

"Am I in trouble? I am sorry about Saturday."

I laugh at her innocence. Yet the expression in her sea-green eyes reminds me so much of Quinn's. Thinking of him sends a spasm of hurt through me. This is going to be tougher than I realized.

"No, baby, you are not in trouble."

"Then what do we need to talk about?"

"Saturday, I received some awful news. Kyle has filed for joint custody of you."

Grace pulls a face that clearly states how she feels about it. Her nose is scrunched up in distaste. "I despise him. He isn't my father. Can he actually take me from you?"

"He is going to try. There is also something else I need to discuss with you. It isn't about Kyle."

"Is it just as dreadful?" She glances back down at the puzzle, identifying a new piece.

I chuckle at the expression on her face. Grace has never held back on speaking her mind. Something I know for certain; she gets from Quinn. He was always one to express what he thought, no matter the repercussions. Something that has gotten our daughter in trouble on more than one occasion.

"Do you recall when you were younger when you asked me about your father? Your real father."

Grace snaps her head up at the reference of her actual father. In her eyes, I see all the questions she wishes to ask. All the questions she has carried inside all these years. Guilt swamps me again. Not only did I rob Quinn of our child, but by not sharing my memories of him with Grace, I cheated her out of him too.

I hold up my hand to indicate that I will be right back. Going into the library, I seize my purse and walk back to the living room. This morning, before I left the house, I put a few pictures in my purse. I need to show Grace a part of my past.

"When I was eighteen, before I moved off to school in England, I met a boy named Quinn."

I set one picture on the table in front of Grace. Quinn's grinning face peers up at me from the worn photograph. He was sitting behind me in the cheap photo booth at the carnival. We were very young and in love that summer. The second picture I place on the table is one I took with my grandpa's old Polaroid camera. Quinn was sleeping soundly and was oblivious of me taking the picture. It was one of the rare times he was ever at peace.

Chapter 18

"That summer was full of magic and wonder for me. However, when September arrived, I traveled home, and Quinn went to bootcamp."

"He was a soldier?"

The way Grace uses the term 'was' regarding Quinn makes my heart constrict. There was no way I would have ever learned if he had fallen in battle. That thought breaks my heart. I have messed up so badly with all of this.

"He still is."

Surprise fills Grace's eyes when my meaning dawns on her. "He is alive?"

"Yes, and he wishes to see you."

A frown appears on her face. "He knows about me?"

Here is where I must confess to her the truth. All of it. "He didn't until today. That is my fault, Grace, not his."

The confused look she sends me causes me to glance over at my mom.

"When your mom found out she was going to have a baby, your grandpa and I tried to locate Quinn for her. He had just left bootcamp to travel on his first deployment. The Army wouldn't provide us his location because we were not family."

"Later, after you were born, there was so much going on with my life. School, residency, later moving back to the United States. I was very busy being your mom, so busy being a doctor, that it just wasn't a priority. It should have been, and I will always regret not finding him for you. There wasn't a day that passed by that I didn't think about him. You have his eyes."

"Does he actually want to meet me?"

The way her voice quivers makes me draw her into my arms. I plant a kiss on her forehead when I pull away. There are tears on her cheeks and fear in her eyes.

"He does. When I told him about you, he wept, just like you are now. I named you after his mother. Elizabeth Greyson. She was his best friend. I think, given time, you two can be friends too."

"When can I meet him?"

(Quinn)

When I pull up to Annora's house, my nerves skyrocket. I rub my sweaty palms on my jeans and open the car door. I haven't been this nervous to talk to a woman since I first met Annora. Now, here I am, racing up her driveway feeling like I am eighteen again.

I roll my shoulders to loosen up as I look at her door. As I lift my hand to knock, my cellphone buzzes. I ignore it since it is Dionne calling again.

For the fifth time since I hung up on her earlier. Do I wish to know what she needs? Maybe, but not right now.

Dionne can go **k herself for all I care.

no doubt

Finally, I knock on the door. Patience has never been a virtue of mine, so I ring the buzzer after a few moments of waiting. Irritation builds within me when there is no reply after five minutes. I desperately need to atone for what I suggested to Annora.

I can't do that if she doesn't answer the d**n door,

The annoying ring of my cellphone sounds again. Cursing vehemently, I pull it out of my pocket. My eyebrows lift in shock as I see Annora's name flash on my screen.

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"Annie? Please answer your door."

"I can't because I am not at home."

Well, that explains why she hasn't answered. Other than the fact that I pi**d her off and hurt her severely. Which I understand.

"Can we talk about what happened at my place? Please."

"No. However, if you wish to meet your daughter, then you will come to the address I am texting to you now."

Before I can say anything further, she disconnects the call. Hope has me rushing down the front walkway to my car. At the ping from my phone, I see the address she sent me. After adding the address to my car's GPS, I start the forty-five-minute trip.

What the hell will I say to Grace when I meet her? How will she react to me? Panic makes me pull over at a gas station. With the shirt I am wearing, all my tattoos are

noticeable. There is no way I want her to look at all that or the scars that some of them try to cover.

I have spare clothes in the trunk of my car for when I am out at the gym. There is a long-sleeved gray button-up shirt I can put on. After removing it from the trunk, I slip it on, then get back behind the wheel. I can feel the nerves return as I pull back on the highway.

Tears sting my eyes when Grace's face flashes through my mind. She is so goddamn beautiful. Those eyes of hers are like looking in a mirror at mine. I can imagine the way Annora felt each time she looked at Grace. Even though I was far away, she had a piece of me with her every day.

When I pull up to the address given to me, I study the exterior for a few minutes before I pull up into the circular driveway. The two-story brick house is old but looks to be in excellent condition. The porch light is on, along with more lights on the bottom floor.

After parking my car, I stroll up to the front door to ring the bell. The door opens a few moments later by a woman that I recognize. Annora's mother, Vivien. Her eyes are warm when she sees me, reminding me of all the times she welcomed me to their family gatherings

that summer.

Her hair is shorter, she is older, but her eyes are the same. Welcoming. I let out the breath I was holding when she reaches out to pull me into a hug. That was always her way. Vivien is a hugger. Something that made me nervous as hell when I was eighteen. Now, it brings me nothing but comfort.

"Come in, let me get a look at you." Vivien steps back, allowing me to come in. She fine-looking man, Quinn."

Oks

me over, then nods once. "You have grown into a

"Vivien, let the man do what he came here for."

A deep voice says from the open door to my left. I turn to face the man who put the fear of God in me that summer. Alexander Winters stands in the doorway, his eyes assessing me much like his wife's had a moment before. I stand my ground like I did back then.

"Relax, son. There is a conversation you and I will have, but now isn't the time. Go on back to the living room. It is down that hall. Your girls are waiting for you."

Alexander points to the hallway behind his wife. I swallow past the sudden lump in my throat. So many emotions are swimming through me right now. The past is colliding with the present in a bittersweet way.

I snuck around with their daughter all summer long. We did so much that her parents wouldn't have approved of. So much that I hoped they would never learn. They must have hated me when she told them I knocked her up. Yet here they are now, welcoming me into their home. Pointing me toward their daughter and granddaughter.

With a nod of my head, I walk past Vivien and down the hall. The sound of laughter coming from the living room makes me slow my steps as nerves grip me again. I am about to come face to face with my daughter for the first time.

I have been shot at, survived bombings, and walked away because that was my job. Now I am terrified by the thought of a little girl. One

Loving Quinn Chapter 19

(Annora)

A shiver runs through me, causing me to look up from the jigsaw puzzle. My breath catches in my throat as my eyes collide with Quinn's. There he stands in the doorway, in my parents' house, just like I asked him to be. Now that he is here, I feel sick to my stomach suddenly.

This is really happening.

I can feel my heartbeat quicken as his eyes move from me to our daughter. Grace is in deep concentration as she searches for a particular puzzle piece. For now, she is completely unaware of the tension in the room.

Quinn's chest rises as he takes a deep breath. He looks nervous as he stands there in the doorway. I can understand why. I am just as nervous as he is, but for a slightly different reason. Right here in this room is something that I have dreamed of for the last twenty years.

Quinn, Grace, and I, all in the same room. I watch as his gaze travels over Grace's face. So many emotions flow like water through his beautiful eyes. Wonder, amazement, joy, fear, and finally, love. Unconditional love from a father is something Grace has always wanted.

Quinn is giving it already, and he hasn't even spoken to her yet.

When I see two fat tears roll down Quinn's cheeks, my heart breaks at what I have done. This is all my fault. With a light touch, I tap Grace's shoulder to get her attention. She turns to me with a frown, but all I do is point to the large man in the doorway.

I feel her tense as she instinctively leans against me. With an outstretched hand, I beckon for Quinn to join us at the table. He lets out a deep breath before he walks to where we sit. I can see hesitation in his eyes as he takes the seat my mother used earlier.

After a moment, I reach over to take Quinn's hand in mine. He has a grip on the table that I don't think he is aware of. When my hand touches his, those sea-green eyes of his flick down to his hand. With a shrug of his shoulders, he moves his hand to his lap.

"Grace, meet Quinn, your father."

"Hi," Grace says in a quiet voice.

"Hello, Grace."

"Mom told me you are a soldier. Are you ok?"

"I am, though I am not on active duty. Yes, I am ok."

"Does that mean you will stay here in California with us?" Grace asked. I can see the hope shining brightly in her eyes.

"I live here now. My company's headquarters are here. So, there will be time for us to get to know each other. If that is what you want, Grace." Quinn's voice hitches as he bares his soul to our little girl.

All my anger at his earlier words vanishes at the sight of his vulnerability. Then shame flows through me again as I realize how much I stole from both. Grace shocks us both by getting out of her chair to rush to Quinn. She throws her arms around his neck in answer to his question.

Joy quickly replaced the shock on his face as he returned her hugs. We spend the next few hours working the j**w puzzle and having a casual conversation as Quinn gets to know Grace. I stayed silent while they talked to give them some father-daughter bonding.

When Grace yawns, I tell her to go upstairs to her room. She has a room here for when she stays with my parents. "I will be up in a few minutes to say goodnight."

"Can Quinn come up to say goodnight too?"

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At the pleading look in her eyes, I don't have the heart to tell her no. So, I turn to look at Quinn, who has a look of pleading in his own eyes. I can tell between the two of them I will have endless trouble ahead of me. They are entirely too much alike.

"Yes, he can.. Go get changed, brush your teeth, and we will be up in a minute."

Grace**s on bouncing feet as she leaves the room. The minute she is gone, all the tension returns to the room. I can feel that Quinn wants to talk about what happened earlier but now is not the time for it. When I turn back to him, he has that soulful look in his eyes.

In the past, that look would melt my resolve. All my anger at him would just fade away and he would make me laugh. Now, all I want to do is ask him to leave. However, I know it will make our daughter unhappy if I do.

"Annie, I am so sorry. I jumped to all the wrong conclusions earlier."

"Save it for another day, Quinn. I have had enough emotional upheaval today. Let's keep tonight about Grace."

Those sea-green eyes of his seem to bore into my soul as he studies my face. When I think he is about to try again, he stays silent, but fidgets with his hands. My heart constricts when I see the gesture. Our daughter does the same action when she is nervous.

Grace peaks her head into the room. Her auburn hair is in a braid off one shoulder. The pajamas she picked are white with little purple

flowers all over them. Her entrance breaks through the tension as she rushes to Quinn.

"I am ready for bed."

Quinn allows her to pull him to his feet. He follows behind her as she drags him down the hallway. I let out a breath, then followed them upstairs. I keep my distance from them but watch as she leads him into her room. Then I stand in the doorway as Grace jumps into bed. The two of them speak in low tones for a few minutes before Quinn leans forward to place a kiss on her forehead. Grace smiles as she closes her eyes.

When Quinn closes her door behind him, I suddenly feel like he is too close. I step away from him before I turn to go back downstairs.

When we reach the bottom of the stairs, I head to the front door. I turn to him as I open it to show him out, only to close it again when

asks his next question.

“How is this going to work between the three of us after tonight?” Quinn asks.

Until recently, I had never given this conversation a thought. There was never a plan in my mind for shared custody. Quinn is on her birth certificate, but after so many years, I just never imagined this day would come. I should have.

“I will send you an email about her schedule. All the after-school activities she is in and the sports she plays. Then, when your schedule allows, you can have her on the weekends. I won’t keep her from you. All I ask is that you inform me where you will be with her.”

“That is generous of you.”

The sarcasm in his voice doesn’t escape my notice. If I am being honest with myself, I know I deserve it. I deserve more than what he has shown me so far tonight. However, the anger I feel at his insinuations from earlier is still very fresh in my heart.

“Look, after everything that happened today and all that I have to deal with from Kyle, I am trying to make this as easy as possible for you. However, one thing that I want to make perfectly clear is that what happened in my office today was a mistake.”

The look of hurt that flashes through his eyes makes me feel horrible, but I need to stand my ground. What we did was very reckless. We had unprotected sex without thinking of the consequences. We barely know each other anymore. After the accusations he made, I am not Sure that I want to get to know this new version of Quinn Greyson.

“I think we need to keep our relationship strictly professional while at the hospital and cordial when we have to for Grace.”

“I can live with that. For now.

The promise in his words, along with the heated look in his eyes, sends shivers down my spine. Heat pools in my belly as he takes a step

towards me.

That can’t happen again, so I hold up my hand to stop him. “No. There will be no repeats of this afternoon. We will co-parent and nothing more. I know you want more, but that isn’t a good idea. Not now.”

“Annic, please let me explain myself.”

I shake my head, then open the door again. “It is late, Quinn. Please, no more.”

Quinn lowers his head to avoid my gaze, but steps outside. He turns to me briefly, then does as I ask. He leaves without another word.

(Quinn)

As I drive back to my penthouse, I can feel the coldness settle over me again. Finding Annora again after all this time chipped at the ice that I built around my heart. When she told me we have a daughter, I felt the ice c**k more. Then, when I met Grace for the first time, the ice shattered.

Annora telling me we have no future together, broke my heart. Co-parenting isn't what I had in mind when she told me about Grace. Now, it seems, I have no other choice. How long can I remain out in the cold without her warmth again?

For twelve years, I have been adrift in the cold oblivion of the world. Without her light to guide me home. Now, after all these years, I had a brief glimpse of what my future could be. With a few hateful words, I destroyed the hope I had.

If Annora wants to be co-parents only, then that is what I will give her. Gone is the vow I made the night I saw her at the fundraiser. The vow to touch no other woman but her. Since she won't be an active part of my life, there is no reason to keep that vow.

When I walk into my penthouse, images of her tear-filled eyes make my heart constrict before I shove her from my mind. I need to decide what room to redecorate for Grace. Other changes to the entire penthouse will need to be made. I will have to call my interior designer tomorrow to help me.

For now, all I can do is take notes as I wander through the empty rooms. We designed every room with only me in mind. I never dreamed that I already had a child out there. I always used protection with all the women I have slept with.

Except for two women who got past my guard. One I met when I was eighteen and the other I met when she was assigned to be my therapist. I was going to marry Dionne until she burned our relationship to the ground with her actions.

However, it is Annora and the one night of reckless passion that will always stick with me. That was the night we said our goodbyes. Our desire for each other was so intense that there were no thoughts about consequences in our minds. It was the night that we conceived

Grace.

That was all it took to. One night. A night that neither of us will ever forget.

"Oh, sh**t."

Today, in her office, we were reckless again. All I could think of was having her naked, with her arms around me as we made love. From the way she responded to my touch, I knew she wanted the same. What if she gets pregnant from this act of recklessness?

What would she look like as her belly grows round with

my

child?

Stop it. Don't go down that road. That will only make me want what I can't have.

Deciding that being in my home alone right now is a bad idea, I peel off the button-up shirt, grab my car keys, then head to a nearby club. What I need right now is a distraction. Loud music, scantily clad women, and alcohol will do just fine.

After a few shots of tequila, my body is feeling loose, but my stubborn mind refuses to stop thinking about Annora. To force her from my

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mind, I move to the dance floor. As expected, shortly after I step into the mass of bodies, a woman in a skin-tight dress presses up against

me,

With big brown eyes, she blinks up at me. Her pouty red lips part as she presses her breasts against my chest. Then she moves against me to the beat of the music. My body responds to her, even though my mind is screaming at me to push her away.

"How about we go somewhere more private," she whispers to me.

I let her take my hand and lead me off the dance floor. Soon, I find myself in a private booth in the club's corner. The dark walls of the booth block anyone from seeing inside, but allows anyone inside to see out. When she presses her a*against me, my body responds instantly.

Then something happens that has never happened to me before. I step away from her and leave the club. My body may be on board with the action I could be getting. However, my heart and mind are not. Anger flares through me as I drive home.

I need to get past this if I am going to live my life on my own terms. If Annora and I will never be what I want us to be, then there is no reason to not have a life of my own.

Going back to my man-w** ways is the only way I know how to survive the nightmares that plague my sleep.

It is time to harden my heart again, build the ice back up, and continue to live my life the way I have been. I will treat Annora with the respect she has asked for as a co-parent. What happens in my private life will be none of her business.

F**k it./I have nothing left to lose so I turn my car around and head back to the club. I know deep down that this isn't what I want. However, what I want is something I can't have right now. I will deal with life as I have for the last few years.

One day at a time.

Loving Quinn Chapter 20

(Annora, six months later)

After the night Quinn met Grace, he has been nothing but polite to me when we speak. It is what I asked for, but at the time, I had no idea how much it would hurt. To have him so close but unable to touch him is killing me. This is for the best and I know it, but my heart breaks a little more each time I see him.

From all I can see, Quinn is an amazing father. Grace always comes back on Sunday evenings in a good mood. They even went to the father-daughter dance at her school. Yet, when he drops her off, he never comes inside. He always stays on the front porch, then leaves after Grace gives him a hug.

My heart wants me to tell Quin that I didn't mean what I said. To ask him if he would give our little family a chance. To give our relationship a chance. However, since there is so much stress in my life now, I keep silent.

The custody case that Kyle and Lana filed is going before a judge this afternoon. I had been hoping that it would be dismissed outright, but those hopes died when Lori called me to give me the unwelcome news. Grace is with my mother at the spa. Leaving me to wait for Quinn to pick me up.

This will be the first time that he and I will have to talk to each other without Grace being the buffer between us. I am nervous to be alone with him in my house and on the car ride to the courthouse. The fear of my heart betraying my mind makes me pace around the living room.

Each time he walks away, I want to call him back. Now the situation with Kyle is forcing us to be in the same place for longer than five minutes. A lot can happen in five minutes, or a lot can go wrong just as fast.

I look at my watch, then walk to the mirror above the small table in the entrance hall. Quinn will be here any minute. My face is pale, my eyes puffy from the crying fit I had this morning, and my hair is out of place. With quick work, I tidy my hair, put on lips gloss, but there is nothing I can do about my skin. I am pale because I am nervous as hell.

The doorbell rings just as I put my lip gloss back in my purse. I take a deep breath, then let it out before I open the door. The sight of Quinn on my front porch makes my breath catch in my throat. His thick black hair is slightly messy in the casual bed-head style that is so popular these days. The charcoal gray suit he is wearing fits his body like it was made just for him. Which it was. He is wearing a gray tie that matches the suit with the little American Flag tie pin that Grace bought him.

Quinn's eyes soften briefly when he sees me, then those beautiful green orbs go back to the indifferent look he always has on his face when around me. With a sigh, I step back to let him inside.

"Give me a minute, I need to go grab something from my room."

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He doesn't respond, so I just walk upstairs to grab the file Lori needs. It holds a hard copy of the DNA test Quinn willingly submitted when I told him that the case was going before a judge. It also holds the custody arrangement that Lori and I worked on for Quinn to sign in the event Kyle's case is dismissed today.

Before I exit my room, I glance at the gift box on my dresser. It is a birthday gift for Quinn. Today is his birthday and later tonight the three of us are going to dinner together. A family dinner, that was Grace's idea. I agreed to go because it is important to her that we all be together tonight. Just the three of us.

"Annora? We need to head out."

Quinn's voice from downstairs makes me rush out of my room. In my rush to get down the stairs, I trip over my foot. I reach for the railing to stop my fall, but two strong arms circle my waist to stop me from falling. My eyes collide with his sea-green gaze as I clutch his shoulders.

My eyes drop to his lips, but I look away when he steps away after he steadies me. I can feel color rush to my cheeks at what I was thinking. Quinn must have known what I was thinking, because he just stares at me with a curious expression.

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"You can't have it both ways, Annora. It is either you want us to just be friends, or you want us to be something else. The hungry look in your eyes betrays your words. One day, you will have to decide. Until then, we have more important things to do." He opens the front door,

then walks outside.

Well, that certainly is a way to put me in my place. I snatch my bag off the hall table, then follow him outside. When I slide into the car beside him, he doesn't look at me, but starts the engine. Once we are on the road, my nerves come back in full force.

"Relax, Annora. Everything will work out with this Kyle situation, just as it was meant to. I will tell the judge the truth, then when Kyle is proven to be a vindictive liar to everyone, we will walk away."

"Do you really think it will work out like that?"

"Kyle is currently serving jail time for a crime you refuse to tell me about. He violated the restraining order you have against him on more than one occasion. The night we met at the fundraiser being only one of them. If this judge rules in Kyle's favor, then I will fight him on my terms."

The steel in Quinn's voice sends shivers down my spine. He must be amazing in the boardroom. With all the business tycoons all over the world. I never want this man as my enemy. The conviction behind the steel makes me think of dark things. Things I have no business thinking about anymore. Not since I drew the line between us.

"If we lose this case, I will let you fight as dirty as you want."

"If we lose, you won't have a choice. My lawyer had already prepared a countersuit. That ex-husband of yours won't know what hit him."

Quinn's words should frighten me, but they have the opposite effect. Lust pools in to pit of my stomach. All my nerves vanish as desire takes over. I force myself to look away as we continue to drive to the courthouse. He is right about one thing. I am going to have to decide what I really want to do with this thing between us.

Do I stick to my decision or take a leap of faith? Is it worth putting my heart on the line to see if we even have anything to build on? Will he break my heart if I give him what he once asked for? All I know is that whatever happens today, I will have plenty to think about tonight.

"We are here."

I blink a few times before I turn to look at him. My thoughts were so consuming that I didn't even realize we had stopped moving. I take a deep breath before I reach for the door handle. Quinn's hand reaches out to grab my free hand.

"Hey, just breathe. You won't be facing him alone ever again. I have your back Annie."

Quinn uses my nickname for the first time in six months. The tightness in my chest loosens at the sudden softness in his voice. Taking a chance, I lean into him, my head falling onto his shoulder. He stiffens at first, but then pulls me into a hug. The smell of his cologne fills my nostrils and I breathe deeply. Then, just like that, he breaks the spell as he pulls away.

"Come on. Let's get in there so your lawyer can go over her strategy with us one last time."

He opens his door, then waits for me to join him on the sidewalk. When I join him, he places his hand on the small of my back, then leads me up the steps to the courthouse. I can feel the panic rising in my stomach as we get closer to the doors.

Before I can go into a full-blown panic attack, Quinn opens the door, then ushers me inside. Lorelai greets us at the courtroom doors when we approach.

Net out a shuddering breath when she pulled me in for a hug.

"We got this, Annora. His case is flimsy. Relax."

The last six months have been stressful for me. When Annora told me she wanted nothing more between us than to be friends for Grace's sake, I knew that I had lost everything. Anytime we bumped into each other at the hospital, she was polite. When I dropped Grace off on Sunday nights, Annora was quiet and reserved.

After all the time we spent apart, not being able to have her in my arms when she is so close is torture.

However, in the end, I respected her decision. Each weekend I spent with Grace. Sometimes at my place watching movies and just talking to get to know each other. Other times I would take her to parks, museums, sports games, or whatever she asked to do. Yes, I spoil her, but given the circumstances, I feel she deserves it.

Last weekend we went camping, hiking, and spent time stargazing. Grace is amazingly intelligent for her age. She makes me proud to be her father every day.

During the week when I am left to my own devices, I spend my time at work, or drowning my misery in alcohol. That is, if I am not taking the edge off with a randomly willing woman. Aaron has expressed his concern for me on more than one occasion over the last six months.

I ignore him and concentrate on getting through life one day at a time.

Our company has been doing well other than a minor hiccup with a competitor. We are in a bidding war for a new property, where we will convert the building into an outreach center for the homeless population in that area. The company bidding against us wants to turn the building into a factory. Something that area doesn't need.

The tension between our two companies has been ramping higher each time we raise the bids. With all the homeless in that area, an outreach center will be beneficial. We can reach so many people, many of them being veterans. The argument that the factory will provide jobs is valid. However, most of those jobs will be filled by people who are employable. The homeless population isn't up to employment standards.

A cold, stark fact that we have learned during our research and planning phase.

We have also been having problems on a few of our other project sites. Broken equipment in the morning when it worked perfectly the night before. Areas where construction was going smoothly would have unexplainable setbacks. One wall to the lobby of the buildings was damaged because the parking brake to one of the bulldozers wasn't put in place and the thing rolled backwards during the night. Most of what has happened could be put down to bad luck, but to have stuff like that happen on three different sites, Aaron thinks it is something more nefarious. I tend to agree with him. So we are going to hire a security service for after working hours.

Then, to add more stress to my life, Dionne has found my new number. She calls once a week without fail. I tell her the same thing each time before I hang up. There is nothing further to say between us and to stop calling or I will take legal action against her.

Part of me wants to know what is so important to her, but I have no desire to go through with it. Dionne ruined any chance with me after aborting our child. So, tomorrow, I have an appointment with a judge to file a cease-and-desist order against her, as well as a restraining order.

Today, however, I get to wipe that smug look off Annora's ex-husband's face. He has convinced everyone who will listen that Grace is his biological daughter. His **b story pi**ed me off when Annora told me. That smarmy little sh**t used our story to co ce others of the validity of his claims.

Luckily for us, her parents, brothers, and grandparents all made statements stating otherwise. Then there is the DNA test that states the truth loudly for everyone to see. I am prepared to make a statement to the judge about my intentions with Grace. She is my child, not Kyle's, and I am fully prepared to accept that responsibility.

Looking over at Annora after Lorelai steps back, I can see her face is pale again. There is nothing I can do to change the facts or make this situation any easier. I wanted to use

money to make this all go away, but that would be cheating. However, I will use everything at my disposal to make it go away if this judge sides with Kyle and Lana.

That poor fool won't get a second chance to come for my child after I am done with him.

"Hey, look at me," I turn her to face me. "Stay focused on the positive. We will leave here victorious, Kyle will not win. Repeat those words

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for me."

Annora's eyes focus on mine. Then she does as I tell her. "Kyle will not win."

"That b**d will not take my child," she says with conviction

"That a**le will not take our child."

I nod my head, then pull her flush against me. Without a second thought, I lift her face to mine, brush my lips against hers in a brief but chaste kiss, then step away. I know I shouldn't have done it, but after the hungry looks she has been giving me for months, I feel it was needed. For both our sakes.

Two hours later, the judge ruled in our favor. He declared that since Kyle was not the father of the child in question, and I had stepped forward after being away in the Army, there was no cause to agree to joint custody. They then took away Kyle to serve out the rest of his prison sentence.

Lana was fuming as she watched her husband being escorted out of the courtroom in handcuffs. She rushed to Annora, pure venom lacing her words as she threatened that this fight wasn't over. When I stepped between them, her eyes went wide in fear.

"Hear this and listen well. Neither you nor your crazy husband have any legal rights to my daughter. My daughter, not Kyles. The DNA test should have been enough for you to know he was lying to you about how he and Annora met. Now, I suggest you dig deep, find your dignity, and leave. I will not hesitate to bring you up on harassment charges if you continue to come at Annora like this."

Lana scurried away without looking back.

Loving Quinn Chapter 21

(Quian)

After dropping Annora off at her house, I head to the office to touch base with Aaron. There was a meeting scheduled to place another bid on the property we are looking at for the gutreath program. We would both like for this bidding war to be over already.

“Hey, Aaron. How did the meeting go?”

Aaron looks up at me with a look of aggravation on his face. His suit jacket is thrown over the back of his chair and his tie is loosened. From the look of his desk, I can tell he hasn't been having a good morning. Papers are s**ed all over its surface. There is a coffee stain on several papers and three mugs on the corner of the desk.

“I am really starting to hate this plan we have for this building, McAllister is not making this easy for us.”

Ethan McAllister is the CEO of McAllister Industries, the company we have been locked in a bidding war with for months. For every bid we give, he goes a million dollars higher. Just enough that our bid is rejected, and we are back at the negotiating table.

“What if we just stop when he gives his next high bid? Let him have it. There are two other viable properties. We can investigate them instead. They are both in the same area, which still allows us to reach those in need.”

“D**t Quinn! We already rejected those two sites. I do, however, have an alternative.”

Aaron riffles through the thick stack of folders on his desk until he finds the one he is looking for. There is a small crinkle on the folder, so he smooths it down before he hands it to me. The way he is smiling lets me know I may or may not like what he is going to show me.

“What is this?”

“Just open it.”

Aaron sits in his chair as I sit in the one across from his desk. I open the folder to see what he has in mine. A photo of a vacant plot of land is the first thing I see. I look up at Aaron and he makes a gesture with his hand that clearly states he wants me to continue. I flip to the next picture that shows a for sale sign sticking out of the ground. The last picture is an aerial view of the surrounding area.

“This is only like a half mile from the place we are bidding on.”

“Yes, but what is even better than that is that it is closer to Mercy General. It also has another lot beside it we can purchase and make into an enclosed playground with a parking lot beside it.”

I can see the wheels already turning in his head and the idea is sound. We can purchase both lots and build a new building with all the amenities we want to have available. Kitchen, temporary group living quarters, offices for counselors, individual and group therapy rooms,

and a small clinic.

As I think about it further, I can see the idea take shape in my mind. "Anron, you may have just solved our problem with McAllister. When

can we go look at this property?"

"I can call the agent tomorrow and set up an appointment, but we still have big issues with our other three construction sites. This morning at the site of the food pantry, the bulldozer broke down. When the site manager looked at it, he noticed scrapes and gouges like someone tampering with the fuel line."

"What the f**k?"

"This s***it that has been happening at all our construction sites are not accidents. At least not all of it. Someone is sabotaging us, Quinn. I will make a call to Mac. Ask him to investigate it and hire security at a three sites at night."

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"i don't agree, but we don't have anyone else that fe

It is at this point that (real

hing. Amin is anate of Bylan's feelings for

but doesn't realize what they are. A fine from a Shakespeare play comes to mind, but just take my head at him.

"I will call her in the morning" Getting up from my chair, I walk to his office door. Before I can open it, Aaron (prakt argalit.

"Are you sure there isn't anyone else we can hire?" There is a pleading quality to his view,

The you really feel that strongly about not offering Rylan the job?

shake his head no, but I know him well enough

Ive one problem in my life, another problem pops up? I don't ne hours to spare until I must pick up Grace and Annora for dinner.

After replying

passed quickly

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emails, updating a few minor details on the shipping mandest, and returning a few phone calls, those in

time to bead home to get ready for my dinner with Grace. My daughter refused to tell me where

– would say was that i would like it. The more I get to know

were going when

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grew up this long without me? I guess some tracts from parent to

use. I love her more than I have worlds la describe it

Now, if only her mother would decide on what the hell she wants. The hungry looks and lingering glances are driving a crazy, I haven't

an ng bratt wants. The only mean who bài var but lay budy on

whatever he wants if only she would say the words. Until that day, I will continue the live how they w

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will have to do black dress and pale uge Grace has planned.

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"Hi, Daddy?"

That is th

first time she has called me daddy and my heart trembles with happiness. I blink back the tears before I set her back on the ground. The smile on her face is infectious as she pulls on my hand to lead me inside.

As we walk into the house, I draw my eyes to th

the stairs. Annora is walking down to us, and I can't help but recall how I caught her in my arms this morning. The hungry look in her eyes when she lowered her gaze to my mouth. I could have kissed her right there on the spot, but I stepped back instead. I know if I had kissed her, it would have led to more.

"Grace, you forgot something on your bed"

Grace's eyes light up, and then she runs up the stairs to retrieve whatever it is she forgot. I give Annora a questioning look, but she just shakes her head and looks up the

stairwell for Grace to return. A few minutes later, she returns with a small, wrapped box in one hand and a gift card in the other.

"Happy birthday, Daddy." The smile on Grace's face lights up the room.

I look at Annora in surprise.

"She asked me a few months ago when your birthday is, so I told her."

"You have had this planned all this time?" I ask her.

"Grace did most of the work, but I made the reservations for dinner."

I have no words for how I am feeling at this moment. There are tears gathering in my eyes despite myself. The only three people who have remembered my birthday in the last twelve years have been Aaron and his parents. This is the best gift I could have received.

"Here, open your present now. Mom got you something too."

My gaze falls onto Grace's smiling face as she looks up at me. I gently take the small box from her and tear the wrapping paper off. The laugh I get in response to that action makes me laugh too. Moving the tissue paper aside reveals the back of a picture frame. Flipping it over, I am greeted by a picture of Grace and I sitting on a blanket in the grass.

I remember the day this was taken. It was a few months after Annora told me about Grace. It was also one of the few times the three of us did something together. Annora must have taken the picture on her way back from getting us all drinks.

"This is a magnificent picture. Thank you, Grace." Bending down, I wrap my arms around her.

"Mom has a gift for you

too."

"I will give it to you after dinner. We will be late if I don't."

Dinner is at my favorite Italian restaurant, Giovanni's. From the smile on Grace's face, I knew this was her idea. We have been here together twice now, and I learned she loves this place just as much as I do. It is a win-win situation for her. Annora is talkative, which catches me off guard. Part of me thinks it is the wine she is having with her dinner, but the other part of me believes it is just her happiness over our victory in court today. Either way, I will take it

After dinner, we took a walk in a park nearby. Grace and Annora talk about how Spring Break is around the corner for school. Grace wants to go to the lake where her great-grandparents still live. My hometown. By the look on Annora's face, I can tell she made other plans,

"What about going somewhere else? I have that week free. We could go anywhere you want."

We spent the rest of our time out talking about where she would want to go. We have a week to spend anywhere she wants. After a few hours, Annora gave me the signal that it was time to go home. I offer my second guest room for the night since my place is closer to hers. Grace is rubbing her eyes as she fights sleep. Reluctantly, Annora agrees, but I can tell by the way her body stiffens that she isn't happy about it.

Once we are back at my place, I carry Grace up to her room while Annora goes into the kitchen to put our leftovers in the refrigerator. When I came back downstairs, she was nowhere to be seen. She doesn't know the layout of the place, so there aren't many places she can go. A cool breeze coming from the open balcony door guides me to her location.

"The view of the city from here is beautiful" She states as I step outside behind her.

"I bought the building like you suggested." I step up to the railing beside her to look down at the city below.

"That comment was a joke,"

"I thought about it, then decided you had a good idea. Aaron and I talked it over and since he is now living in his new house, we came up with a plan. Around this time next year, we will start the construction. We already have the designs made and approved by the city."

"To think that I thought being a surgeon was stressful. Here you are buying hospitals, apartment buildings, and whatever else it is you do."

"You have never actually asked what G&C Enterprises does."

"We haven't really talked much about anything really other than Grace. Speaking of our daughter, that reminds me of my gift for you. It is in my bag."

I motion towards the balcony door for her to lead the way inside. With a laugh, she walks back inside, leaving me to follow her. The sway of her hips as she walks away hypnotizes me. It amazes me how her figure has matured over the years. The woman takes my breath with her beauty, and sex appeal, and she doesn't know what she does to me.

The wine from dinner is having an undesired effect on me. I promised myself that I wouldn't make any romantic advances unless she was the one to make the first move. Maybe having her here tonight was a bad idea, or maybe it would be the perfect time to convince her we belong together.

"Here it is." Annora's voice calls to me, making me take those remaining steps to join her inside.

With a photo album in her hands, she kicks off her heels, and then sits cross-legged on the floor next to the coffee table. Seeing this side of her makes me laugh. "Making yourself at home, are you?"

"Well, I want to be comfortable while you open your present."

"You got me a photo album for my birthday?"

"Come sit with me so you can see what is inside."

I do as she requests, kicking off my shoes as I walk to the coffee table. Then I sit next to her on the floor with the soft my back so that I am between it and the table. Annora takes me by surprise when she leans closer to hand me the album. The smell of her is so intoxicating that I close my eyes and just breathe it in.

However, when I open my eyes, she has the album open. The first thing I see is Annora's smiling face as she holds our baby in her arms. Then page after page she shares Grace's childhood with me. When we get to the end, and she closes the album, I have to wipe the tears off my face

The only thing I can do when she looks at me is mouth the words "thank you" since I don't trust my voice.

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[Quinn)

No matter how hard I try, I just can't seem to fall asleep. Images from the photo album Annora gave me for my birthday keep flashing through my mind. Grace as a baby on holidays, vacations, or anytime Annora felt like snapping a picture. Which, by the looks of it, was all the time. Then there were the toddler years with much of the same.

Annora told me she also has home videos she had copies downloaded on a hard drive for me. We was already past one in the morning when we finished going through the pictures.

get to watch any of them since it

I escorted her to the guest room down the hall from Grace's room. It took all my willpower to walk away from her. Between the wine we had at dinner, what he had while she shared stories about each picture, I knew that I could have my way with her right then and there. So, I kissed her on the forehead, then made my way to my room upstairs.

Now here I lay, eyes wide open, mind going a mile a minute. The love of my life and our child are one floor below me right now. Yet, I lay in my bed alone. There has been no one else in this bed but me. Now I want only one woman spread out before me on its silk sheets.

Annora's auburn hairs framed around her head like a halo would stand out against all that black. Her pale skin would practically glow against the darkness of my bed. Thinking about it has my c**k hardening painfully. Normally I sleep naked, but on the nights that Grace is here, I sleep in pajama pants,

I suddenly sit up in bed, my entire body on alert as I hear a soft sound right outside my door. Then there is a light tap on the door followed by Annora's voice asking if I am awake. Disbelief at what I am hearing makes me get out of bed to see if I am hearing correctly. I have dreamed of this so many times over the last six months. Not of her coming to my room like this, but just of her coming to me, with need in her voice.

Getting out of bed, I walk on silent feet across the thick carpet to open the door. Annora is standing right outside my door in the t-shirt I let her borrow to sleep in. It hangs down to her knees and the top hangs off one of her shoulders. Desire to claim her in every way sings through my blood.

"Are you alright?" ask.

"I can't sleep."

With a step back, I motion for her to come in. The only light in the room is the pale light of the moon as it shines through the parted curtains. Please let her be here to tell me she has made her choice. I am not sure how much more of this torture I can take.

"What is keeping you awake?" I ask her.

"Seeing that you are awake too, I could ask you the same question."

"Annie, tonight is a terrible night to play games with me,"

To my further surprise, she closes the door behind her, then steps in front of me with her face tilted up to look at me. There is a storm of emotion in her eyes.

"Why not?"

“Like I told you this morning. One day, you are going to have to decide whether you want to keep playing this game of hungry eyes or act on these feelings and the desire between us. Have you done that yet?”

In answer to my question, she wraps her arms around my neck, then gives a little hop. This causes me to catch her around the waist to keep from toppling over, As I do, she wraps her legs around me. If that isn't enough of an answer, I don't know what is. However, I need to -bear the words, so I pull my face back when she leans up for a kiss.

1/4

“Say the words, Annie. I won't go any further until you do.”

“We have been on this path since we were eighteen. I was wrong to put up these walls between us. I need you. All of you.”

us than our daughter.

Once we do this, there will be no going back to the way it was before. I won't walk away again. There is more to us t Can you handle that?”

“I don't want to be apart from you anymore.”

This time, I allow her to kiss me. Our mouths fuse together in a heated kiss that sets my blood on fire. My hands find the bare skin of her hips, kneading her flesh as I back her towards the door. Her nails graze my scalp as I move my mouth to her throat.

The moan that escapes her mouth encourages me to go lower until my teeth graze her collarbone. Pinning her to the door with my lower body, I grip the hem of the t-shirt she is wearing, then peel it up and over her head. With my other hand, I remove her hands from behind my head, then pin them to the door above her.

Thrusting my hips into her, I grind my erection against her care. A throaty moan tears from her lips as the friction I create gives her pleasure. I recapture her lips, nibbling at her lower lip until she opens her mouth to allow my tongue to slip inside. The fire that erupts between is instantaneous.

Soon, Annora is squirming to get her hands free. I let them go only so I can grip her *** with both hands. With a growl, I spin us around, move swiftly to my bed, then toss her on her back. Before she recovers, I follow her down to the bed. With her legs open, I stand on my knees between them and just stare down at her.

The two **ale mounds of her breast, bare to my gaze, are just calling to be touched. I palm both breasts, then graze my thumbs over her nipples. Annora arches her back, bringing them further into my touch. To please myself, I lean down and flick my tongue over one of the rosy pink peaks. She rewards me with another throaty moan.

“Oh god, Quinn, I need you now.”

“So greedy, my love.”

Ignoring her plea, I give her other breast the same treatment before I lick, kiss, and nibble my way down her body. When I reach her core, I blow my hot breath over the lace panties she is still wearing. The shudder that racks her body encourages me to continue. With my thumb, I move the lace to the side, then graze over her once before I press harder against her**is. With circular motions, I rub my thumb over it until she is whimpering with need.

Unable to hold back anymore, I slip her panties over her hips, down her legs, then throw them behind me somewhere. I glance up at her and see that she is staring at me. The naked desire in her eyes makes my c**k swell more. The need to bury myself deep in her is strong. but I want to hear her beg for it more.

I watch her eyes as I flick my tongue over he***. Her mouth drops open as her lower body presses upward towards me. With that obvious invitation, I close my mouth over her. My tongue fluttering around her*t in quick movements while I thrust two fingers into her.com Soon, her body jerks against my face as her o**sm rips through her. I wipe my mouth on her inner thigh, then shimpy thy pants off.

Unlike the last time in her office, I reach over to my nightstand for a condom. I roll the condom op, then just stare down at her. She is so** beautiful spread out on my bed. “Are you sure, Annie?”

Make love to me, Quinn.”

I slip inside slowly. With slow erotic movements, we dance together on the silk sheets. Annora’s legs wrap around my waist, her arms up under mine as she holds me tight against her, and I bury my face in the crook of her neck. Her quiet moans of pleasure my ears as we rock against each other.

My head lifts in time to watch her eyes go wide in wonder as she crests the peak of o**sm. I lean down to kiss her gently as our bodies continue to move together. Something in my soul breaks wide open as she brings her hands up to stroke my cheek, a deep’chilm settles in my heart as we make love.

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This is a calmness that I haven’t felt since the last time we were together. Twelve long years ago. I am in so much trouble with her. This woman is my undoing, and now she knows it. I will love falling for her all over again.

(The next morning)

My eyes pop open after I roll over to pull Annora against me. Her spot beside me is empty and has been for some time by the way it no longer holds her warmth. Fear **es through me after the events of last night. Did she regret what we did when the sun came up?

No, du**she probably just went to check on Grace. Quit jumping to conclusions, Relax and enjoy the good without expecting the bad, I tell myself as I get out of bed. After locating my pajama pants, I smile when I spot Annora's lacy panties hanging off the corner of my dresser.

Wherever she is now, she has no panties on. That thought causes memories of everything we did to each other last night to run through my head. Now, all I want to do is find her and do more. Only the knowledge that Grace is here with us makes me clear that thought from my head.

With a smile on my face, I head down the stairs to check in Grace. It is still earlier than she normally wakes up when she stays with me. That will give

Annora and me some time to talk, or not talk at all, if I have my way. After I am satisfied that Grace is still asleep, I head downstairs to the ground floor of my penthouse.

The smell of bacon cooking makes me veer off towards the kitchen. The sight that greets me when I step around the glass block wall takes my breath away. Annora is at the stove, her hips are swaying to the jazz pumping softly out of the built-in speakers as she cooks breakfast. There is a covered plate on the island counter behind her. Next to it is the syrup, so I can only assume she made pancakes, too.

Silently, as they trained me to do in the Army, I creep up on her slowly. When I am right behind her, my hands snake around hips then press flat against her stomach to pull her back into my chest. The cry of surprise she lets out is instantaneous, but she relaxes in my arms just as fast.

Leaning down, I whisper softly into her ear. "I found your panties, Annie. That means you are naked under my shirt."

Annora shivers, then spins around in my arms. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, there are many things I can do to you right here in this kitchen." My hands glide down her back to cup her a** then I move the shirt up enough so I can give her bare cheeks a smack.

Lust shines in her eyes as she leans up to kiss me. Removing the tongs from her hand, I flick the burner off with my other hand, dropping the tongs on the counter. Then turn

her around, lift her up to sit her on the island counter. With her legs spread for me, I step closer to her, then grind my raging erection against her bare p**y.

Her moan is music to my ears. I laugh when she covers her mouth with her hand, then looks toward the stairs. The blush on her cheeks makes me grind against her again.

“Every room in this penthouse is soundproof except for the living room and kitchen. She can’t hear us unless she comes down here. Grace was sound asleep when I checked on her.”

“Quinn,” she moans for me when I slip my hand between us to stroke her*t. “I don’t want her to see us like this.”

She want. I promise. Baby, relax.”

“Oh g**d, hurry Quinn,” Annora’s voice is thick with desire as she wraps her arms around my neck.

Swiftly, I lower my pants, then guide my **k to her wet core. With my dyes on hers, I slip slowly inside her. “Oh, f**k. You are so tight

Annora wraps her legs around my waist, then leans back on her elbows. With one hand, I push her shirt up high to reveal her breasts,

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Leaning down, I take one of her nipples into my mouth. Soon I am thrusting into her hard and fast. Wet slaps of my flesh connecting with hers, her soft moans, and my heavy breathing echo off the black-tiled walls of my kitchen.

Delicious pain slices through me as Annora rakes her nails down my back as she comes for me. I follow her into the oblivion of pleasure a few thrusts later. With a breathless sigh, I lower my head to rest my forehead against hers. Her hands draw lazy circles up and down my back as we both calm our breathing-

Reluctantly, I pull free of her body and pull my pants back up. Annora slides off the counter, then pulls the t-shirt down. The way she covers her face with her hair makes me place my hand under her chin to make her look up at me. The flush on her face gives my ego

boost.

“I think a shower then getting dressed in my own clothes is a good idea. She says with a smile.

Thoughts of pinning her against the marble tiles of my shower flashed through my mind. Annora laughs as if she guessed my thoughts. With a shake of her head, she dashes out of the kitchen. I can't believe that I just f***d her on my kitchen counter. I can, but it feels like a dream. Something I have pictured before, but I never imagined it would happen.

At the sound of my doorbell, my head turns toward the entrance hallway. Who the hell could that be? Aaron knows I brought Annie and Grace back here last night, so I doubt it will be him. With a frown, I make my way to the door.

The face I see when I open the door causes me to see red. Dionne stands in the hallway with a smirk on her face. When she sees my naked chest, I swear lust shines in her eyes. Raw, blinding rage is all I feel for this woman.

"How the f**k did you find where I live?"

Chapter Comments

North Rose

yup no condom again. He loves her, she loves him, they have a kid already....so no condom isn't an issue with them.

JARM

POST COMMENT

I appreciate that the story line never has Grace walking in when they are having sex. I thank the writer for a great story line