

Loving Quinn Chapter 33

morning to go to the meeting with Dianne. I understand her reasoning, but I just don't want to give into Dionne's demands. Now, because I refuse to go, Annie is giving me the silent treatment as she helps Grace get ready for school.

It is like we are eighteen again. She would do the same thing when I made her mad. She would either go back to grandparents' house and ignore me when I came to apologize, or she would just stay by my side and not speak to me.

Back then I would just make her laugh until she stopped being mad. I tried that tactic this morning, but the glare she gave wither the strongest man to a desiccated husk of who he once was. So, I tried my second tactic that used to work on her.

me could

While she was in the bathroom doing her make-up, I stepped up behind her, then placed soft kisses up her neck until I reached her carlobe. I used my teeth to nibble on her ear, then blew my hot breath over her wet skin. Just like in the past, her body shivered as goosebumps erupted all over her exposed flesh.

However, unlike the past, this time, Annora spins around to glare at me again. Not wanting to press my luck any further, I leave the bathroom to get dressed for the day. Now here we are in the kitchen as Annora makes scrambled eggs for Grace.

If I don't cave in to Annora's demands to go meet Dionne, I will continue to get the silent treatment. If I give into Dionne's demands to moet, I um falling for her games. This is a no-win situation. Do I wait to see how long Annora will stay mad at me, or do I give in and just get this meeting with Dionne over with?

In the past, Annie could never stay mad at me for more than a few hours. The woman cooking eggs in my kitchen is a complete unknown Now the question I find myself asking is why I am even contemplating letting her stay mad.

After Annora puts a plate of scrambled eggs in front of Grace at the kitchen island counter, her eyes meet mine. Yup, the mad is still there, in those hazel eyes. The set of her shoulders says she is ready to argue ber point again, I point to the doorway of the kitchen to indicate I want to speak to hear in the hall

She put the pan back on the stove, then follows me out into the foyer. The way her shoulders are now hunched, it is like she is expecting me to fight or yell at her, which makes me sad. Is that how her ex-husband would treat her? The thought of him putting his hands on her in violence makes me want to kill him. It is a good thing he will be in jail for a while.

Part of me is angry that she has reacted this way because we are fighting, but I know it isn't her fault after all s.. went through with her ex-husband. My hatred for that man grows more and more.

"Baby, look at me."

When her eyes lift from the floor to meet mine, the fear in those hazel depths causes me to reach out to her slowly. Like you would a wounded animal so that you can help it. In my own way, because of my time as a soldier, I understand this reaction.

"I am not him. There will be no yelling at you in anger. I won't hit you if you do something that I don't like, Kyte isn't here and I am nothing like him."

Annora lets out a shuddering sigh, then she closes the distance between us. My arms wrap around her instantly. The tension in her body melts away as I run my hand up and down her back. The irony of this stance isn't lost on me at all. Just recently, she was soothing me in

this way

We are both broken in our own ways.

"I am sorry that I reacted that way, Quinn. In my heart, I know you are not him. I guess it is just instinct. After everything Kyle put me through."

You are precious to me, Annie, and I will never raise a hand to you or yell at you in anger. I have learned from my father that neither of

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those things solve problems. If you ever make me that angry, I will walk away until I am calmer. In situations like this, words solve problems, not fists."

She pulls away to look up at me. The fear is gone, but there is still worry in her eyes. "I am sorry that I made this meeting with that b**h

big deal. We don't have to go. I will just take Grace to school and then catch up on some paperwork."

"No, I have concluded that you have a point. If we do this together, meet Dionne as a united team, maybe she will back down. That was what I brought you out here to tell you."

"Why did you cho

did you change your mind?"

at me? Will that make her angry again? Women are a

Do I tell Annie that I would rather play into Dionne's games than have her mad at mystery that most men will never understand.

Well, I might as well find out.

"I decided I would rather play her games than have you mad at me. The silent treatment and those death glares are not fun. I love talking to you and looking into your beautiful eyes. So, please don't be angry with me."

Annora tilts her head to the side to study me for a moment before she smiles at me. "That works on Grace so well. Anytime she has done something wrong but doesn't want me to know, even though I do, I go silent on her until she c**ks."

"That is deviously evil, but on a genius level for a parent/child relationship. I think that is an excellent tactic for our daughter. Not so much for me.'

"Fair enough. The neck and ear thing still works, by the way."

I narrow my eyes at her when she smiles sweetly at me. "Are you t
you telling me you caved, but let me think you were still mad at me?"

"I was planning on telling you when Grace went to get her backpack, but you called me out here and well, here we are now.

I lean forward to whisper in her ear, "When we got home tonight, and Grace is all tucked in bed, you are in big trouble. I am going to s**k that a**of yours and then I am going to..."

When I hear Grace's stool push away from the counter, I pull away from Annie to look down at her with a sale on my face. Her eyes wide, but not in fear. For a split second, there is raw desire and curiosity in her eyes. Swiftly she looks away as Grace runs out of the kitchen to go grab her school supplies.

are

"How do you want to do this today? Should I go with you to take Grace to school and then go to this meeting? I can drop you off at the hospital afterwards."

"I have nothing scheduled for today, so I don't have to go into the hospital unless there is an emergency with one of my patients."

My schedule is clear today as well. My imagination goes wild as I think about all we can do together today. That s**g she deserves is looking better and better now that I know we have all day to be alone together.

“Then I will drive, and after this s**id meeting, we can go have breakfast together.”

“Just breakfast?”

There is a challenging tone in her voice that makes me smile. “How about we go on our first date as a couple this time around?”

The way her eyes light up let me know she would very much like that to happen. After leaning up to give me a quick peck on the lips, she turns around to go clean up the breakfast dishes. Grace comes running back down the stairs a few minutes later with a piece of paper in her hand.

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“Dad, can you sign this for me?”

“What is it?”

“A permission slip for the field trip next week.”

I take the slip from her hand and read it. They are going to the Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. I was planning on taking her there on one of our weekends together. Maybe I could volunteer with the school to go along. I make a m**al note to call her teacher later to ask.

“I need a pen, Grace”

She reaches into her backpack and pulls out a pen, then hands it to me. I sign the slip, then hand it to her. I don’t tell her about my idea of going on the trip with her classmates. That will stay surprise for the day of the trip.

After I signed the slip, Grace rushes into the kitchen, telling Annora that they are going to be late. I grab my keys off the hall table and wait for them both by the front door. Grace is the first to come out of the kitchen. There is a piece of toast clamped between her lips as she slips one strap of her backpack over her shoulder. Annora comes into the foyer, grabs her purse and keys, then joins us at the door.

“Well, ladies/ let’s get this show on the road.”

Traffic from my place to Grace's school was light. We made it there with five minutes to spare. This is my first time dropping her off. Even though Annora is in the car with me, her hand clasped in mine over the center console, I can feel the curious stares of a few women on

the sidewalk.

Annora laughs after Grace runs into the school. The wave she sends to the gawking mothers makes me grin. However, the feeling I get from the situation makes me feel dirty somehow I don't have time to reflect on it because we have a meeting to get to.

After stopping to get gas, we head towards the Ocean Beach area. As we get closer to the address Dionne gave me, the larger the houses become. However, when we arrive, there are no cars parked in the driveway. There is also a 'Sold' sign over the old for sale sign.

"Did she just buy this place?" Annora asks after I pull into the driveway.

"I don't know, I certainly hope not."

"Quinn, what do you think she has to say to you? What could be so important for her to keep violating

ing a restraining order like this?"

I turn the car off, then angle my body so that I am facing Annora. She is looking out the window towards the house as if she is looking for signs that someone is inside. There is this feeling in the pit of my stomach that tells me I will not like what Dionne has to tell me.

There was nothing left between us after she aborted our child. Realizing that I never loved her was an eye opener. Nothing she can do or say now will change that. If anything, I feel sorry for her. Here she is, two years later, throwing herself at me, knowing I want nothing more to do with her.

The phone calls, the gifts, her showing up at my house, are all part of a stalker's behavior. Where is that strong minded, independent woman that I used to know? What happened to her in the last two years to make her this way?

I know it can't be because I walked away from her just a week before we were to be married. Dionne was a lot of things, but the one thing she wasn't was sentimental. She told me once that if things between us didn't last that she would dust herself off and move on with her life. Why would I expect something different from her after I walked away?

it is time to go in," Annora says.

“Do you think she is in there?”

“Her car could be in the garage.”

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That is true. Before she can open the door, I grab Annora’s hand. “No matter what she has to say, you are the woman I want in my life, not her. I am absolutely, without a doubt, all yours.”

*I believe you, Quinn. Besides, after being away from you for twelve years, I am not giving up now without a fight. This crazy b**h is out of her mind if she thinks I am just going to walk away,”

With a smile on my face, I lean in and capture her lips with mine. Fire erupts between us instantly. A moan escapes her lips as I deepen the kiss, I lick her lower lip and she opens her mouth for my tongue to sweep inside. She fists her hands into the front of my button-up shirt to hold me close.

I break the kiss when she lets go of my shirt. We are both breathless as we sit back to gather our senses. I could spend all day

“Come on, let’s get this over with,” I tell her w

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(Annora)

My mind is in a dizzying circle after we leave the house where Dionne wanted to meet Quinn. All I can think about is why she wants to meet him so badly. After what she did to him two years, does she honestly think he will listen to anything she has to say?

“This will never end, will it?”

“What?” Quinn asks.

“Her games. They won’t stop.”

“Dionne will stop because we are going to the police station right now with everything that she has sent me and the videos where she enters my office building. It is all in the backseat. We are going to put a stop to these games right now.”

Surprise rushes through me as I look out the window of the car and realize where we are. The police station is three blocks away from the traffic light we just stopped at. He squeezes my hand as I look back at him.

“I am done with her games, and it is time to make her face the consequences of breaking the law.”

An hour later, we leave the station with assurances that officers are being dispatched to Dionne’s home and the medical building where her office is. They are going to place her under arrest for violating the parameters of the restraining order on more than one occasion. With the proof on video for two of those occasions, the detective Quinn spoke to was p**d.

Dionne didn’t send the first package, the g***n underwear, she hand delivered it to the front desk just like she did the key with the note. Quinn gave the detective copies of the phone records that showed every single time she called his cellphone over the last two years. With those records, he showed proof that those unknown numbers were from cellphones in Dionne’s name.

Talk about a crazy stalker **ch.

So, with the assurance that it will occupy Dionne’s time for a while, Quinn grabs my hand as we walk ack to the car. I glance at my watch and realize that we still have two hours free to go on a date. I want more time than that, but I will take what I can get.

Quinn heads towards the beach. When I ask what he has in mind, all he does is shake his head and smile at me. I guess I will have to wait until we arrive at our destination to find out.

We pull into a parking lot full of cars with racks on the top for surfboards. There are tons of people walking either to the water with boards or blankets in their hands or walking back from the water towards the outdoor showers.

Quinn gets out of the car and waits for me to join him. “We have a few hours to have our date. The weather is perfect for what I have in

mind.”

We walk to the edge of the parking lot where the pavement blended with the sand. He stops at a bench, then sits down to take his shoes off. Understanding what he wants to do, I join him and follow his lead.

“I thought a walk on the beach would be fun. Even if I would have preferred one at night and on a more secluded stretch of beach. However, we are here, so why not make the best of it?”

“I think this is perfect.”

“Then let’s go enjoy the sunshine,” Quinn says. He stands up after stuffing his socks in his shoes. Then, taking them in one hand, he holds his free hand out to me.

I follow his lead again, then after taking his hand, I let him pull me toward the water, When we were teenagers, we would walk around the

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lake shore all the time. With the sun overhead and the sound of the on, this walk is beautiful.

With my hand in his, we walk further down the beach. As we walk, we pass fewer and fewer people. He tells me about the new project he and Adron are working on. While he talks about it, his thumb is moving softly over the top of mine.

What he and Aaron plan to do is a good thing for that area. It makes me proud that they want to give back to the community. That area certainly needs what they are working hard to accomplish.

“I offered Max a job.”

I stop walking, which makes him stop and look back at me. “What did he say?”

If Max has something going for him out here, it would certainly help distract him from what is going on with Leita and the baby. Will he take it, or will he hesitate because Quinn is like family? That is how Max will see Quinn that way now.

“Max said he would think about it and let me know when I get final approval.

“What did you offer him?”

“To be the contractor for the outreach project. We haven’t hired anyone yet since the sale is still in progress. I assured him we would have a contract drawn up to make it all business.”

That idea would appeal to Max’s business sense. “I hope he takes your offer. He is in an awful place, emotionally, and going back to New York right now is a bad idea for him.”

“He needs the work, and we need a capable contractor with his own construction crew. It felt right, so I made the offer.”

I nod my head, then we walk a little further down the beach. We both fall into silence as we just enjoy the scenery and each other's company. When I can no longer hear the voices of anyone else on the beach, I stop to look out at the water.

Quinn moves around to stand behind me, then wraps his arms around me. I lean back into his warm embrace to just watch the waves crash against the shoreline. I love the way his powerful arms make me feel so safe.

I can feel the steady beating of Quinn's heart as I lean further back against him. Out of everything I imagined for our date, this tops chart. It is just the two of us in our own little bubble as he just holds me close. For the two of us, all that matters is each other.

the

He leans his head down to lay a soft kiss on my neck. "Did you dream of me as often as I dreamt of you?" His lips travel up flesh of my neck, soft sensual kisses, until he reaches my earlobe. Then he uses his teeth to tug on it gently.

the tender

The shivers that wrack my body are not from the breeze coming off the ocean. The sound of the waves crashing against the shoreline swallows the moan that escapes my lips. One of his hands slides up slowly up my belly until he reaches my left breast. The heat of his hand seeps through my blouse.

I press my **back into him. The thin material of my skirt leaves nothing to the imagination as I feel his hard-erection against my ** "Mm, I love the way you make me feel. It is like we are teenagers again

His hand slips into my blouse to cup my breast. I moan when his thumb rubs over my nipple, causing it to harden for him. Between the heat of his hard c**k pressing against my **and his warm hand cupping my breast, the need for him almost takes my breath away.

"Want to take a risk Quinn whispers in my ear. His hot breath causes me to shiver in delight.

Excitement pulses through my body at the way his voice has gone low and husky, I can feel my p**y throb as I crane my neck to look up- at him. "What do you have in mind?"

Quinn points with one hand to the rocky cliffs behind us. There is a large rock close to the side of the cliff-The gap between it and the cliff looks large enough for us to slip between them. In response to his question, I grind my a** against him «galp.

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"I want to pin you against those rocks over there, lift one of your legs over my shoulder, and eat that beautiful p**y until you come all over my face."

Oh, my goodness. The way he whispers that in my ear makes my p** throb, I can feel wetness seep onto my thighs as I press them together. Quinn pulls his hand out of my shirt, then uses the hand that is still on my hip to spin me around to face him.

His mouth descends on mine swiftly. I expected a demanding kiss, but the slow sensual kiss he gives me causes me to melt in his arms. His tongue sweeps into my mouth, then swirls into an erotic dance with mine. Both of his hands go behind me to grab my a** cheeks.

The way he is kneading my a*** with his hands and devouring my moans of pleasure with his mouth makes me press my body firmly against him. I can feel his erection throb against my belly. Delicious flames of desire lick at my body as he deepens the kiss.

my I could stay like this with him forever. Quinn's sensual nature is drawing me deeper and deeper into bliss. Before he came back into life, I was like a fish out of water, flopping around in desperation to get back to the life-saving water I needed to breathe. The longer I was out there on my own, the harder it was to breathe.

Now, with him right here with me, I can breathe normally for the first time in years.

Quinn suddenly tears his mouth from mine, scoops me up in his muscular arms, then with quick strides he walks us towards the gap in the rocks. When we slip between the rocks, we are enveloped in the shade. I look around and we are completely shielded from view on all

The speed at which he has my back pinned to the rock takes my breath away. Quinn reaches up under my skirt and swiftly pulls my panties off. With one hand on my hip, he uses the other to lift my left leg. His amazing sea-green eyes stare into mine as he braces my foot high on a rock beside me.

I could drown in the deep desire pooling in his eyes,

With my left leg where he wants is, Quinn sinks to his knees, his eyes staying on mine. Something about the continued eye contact is incredibly arousing. Or maybe it is the sight of my strong Greek god down going down on his knees like he is preparing to worship me. Either way, if he doesn't do something soon to quench this fire burning deep inside me, I will go up in flames.

"Unbutton your blouse for me. Show me those glorious breasts," Quinn says.

The commanding tone in his voice makes my body shiver. With trembling fingers, I do as he demands. As each button comes free, the cool air makes goosebumps rise on

each inch of exposed flesh. Quinn's eyes follow the path of my fingers as I unbutton my blouse.

up to expose my

core. Once my blouse is wide open, h** While I am doing what he asks me to do, his hands are slowly raising my skirt up to blows his hot breath over my wet p**y. The sensation has me throwing my head back against the rock and arching my back. This brings my core closer to his face.

"Hold your

your skirt for me, Annie. My hands are going to be busy pleasuring you."

I

"Oh, Quinn, please..." I moan his name as I grip the fabric of my skirt lightly in my hands.

"You are so wet for me."

Quinn slides two fingers up my slit, then uses them to spread me open. The moment his tongue flicks across my **t, my body jerks like he electrocuted me. My eyes fly open and I look down at him. The sight of him on his knees with his face against my core has an o**sm so intense ripping through me.

He presses his mouth to my p**y, then laps my juices up like I am the best thing he has tasted in his life. When I feel him slip a finger deep inside me, I can't stop the moan that escapes my lips. A second finger soon joins the first as he flutters his tongue over my **t

I slide one hand into his thick, silky black hair to hold him right where I want him.

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If my gut feeling is correct that she and McAllister are connected, then she has a powerful ally to help her. I hope I am wrong, even though it would explain why McAllister has been gunning for G&C enterprises. I could ask the man directly or wait for Mac to find the

link between them.

However, there is still the question of why? Is McAllister the type of man that would come after me just because of my history with Dionne? She did something horrible to me, not the other way around. What perceived wrongs have I done to her that would cause him to attack my business?

Unless she spun a different tale to him about the events that happened to make me look like the bad guy. Knowing Dionne, the way I do, that seems far-fetched. Yet all the hang-up phone calls, the way she has knowingly broken a restraining order, and the cryptic meeting today, point to a woman who isn't the one I used to know.

What happened to her after I left New York to change her so much? I am not conceited enough to think it had anything to do with me. It makes me wonder though.

"They are both free tomorrow,

but my

mum insists that

it we have dinner at their house. Will that work for you?"

I pull into the pickup line behind the school buses at Grace's school, then look over at her. "I am looking forward to it. Is there anything I should bring?"

Annora laughs. "No. My mother will have everything covered."

I lift her hand to kiss the back of it. When I look out the car window, I spot some of the same women from this morning standing at the curb waiting for their children. One bold woman is looking straight at me. Her blue eyes widen as she notices I am looking at her.

She fluffs her hair a little, then gives me her best seductive smile. I have gotten used to this behavior from women over the years, but something about this situation makes me feel dirty. This woman can clearly see Annora sitting next to me. If she was staring long enough, she saw me kiss her hand

Yet, with no shame at all, she is standing there giving me the "f**k me" eyes.

"Let's see what Mrs. Taylor thinks of this." Annora says.

She puts her hand on my cheek to turn my face to hers. The mischievous sparkle in her eye makes it clear she saw the look the woman was giving me. With a smile, she closes the space between us and captures my lips with hers. She keeps the kiss simple since we are in line to pick up our daughter.

When we both look back out the window, Mrs. Taylor has walked away. All the other women with her seemed to have gotten the point as well because they are all facing towards the school now. A smile tugs at my lips as Annora laughs softly.

"I think she got the point."

“Message read loud and clear, boss,” I tell her. Because I can’t help myself, I kiss the back of her hand again. “I think your mischievous streak has gotten bigger and meaner over the years.”

“It has. There were a lot of practical jokes between students during med school. I learned early that it was either stay out of their way or join the games. I joined their games. We had a lot of fun.”

“You will have to tell me some of those stories sometime.”

“What are your plans for Friday night?”

The mention of Friday night reminds me of Aaron’s parents coming into town. “Aaron’s parents are coming into town to visit on Friday. I want his mom to meet Grace before they go home. Friday night is all yours if you want it.”

“I will ask my mom tomorrow if Grace can stay with them Friday night”

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“Date night?”

She laughs then looks out the window as she hears Grace’s voice coming towards the car. “Yes. So, think of what you want to do.”

I have a plan in mind already. This will be the perfect chance to take that risk. Now all I can do is pray she says yes. Loving Quinn

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(Quinn)

After taking that risk with Annora between the rocks, we fix our clothing, then walk hand in hand back up the beach to the car. She has a light blush staining her cheeks as we walk. To me, she is the s**t woman I have ever seen.

Back when I first saw her across the lake, I thought she was beautiful. Today, under the warm sun shining down on her face, she is stunning. Her auburn hair is windblown with a few strands sticking to her forehead from sweating. Her pale complexion is dotted with freckles and is otherwise unblemished. Everything about her, both inside and out, is amazing to me.

I am sinking further and further towards the point where I may take another risk with her soon. This one is a risk I was planning on taking years ago with her, but my Army career

put me on another path. Now that our lives are both on the same path, I think it is time to open that box of dreams.

Not today, or tomorrow, but soon, I think. The timing has to be right. Until then, I will go to the bank to open my safe deposit box. Inside, in a worn leather pouch, is the ring I bought her when I was only nineteen. It isn't an engagement ring Brany means.

It is a promise ring. I bought to give to her when I saw her again. It represented the promise that I made her the day we said goodbye. I promised that no matter where I was or how long it took, I would always find my way back to her.

It took twelve years, a lot of pain, and a few heartaches, but I am here. Next to Annora is where I will always belong. With her and Grace, my life has found meaning again.

"You have gone quiet.

. What are

are you thinking?" Annora asks.

I blink at her, then look around us. We have reached the parking lot, and she is sitting down to dust the sand off her feet before putting her shoes on. I chuckle as I sit next to her to do what she is.

"I was just enjoying the quiet day out of the office with you. Things will get busy with work once the sale of the land goes through and we can start that project. So many things

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(Quinn)

After we pick Grace up, I drive home while she tells us all about her day. I am enjoying hearing about everything she feels is important enough to share with us. I normally have been hearing the highlights of her week when she is with me over the weekends. Hearing it the day of is much more enjoyable since it is fresh in her mind.

Grace is so animated when she talks when she is excited about something. She talks with her hands a lot. She gets that from Annora. I used to find it funny when we were teenagers, seeing the same habit in our daughter is cute.

By the time I pull into the garage at the penthouse, she has launched into what movies she would like to watch for our movie night tonight. Three of the titles she mentions make me cringe internally, but I don't say what I am thinking. I don't really care what we watch. For me, it is the time I will spend with my family.

My family. Wow, I am amazed that my life has turned out this way.

This is something that I have always wanted to have with Annie. I dreamed of it for years. Then things with Dionne got serious, and I attempted to put the dream of Annie into the past. Now, Annora and Grace are my future.

“Come on, Grace, let’s go easy on your father for his first family movie night.” Annora laughs.

Grace goes quiet as we get out of the car and head towards the elevator, David waves me over to the security office. I tell Annie and Grace to go on up, then I walk over to David. I wait until they are in the elevator to ask him what he needs.

“A very well-dressed man came by this morning after you left. He wanted to go up to give you something but when I told him that isn’t possible, he got angry.”

“Did he tell you his name and what he wanted?”

“When I asked his name and offered to pass on a message for him, he handed me a business card, then stormed off.”

David hands me the card.

The name on it surprises the hell out of me. Evan McAllister of McAllister Industries. Why the hell does he want to talk to me? Guess there is only one way to find out, I will call him tomorrow at the office with Aaron there with me to overhear the conversation.

“Thank you, David.”

“No problem, boss.”

He gives me a smirk after I laugh. I leave him and walk to the elevator. When I open the door to my penthouse, it is oddly quiet. After dumping my keys on the hall table, I peek my head into the kitchen. It is empty.

Grace is probably in her room doing her homework. Now to find Annora before I head to my home office to check my voicemails. When I walk into our bedroom, I hear the shower running in the bathroom. The temptation to join her is strong, but I write her a note instead and leave it on the bedroom mirror.

Deciding that a shower is a good idea, I grab some clean clothes, then head downstairs to the bathroom on the first floor. After I take a quick shower, I head to my office to listen to my voicemails. I close my office door, then sit behind my desk.

The first message is from Aaron letting me know that the sale went through on the property for the outreach center. We should have the official paperwork delivered to the

office by Friday. His second message is informing me we had an unexpected visitor this afternoon.

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When Aaron asked what the man wanted, Evan told him he would prefer to say what he needed to say when we were both together. So, Aaron told him to come back first thing in the morning. That saves me a phone call. I can just find out what he wants tomorrow in

person.

When I get to the message from my lawyer, the first thing he tells me is that Dionne was arrested like I was hoped she would. The second

part of his message confuses me, then has anger rushing through my veins.

1

I now know what Dionne wanted to tell me this morning. She has a child and is claiming that it is mine. I know that isn't possible since she had an abortion. There is no way this child is mine. She filed documents with the court claiming child abandonment. How can I have abandoned this child that I never knew existed? What f**ng game is she playing?

Then, like that, it dawns on me. Three weeks passed between the time she has the abortion to the day that I learned about it. Is it medically possible for her to have gotten pregnant in those three weeks? I open my laptop to do a little research.

I feel all the blood drain from my face as I read that there is a possibility, a slim one, but there is a chance that the child she has is mine. Holy f**ng s**t. My only question is why is she doing this now? Why not when she found out she was pregnant? She had my number and ample opportunity to tell me about the child.

On the trail of that thought, another one slams into it. I know why she is doing this now. It has everything to do with what she saw on Saturday and what Annora told her on Monday. This is her revenge.

She is punishing me for leaving two years ago, for keeping my past with Annora from her, and not caving to her flirtatious demands that I become her lover again. How the hell am going to tell Annora about this? We are finally in a good place in our relationship. Now this s**t will threaten all the progress we have made.

I know one thing for sure, a DNA test is in order. Yes, there is a possibility that her child is mine, but it has been two years since we broke up. There is a chance that I am not the father. She could have met someone during that time.

At the knock on my office door, I close my laptop, then stand up to open the door. Annora is standing there with a smile on her face. Despite what I just learned, or maybe because of it, I pull her into my arms for a hug. I hold on to her tightly for a few moments more, then I let her out of my embrace.

“Is everything ok?”

No.

“Yes.” I lie.

“Come on, Grace is ready for movie night, and I have a pizza in the oven.”

I can tell from the look in her eyes that she doesn’t believe me. However, she holds her hand out to me so she can lead me into the living room. I push all thoughts of Dionne and the bombshell that she just dropped on my life. I will tell Annora about it later when we are in the privacy of our bedroom.

For now, I want to spend what time we have left together as a family. Because I have a gut feeling that as soon as I tell Annora about Dionne’s child, she will pack her things and leave me. If I were in her shoes, I would run too.

So, I put a smile on my face, then help Grace pick a movie while Annora checks on the pizza. Grace lets out a squeal of excitement as she finds a movie she wants to watch. I groan internally when I see what movie she picked. The Princess Diaries.

I have no idea what it is about, but I will happily watch it with her. Anything she picks will help me distract my mind from the storm to come. When Annora calls us to the kitchen to eat dinner, Grace runs out of the living room. I laugh at her excitement, then join them for

pizza.

Later, after we are all full, Grace runs up to her room to change into her pajamas. Annora takes that as her chance to ask me what is wrong. I let out a heavy sigh. If I tell her now, it will ruin Grace’s movie night.

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If I lie again and tell her it is work related to the outreach center project, will she believe me? I don't want there to be lies between us. So, I take a deep breath, then open my mouth to tell her about Dionne's child. To my surprise, she steps up to me and places her index finger on my lips.

"If it is about Dionne, tell me later. We will deal with whatever it is together. I meant what I said this morning in the car. I will not give up what we have. If it is a fight she wants, it is a fight she will get."

"Annie..."

"Shh... tell me later."

Annora stands up on her tip-toes, places a soft kiss on my lips, then walks out of the room. Grace runs down the stairs a minute later with a blanket in one and a pillow in the other. When I walk into the living room, she is making laying her blanket on the floor. That means I get to snuggle with Annie on the sofa.

"Ok ladies let's get our first movie night as a family started."

With Annora snuggled up against me, I empty everything from my mind, and enjoy the night with my girls. The movie turns out to be a teenage chick-flick that I lose interest in almost immediately. However, with my arm wrapped around Annora's shoulder, I am exactly where I want to be.

I quickly get lost in the smell of her hair, the way she keeps running one hand up my arm, and the other one idly stroking my thigh. Her simple strawberry shampoo is intoxicating to me. The warm touch of her hand is calming. Just what I need right now.

Annora taps on my arm, then points to where Grace is on the floor. When I take my eyes off her to look over at our daughter, I can't help but laugh. She is laying on her belly, both arms under her pillow as she hugs it, and she is fast asleep.

Standing up from the sofa, I walk to her, then kneel to scoop her up in my arms. She holds onto the pillow as I carry her to her room. Annora follows behind me after she turns the tv off and grabs Grace's blanket.

I lay Grace gently on her bed, then step back so Annora can pry the pillow from her arms and cover her up. As I watch her with our daughter, I am struck by how many nights like this that I missed in her life. I am no longer angry about it, but I wish I could have been there to see her through all the earlier years.

When Annora turns to face me, I gently cup her face in my hands, then kiss her lightly on her lips. "Come upstairs. There is something I have to tell you."

All she does is nod her head, then she leads the way to our room. A ball of dread forms in my gut as we walk into the room, and she goes straight to the bed and sits down facing me. Her eyes meet mine as she pats her hand on the end of the bed beside her.

“Did they arrest her? Is there bad news there?”

“They did and she will go before a judge in the morning.”

I walk to the bed, but instead of sitting next to her, I kneel on the floor at her feet. I look up at her before I speak again. Her eyes are full of questions.

“I know what Dionne was planning to tell me this morning.”

Annora frowns. “Why are you on your knees? Is what she planned to tell you that bad?”

How do you tell the woman you have loved since you were eighteen that you are possibly the father of another woman’s child? Just spit it out and hope for the best? This entire situation sucks.

“Dionne is claiming that I am the father of her child. She filed a claim through the court for child abandonment and she wants compensation for her pain and suffering. Chapter 36

Anger quickly replaces the confusion in her eyes. Then she frowns, tilts her head to the side as if she is working out a math problem in her head. When she looks at me again, her eyes narrow.

“When you found out about the abortion, how long after she had it done did you find out about it?”

“Three weeks.”

“Did she have another lover?”

That question makes me frown. Dionne was a lot of things, but I never had reason to think she was cheating on me. No, that isn’t true, there was once occasion when I did. I smelled another man’s cologne all over her, but she claimed it was a new patient that gave her a hug at the end of their session.

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Knowing how we started, the seeds of doubt were planted that day. I brushed it off since I was called back to base for a training exercise. That incident was 3 around the time she had the abortion.

“What makes you ask that?”

“While there is a slim chance her child could be yours if you were sexually active two weeks after the abortion and her ovulation cycle lined up just right. However, Shawna told me something about the brief time Dionne worked at Mercy General.”

Her clinical explanation and the tone in her voice while she gave it made me stand up to sit on the bed next to her. It is what I already knew from my research, but having her confirm it makes me dread the possibility even more.

“What did Shawna tell you?”

“Remember how I told you that Dionne left the hospital to get married?”

“Yes, I just assumed after the way she showed up here on Sunday that she isn’t married anymore. Do you know something about her husband, well, her fiancé at the time she worked at the hospital.”

“I have seen him and know his name. There was a charity event that hospital threw for the cardiology department. Shawna reminded of it. I didn’t know his name, but I remember his face. He and Dionne were fighting about something and that is why it stuck in my

mind.”

“What were they fighting about?”

Annie shrugs her shoulders. “I couldn’t hear her side of it, but his face was very red with anger. His name was Ethan McAllister. He runs McAllister Industries with his twin brother.”

That explains everything. I had a feeling the reason he was coming after us has something to do with her, but I had no proof. Now I know why.

1 regret ever meeting Dionne Masters.

Loving Quinn Chapter 37

(Annora)

When Quinn dropped to his knees, I my heart jumped into my throat thinking he was going to pull a ring out of his pocket. Then, when he didn’t propose, I was split with how that made me feel. Part of me was relieved, because no matter how much I love him, it is too soon. The other part of me was hurt that he didn’t because I would love to become his wife.

One day.

Now I am sitting on the edge of our bed, rubbing my hand up and down his back. Panic set in when I confirmed it is possible that Dionne's child is his. I doubt it, but since the b**h filed a lawsuit against him for child abandonment, a DNA test is the only way to prove

it.

"What lab do you plan on using for the test?"

"I will have my lawyer use the same one we used for Grace. We will do it through my lawyer. He will be there when she gives the sample to ensure it isn't tampered with. His idea, not mine, My sample is already on file with the lab."

"What if she asks to have her own independent lab run the same test?"

Something that is done in cases like this to ensure that neither test results is tampered with. It is what I would do if I were in this position. I mean, in a way, I am.

"Then I will have my lawyer and hers oversee the collections. I will have no interactions with her or the child until I know."

"Do you want the child to be yours? The reason you two spilt was because of what she did to your baby."

Quinn goes quiet for a few minutes. As he thinks about my question, I think about how I will handle the future between us if the child is his. This child could be Grace's sibling and my potential stepchild. I know one thing for sure, no matter what the results are, there are two innocent lives in the middle of all of this.

Grace and a baby. Both are innocent of this drama. I will do everything I can to keep this from effecting my daughter negatively. Until the test results come in, there is no need to tell her about this situation.

"Two years ago, what she did devastated me. It was the first time I allowed myself to think about the future. It wasn't the one I had planned, but it gave me hope. The hope that I wasn't broken. I thought I loved Dionne. I really did. Do you want to know what my first reaction, besides the anger, was?"

The raw fear in his eyes when they meet mine makes my heart throb in pain. From all that has happened since he came back into my life, I can understand his reaction. He doesn't need to say anything because his eyes tell me everything I need to know.

"You think I am going to leave you, don't you?"

When he closes those amazing sea-green eyes of his and bows his head, it is like he is bracing for the worst. After living without him for twelve years, giving birth to his daughter, there is no way I am walking away now.

“Dionne isn’t going to win, Quinn. That b**h wants a fight, and we will give her one. Together.”

“Does it make me a bad person if I don’t want her child to be mine? I will do the right thing if the results say that I am. I will love them unconditionally because I can’t do anything other than that.”

That is why I love this man. He may look unapproachable to some people, but I know the real Quinn. He has a big heart and so much love to give. Love that his father denied him after his mother died. Because of how he grew up after that day, he will never deny any child of

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“Come here,” I say to him as I stand up off the bed.

He looks up at me with a confused expression but takes the hand I hold out for him. With his hand in mine, I lead him to the large mirror on the wall above the dresser. When he looks at me through his reflection in the mirror, he is still confused.

“What are you doing, Annie?”

“What do you see when you look at your reflection in the mirror?”

Quinn tilts his head to study his reflection. “An incredibly handsome man standing next to the most beautiful woman in the world.”

I smile at his response. “Look deeper, go beyond the physical.”

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He closes his eyes for a moment, then he does as I ask him. “I see a battle-weary soldier, a man who has done some good here and there, but also a man who did a lot of bad to escape nightmares of war.”

“What terrible things did you do? Sleeping around with all those women?”

He turns around to face me, then leans back on the dresser. "I don't want to talk about all the women I slept with in the past."

"You promised to be open and honest with me, Quinn. This is part of that. We have to be able to talk to each other about everything."

With a frustrated growl, Quinn walks away from the dresser. He walks to the balcony window then just stared out at the night sky Just when I think he is going to ignore the topic, he speaks in a voice that has gone flat, no emotion in his tone.

"At first, it started as a way to numb the loneliness that comes with the life of a soldier. Moving from one base to another, one deployment after another. It left no room for a steady life. Then when my relationship with Dionne became more than it should have been, I turned to her instead of random women."

My heart clinches in pain at the thought of the loneliness he lived through. I could have saved him all of that had I just tried harder to find him. I should have kept fighting to get through to someone who could find him for me.

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truth.

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None of them knew me. They just saw my money.”

I walk to him after he stops talking and turns to look at the window again. He stiffens when I wrap my arms around him from behinds as I press my cheek against his back. I hold him until he relaxes. We stay just like this for a few more minutes before I turn him around to face

me.

His eyes change from that flat look he had when talking about his past. Now they are soft and warm when he looks at me. I lift my hand to stroke his cheek.

“You did nothing wrong with those women. They were using you just as much as you were using them. Their reasons were for their selfish greed. Social status seeking. You are not the horrible man you think you are.”

“How can you say that? I used so many women just for sex. How can you not feel dirty after knowing how many women I have been with before I came back into your life?”

I haven’t thought about it that way. Not once since he told me about those women have I felt the way he thinks I should. “I have felt loved, desired, and cherished, but not once have I felt dirty.”

He drops to his knees, wraps his arms around my waist, then pressed his face against my belly. He shocks me further by breaking down into tears. His shoulders moving violently as he s**bs against my stomach. Gently, I wrap one arm around his shoulder, then I slip my free

hand into his hair to hold him close to me.

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He looks up at me as I remember all we did together that day. When I look down into his sea-green eyes, they are clear and soft as he looks into mine. Again, he says nothing, but he stands up, then scoops me up in his arms and walks to the bed.

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His voice is husky as he speaks after I finish recounting that memory. He moves away enough so he can gently roll me onto my back. I smile at him as he covers my body with his, then I sigh when his lips brush mine just like they did the first time that summer.

We spend the rest of the night making out like we are teenagers again.

Loving Quinn Chapter 38

(Quinn)

When I wake the next morning, Annora is still beside me with her leg thrown over my waist, and her hand over my heart. The comforter is down around her hips giving me a tantalizing view of her amazing breasts. As I reach my hand up to stroke her cheek, I hear a sound out

in the hallway.

Quickly I pull the blanket up to cover her, grab my pajamas pants off the floor, then slip them on before I walk to the door. Grace is lifting her hand to knock on the door as I open it. She smiles up at me, then shows me the time on her watch.

F**k. We are running very late today. I have about thirty minutes to get her to school.

“Give me five minutes and I will meet you in the foyer.”

She nods her head, then races down the hallway. I close the door, then quietly walk to my closet to get dressed. When I come back out, Annie is sitting up with the comforter clutched to her breasts.

“We overslept, didn’t we?”

“Yes, my love. I will take Grace to school, then head to the office from there. I have a meeting with Aaron and Evan McAllister this

morning.”

“The brother.”

“Yes. I will explain everything later, I promise.”

She blows me a kiss as I open the bedroom door. With a shake of my head, knowing that I am going to have to speed to get Grace to school on time, I rush out of the bedroom. When I reach the foyer, Grace opens the door, tosses me my keys, then rushes into the hallway.

I catch my keys, have a split second to admire her throwing arm, then rush out behind her. The life of a parent is never dull, and I am loving every minute of having her with me this week. I will miss this when Annora and Grace move back to their house when the work is

finished in the bathroom.

After everything that I learned yesterday, and despite assurances from Annora that she is sticking to me like glue, I am still scared that I will lose it all in the end. Having them both with me or not won't change things if the outcome of the DNA test proves what Dionne

claims.

"I am so sorry, Grace, but it looks like we are going to be late."

Traffic has proven to be a pain this morning, so I slow down and embrace the knowledge that I will have to walk her into school to sign her in. That means I have to talk to the attendant at the front desk. Margaret just call me Maddie' Morgan. A bleached blonde with

breasts inappropriately on display in elementary school.

I met her when I had to meet with the school principal to show him my identification to prove who I was to Grace. It shocked me I was already on file as her father at the school. Mrs. Morgan flirted with me shamelessly while I waited for the principal to call me to his office. Then when I left, she tried to slip me a piece of paper.

There was no way I was going to take her up on the offer she was trying to give me. This woman works at the school my daughter attends. There is no way I would show that level of disrespect to my child.

For another thing, miss bleach blonde was wearing a wedding ring, and refused to sleep with married women. It was always my one rule. I refused to be the one-night stand to a woman who was already someone's wife. I hate cheaters.

"Grace, do you have everything you need for lunch?" I ask her as we put into an empty parking spot in front of the school.

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"We were running late, so I didn't grab anything."

I pull my wallet out of my pocket and pull out a ten-dollar bill, then hand it to her. "Will that be enough?"

She nods her head, then takes it from me. After shoving it in her pocket, she walks with me into the front of the school. We head straight to the front office to sign her in. To my relief, Mrs. Morgan isn't the attendant at the desk.

After signing her in, I give her a hug, then head straight to the office. The drive was brutal, but it gave me time to think of things to say to Evan McAllister. Is the reason he wants to talk to me about what I found out yesterday? If so, then why now?

What made him decide to come speak to me now? Is he seeking me out because of the lawsuit that Dionne filed? Was he trying to give me a heads up about it yesterday? There are just so many d**n questions I need answers to.

When I walk out of the elevator thirty minutes later, I can see Aaron standing next to Evan McAllister in the conference room. They are laughing about something which makes me like the man despite the situation that brought him to my office.

Because I rushed out of the house this morning, I left my briefcase in my office at home. I will have to detour back home later to pick it up before I head to my lawyer's office to talk about the lawsuit Dionne filed against me.

For now, I take a deep breath, then walk into the conference room. Aaron gives me a nod of greeting when he notices me. Evan clears his throat, then walks to me, holding his hand out for me to shake. I shake his hand firmly, then motion with my free hand toward the table.

Once we are all seated, I study Evan for a moment before I speak. "What can we do for you, Mr. McAllister?"

"It is more about what I can do for you both. My brother is... blinded by his anger and jealousy. He has taken things too far with his quest to win against you."

I watch his face as he speaks. From the look in his eyes, I can tell he has genuine remorse for what his brother has done. Now to get him to tell us what those things are, to confirm my suspicions.

"What exactly has he done other than keep us tied up in that bidding war for the property we were both interested in?" Aaron asks.

From the way he has one brow lifted, I can tell Evan now has Aaron's full attention. I haven't had the chance to tell him about what my lawyer informed of or what I learned from Annora last night. My little emotion breakdown took a lot out of me.

Thankfully, I had Annora's words, soft hands, and the comfort of her love to soothe my soul like a warm summer day.

"It shames me to admit what he has done to you two. He took things too far when he hired people on your construction crews to sabotage the sites. He went behind my back with the sabotage. When I found out about it, I told him that if he didn't put an end to it, I would pull out of the company."

"Did he?"

Evan gives me a wry smile. "Only after you two hired security teams for all your constructions sites."

I lean back in my chair before I ask him the question that I already know the answer to. Again, I need to hear him confirm it all. Aaron needs to hear everything as my witness.

"Why does your brother hate us? What is he so jealous of?"

This time, Evan breaks eye contact with me and hangs his head low. His shoulders slump as he wearily shakes his head. It is like he is in disbelief at his brother's actions. When he lifts his head to meet my gaze, his eyes are now full of anger.

Anger that I know isn't aimed at me or Aaron.

"Three years ago, my brother met a woman. This woman was his therapist."

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Well, that confirms my theory that she met someone while we were together. It also proves that crossing the line between therapist and patient is a common thing for her. It makes me wonder if there were others before me. She claimed I was the first she ever crossed that line with. Now I have my doubts because I know I wasn't the last.

"He bonded with her in a way that I felt was inappropriate. Ethan claimed he loved her, but I told him it was infatuation, not love. Later, after he learned she was engaged to someone else, he went crazy."

I can see from the look on my best friend's face that Aaron has figured out who the woman is. All I do is nod at him to let him know that I, too, am aware of who she is. Then I wait for Evan to continue his story.

"She told my brother that the only reason she was going to marry this guy was because she was pregnant. She claimed she feared leaving him. He was a soldier and slightly unstable m**y from his experience in his career."

That lie makes me laugh. I was never a danger to myself or others. I never once raised a hand to her or yelled at her in anger. It is not in my nature to treat a woman like that.

“So, she spun a web of lies to convince him she loved him? Is that why she aborted my child? So she could pull your brother closer to

her?”

Evan looks at me in surprise. “You already know?”

“I had suspicions, but nothing concrete to go on. It wasn’t until last night that the last piece of the puzzle fell into place.”

“How did you find out? Wait, she didn’t abort your child. That is the baby she has now.”

“No, it isn’t. She had an abortion and the clinic she had it at called to confirm her follow-up appointment two weeks later. I spoke to the nurse personally. Confirmed the date of the abortion.”

Even frowns. “She claims the child she has now is yours. That is why my brother is angry and jealous of you. It is why he is coming after

your company.”

“I am aware of the lawsuit she filed against me. Dionne is claiming that I abandoned her and our child. Which I didn’t because she killed the only child I knew about before it ever had a chance. It was an inconvenience to her and now I know why. She was playing me and your

brother.”

Evan’s expression turns even angrier. He balls his hands into fists. He takes a few deep breaths to calm down before he speaks again. “Is there any chance at all that you are the father of her son?”

“Yes. My girlfriend confirmed that there is a slim chance. She was the one who put the last puzzle piece in place for me. Annora worked with Dionna at Mercy General briefly and actually saw your brother once. It was before Dionne left the hospital to get married.”

“Wait, so Dionne is married to Ethan McAllister?” Aaron says.

“She is,” Evan confirms.

“Were they sleeping together before she and I split up?”

“They were. I caught them together in her office when I went to pick him up after a session one afternoon. So, her son, could be my brother’s or yours?”

“That is why I am demanding a DNA test through the court. Now that I know it could be someone else’s, that is my first order of business before I allow this lawsuit to go any further.”

Evan looks at me and Aaron, then shakes his head. His eyes are sad now after he has learned just how much his brother has been played by this woman. When he speaks again, his voice goes hard with anger.

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“That woman is a menace. Ethan was ballistic when she was arrested yesterday for stalking and violating your restraining order. He didn’t know she was calling you, sending you things, or that she showed up at your home.”

“She came to my home to try to get back into my bed.”

“What the actual f**k? After knowing her history, that she was with you and my brother during the same time period, that shouldn’t surprise me, but it does.”

I give him a brief rundown of everything she has done since I first saw her that day in the therapy room at Mercy General. When I tell him about the note and the key for the meeting yesterday, Evan’s eyes flash with something close to hatred.

“That house is the one my brother just bought for her. He wanted a bigger house so they could have children. Ethan desperately wants a

child of his own with her.”

That reminds me of the fact that I may have a son. “What is the boy’s name? Her son.”

“Logan.”

“How does your brother treat Logan?”

“Ethan ignores Logan. He pretends to that the boy doesn’t exist. I think it is his way of coping with the fact that Logan isn’t his. Because that is what Dionne has told him and has let him believe for the last two years.”

My heart throbs with pity for Ethan and Logan. Despite all that Ethan has done, he is a victim, too. Dionne has lied, manipulated, and strong him along for three years. Logan is an innocent child who is being used as a pawn in Dionne's game. What kind of woman kills one baby then uses another to pit to men against each other?

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"What do you plan to do while she is in jail? She is going before a judge this afternoon for a bail hearing. I intend to be there with my lawyer to express my concerns."

"I tried to talk to Ethan last night, but he is determined to post her bail. He believes everything she told him and thinks you are just trying to pay her back for breaking up with you two years ago."

I look at Aaron for a moment after he laughs at that twist on the truth. "I broke up with her after I confronted her about the abortion. When she told me why she did it, there was no way I was going to marry her. Our child was a gift, but to her it was an inconvenience. Now I know why."

After Evan agrees to talk some sense into his brother, he leaves with the promise to speak to the judge on my behalf. Even though he feels conflicted about helping his brother, he knows Dionne is trouble. If she goes to jail, Ethan may have a chance to get clarity.

If it turns out that Logan is mine, I will do everything in my power to take him away from her. I don't like the idea of taking him away from his mother, but she has hurt too many people already with her lies and manipulations.

It will all come down to DNA. One woman, two men, and a baby that binds them together. My life is now a soap opera. Fantastic.

Tune in tomorrow...

-No way will this be my life for long.

Loving Quinn Chapter 39

(Annora)

My day passes by in a blur. All my patients are stable, and their surgeries are scheduled. My files are all caught up in record time. Every time I have a spare moment, my mind wanders back to the conversation I had with Quinn last night and the breakdown he had.

On the outside, he appears calm to most people. On the inside, he is still that wounded boy I met twelve years ago. The one who, at a young age, came to terms with his

father's withdraw from him. From the way Quinn described it to me, their house was full of love. That was until the heart of their family died.

With her death, his father shut down emotionally towards Quinn. It is a lasting wound that has stayed with him into adulthood. I assumed since he was now taking care of his father, that they had patched their relationship.

That is a topic I haven't tried to bring up since I decided to give our relationship a second chance.

From the way Quinn reacted last night to the idea of having another child with Dionne, or losing me and Grace, I can see that there is still a gaping hole in his heart. One that is crying out to be loved.

Our daughter has healed him more than she will ever know, but I can see now that he needs more. I have an idea that will make him happy, and maybe if all goes well, it can set us both on the path of healing. Something I now know we both need if we are going to have a chance.

After the way I reacted to his anger over the meeting that Dionne wanted to have with him, I know that need just as much healing as he does. Kyle did an excellent job of breaking my defenses down. I thought I was over all the jump reactions when someone touched me or

yelled at me. Quinn showed me how wrong I was about that.

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I don't fear him. It was just a reflex from my abusive experience with my ex-husband. However, something I realized after that incident is that I need to go back to therapy myself. If the three of us are going to have a future as a family, the two of us need to be in a good place m**ly.

No matter how much love we have for each other, if our foundation isn't strong enough, the c**ks will form. Then they will spread until the entire thing falls apart. I won't put Grace through that if there is anything I can do to prevent it.

So, before I leave the hospital, I call my therapist to make an appointment for first thing next week. After marking that in my calendar, I grab my purse, briefcase, and keys, then I head to pick up Grace. Since we are having dinner with my parents tonight, I want to make sure she has her homework done before we head to their house.

While she is doing her homework, it will give me a chance to talk to Quinn. I want to talk to him about what he promised me. That he would go back into therapy for his PTSD. I also want to know his conversation with Evan McAllister went this morning. Curiosity has been

eating at me all day.

What did the man want with Quinn? Why now? For me, the timing of Evan's visit is just too coincidental for my liking. His brother is married to Quinn's ex-fiancé. The same d**n woman who filed a lawsuit the same day he came to see Quinn.

To me, it seems off in a way. I hope for Quinn's sake that I am wrong. Please let me be wrong.

When I get to Grace's school, instead of waiting in the pickup line behind the buses. I pull into an empty parking spot. As I walk up the front walkway, I feel the stares of some mothers here to pick up their children.

Their judging eyes and curious looks never bothered me in the past, but they are bothering me today. I think it is because of how some of them were staring at me with jealousy in their eyes. Mrs. Taylor turns her back to me as I walk closer towards them.

I can hear them whispering but can't pick up what they are saying. One phrase sticks out when I as I get closer. 'What a s**t.' Are they calling me a s***t? I don't know any of these women personally. Our only interactions have been through school events or field trips if I had the chance to go.

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None of them ever attempted to talk to me or get to know me. I didn't try to talk to them either. I never saw the point in rubbing elbows with other parents other than parents of Grace's friends.

I clear my throat when I stop behind Mrs. Taylor. "You seem to have something to say to me. Well, here I am. Let's hear it."

The other women around her gasp in surprise when I say this. Mrs. Taylor turns around to face me. Her face is pale, like she didn't expect me to confront her. Bullies come in ages. This one is a wife, a mother, and someone who should know better.

She opens her mouth to speak, then closes it again. Her cheeks flush crimson as I continue to stare at her. I can tell from the look in her eyes that she would make a scene if we were anywhere else but here.

"Ok, so from all the whispering, the dirty looks I saw being thrown my way, you ladies seem to have a problem with me. I know why Mrs. Taylor has a problem, so I will address that one first. The man who was in the car with me the other day and sometimes picks my daughter up from school."

When none of them say anything, but a few look away, I smile at them.

“That man is her father. Quinn has come back into our lives after serving his country in the Army. He is a hero and doesn’t deserve to be treated like eye candy by any of you. He is also in a committed relationship with the love of his life. Me.”

I look at them with a steady stare. A few of them do look ashamed of themselves. Mrs. Taylor looks annoyed.

“So, I would appreciate it if you ladies would show some respect. Not just to him, but to yourselves. This is a school, not a club or bar where you would pick up men. Have some self-respect. Oh, and to whoever called me a s**t. You don’t know me or what I have lived through. How dare you judge me based on the few EXTREMELY limited interactions we have had.”

With that said, I walk away from them with my head held high. It will be better for everyone if I wait in the front lobby of the school. If I stay out there with Mrs. Taylor and her ‘I am better than you’ glare, I may cause a bigger scene than I already did.

As I wait for Grace in the lobby, I laugh at what just happened. I have never been the jealous type before. I don’t think I am now, but the way women look at him bothers me sometimes. It is something that I will have to get used to and not let it bother me.

If I am being honest with myself, I can’t blame them for looking. Quinn is absolutely drop-dead gorgeous. The way he fills out a business suit makes me want to peel him out of it, one layer at a time, like I would a banana. The tantalizing view of his a** in tight jeans makes me want to cup both of his a**cheeks in my hand and knead them like I am making bread.

That is all with him fully clothed! Every delicious inch of his naked body is something every woman fantasizes about. If I were a painter or a sculptor, he would be my muse. Knowing that all that delightfully toned body is all mine, makes me smile in pure satisfaction.

Tomorrow night, we will have our first official date night in twelve years. I can’t wait to see what he has planned for us, I also can’t wait for what he has planned for me after our date is over and we are all alone together in his penthouse. He can do anything he wants to me,

and I will happily let him.

I jump a little when the bell rings to signal the end of the day. Voices fill the hallways as children rush from their classrooms to go home for the day. I can see Grace as she walks with her friends. She waves when she spots me. She says something to her friend, then makes her

way over to me.

“Why are you in here?” She asks.

“I didn’t want to sit in the car.”

She smiles at me before she launches into the events of her day. With Grace, this is a daily ritual. On days that my mother or father pick her up, she tells me about her day when we get home. I like how she tells me about her school days.

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This was something I did with my mother until I was in high school. I felt like I was too old for it, so I started telling her about my week on the weekends. Eventually, toward the end of my senior year in high school, I stopped altogether. She seemed uninterested.

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When Grace gets to that point, I will understand, but I will still ask how her day was. I want her to know that she can always talk to me about anything. With Quinn in our lives now, she has two parents that she can talk to if she wants. I know he will always be there for her.

As we drive back to Quinn’s penthouse, Grace goes silent for a few minutes. I look over at her briefly, then back at the road. She is nibbling on her bottom lip like she does when she has something she wants to ask me.

“What is it, Grace?”

“Do we have to move back home to our house when work on the bathroom has been completed?”

I knew this question was coming, but I figured she would wait until Sunday to ask me. After spending the last few days with Quinn, I must admit that the idea of living together is growing on me. Falling asleep in his arms, waking up beside him, and having more time with just the three of us as a family is something I want more than anything.

“We will go home on Sunday, but I promise I will talk to your dad about it. I know it is something you want, Grace, and I understand. Trust me, I want this too, but all of us need to be on the same page.”

I know she is pouting without even looking at her. This is a conversation that I don’t want to have in the car, so I keep silent until we pull into the garage at Quinn’s building. After I park the car and turn the engine off, I turn to face her.

There are tears running down her cheeks as I turn her face towards me. With my thumbs, I wipe her tears off, then wait for her to look me in the eyes. When she does, the hurt in her eyes makes my heart constrict.

“Does he not want us to live with him? Is that why you keep saying no? Will he leave like Kyle did?”

That is a heavy blow she just delivered there. Grace thinks Quinn doesn’t want her like just like Kyle. She thinks because we are not living together as the family that she wants us to be is because Quinn doesn’t want us.

“Come on, let’s go upstairs and talk.”

Grace sniffles, then grabs her bag off the floorboard. After grabbing my things, I get out of the car with her. By the time we get to the apartment door, her eyes are red from her crying. When I unlock the door, she rushes inside, then straight up to her room.

This talk is going well already. After dropping my purse and briefcase off next to the hall table, I slip out of my heels, then head up to have this long overdue conversation. Grace is sitting on the edge of her bed when I walk in. The fact that her door is open shows she

wants to hear what I have to say.

I grab the chair next to her bed and pull it to the end of the bed. I sit in it so that I am facing her while I talk. After taking a deep breath, I gently tell her about truth about Kyle. The man who never wanted to be her father but faked it to get me to marry him.

“Gracie, there have been things that have happened in our lives, adult things, that I have done my absolute best to shield you from. Now I

can see that in my attempt to hide what was happening in our house, I have hurt you.”

She raises her head to look at me. The tears running down her cheeks makes me angry at myself. I thought it was better that she didn’t know what Kyle was like. I kept telling myself that she was too young to know about the domestic violence happening right under her

nose.

“Kyle abused me. He hurt me with more than his words. Sometimes it was his hands or fists. I made him leave after he hurt me so badly that I had to go to the hospital. You stayed with grandma and grandpa that night.”

Anger quickly replaced the shock in Grace’s eyes. “Why did you let him stay for so long? He hurt you. Why did you let him stay?”

Those are questions I asked myself all the time after I finally had enough. Why did I let him stay even though he hurt me? I didn't love him anymore, and he never loved Grace. Why did I ever marry that man

"I don't know, baby. There is one thing I know, and I think you know it too. Quinn is nothing like Kyle. He has loved you since the day I told him about you. He has done everything in his power to show you that. I robbed you of time with him by not looking for him as you got older. That is on me."

"Then why can't we all live together?"

"We can if you want to," Quinn says from behind me.

Just like that, there he is.

Loving Quinn Chapter 40

(Quinn)

After the day I had, all I wanted was to get home, change, then spend the night with my future in-laws. When I finally get home, my first thought was to find my girls. I stopped at the bank to grab the ring I bought for Annora years ago, then I stopped by the floral shop for

flowers.

A dozen red roses for Annora, pink roses for Grace, and a spring floral arrangement for Mrs. Winters. I leave the floral arrangement on the hall table and bring the roses with me as head up the stairs towards Grace's room. I hear Annora's voice as I get to the door to Grace's

room.

She is telling Grace about what Kyle did to her. Why she made him leave. I have heard this already from her, but hearing it again makes my heart hurt for my girls. I am grateful to Annora for shielding Grace from all that Kyle did.

When I hear the vulnerability in Annie's voice after Grace asks why she let Kyle stay for so long, I walk closer to the door as quietly as possible. I will do everything I can to make sure my girls are safe. Kyle will never hurt them again.

I am about to step into the room when Grace asks why we all can't live together. It is a question I have asked myself all day. At first, I thought it was because we are just not ready for that step, but our daughter clearly is.

"We can if you want to."

Grace's eyes go wide when I step into the room and Annora spins around in her chair to face me. Her eyes are equally surprised to see me. However, I can see uncertainty in those hazel depths as well.

"I bought these beautiful flowers for my girls. However, I can see we all need to have a family chat first before we head to dinner."

I sit the flowers down on Grace's dresser, then walk to the end of the bed where she is sitting. I lower myself down beside her, then put my arm around her shoulder. She leans into me as I look at Annora.

"Hear me out, both of you. I had an idea today on the way home. This is new to all of us, and I can clearly see that is something we all

want to explore. I suggest a trial run."

Grace pulls away to look at me with confusion in her eyes. I hold up my hand to ask her to hear me out, then I look at Annora. I can see that she is following my train of thought. There is a smile on her face. It makes me think she has a similar idea.

"Now, what I have in mind is simple. Rather than we rush this living together thing. We try something like what we have been doing this week. Only we alternate houses. One week you two stay here with me, the next week I stay with you two at your place."

I can see that I now have their full attention.

"This isn't because I don't want to live with you, Grace. So, please, don't think that. I want to take this slow so that we can all get used to each other. This is new for all of us. You have had your mom this whole time. I want to make sure my addition to the family dynamic you two have doesn't cause problems. Until now, you have only been with me on the weekends."

I put my finger under her chin when she looks down at her lap.

"Grace, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I want to make sure for all of us we work together as a family. You and your mother mean everything to me. So, in order for us to reach the goal that you want for us, we need to go slow."

The smile she gives me makes my heart feel lighter, When she throws her arms around me, laugh as I hold her tight. I glance over her shoulder to look at Annora. She has been silent this entire time. Her silence has me worried.

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When she gives me that amazing smile that just lights up my entire world, I know she is all in with my idea. I know I should have talked to her about my plan instead of just

springing it on her like this. When I heard the tears in Grace's voice, I knew it was a risk I had to

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take.

"Ok, Grace, get started on your homework. What you don't finish before you need to get ready for dinner, you will take with you to do after dinner." Annora says.

She stands up from her chair, then walks out of the room. Grace pulls back from our hug to get up off the bed. I stand up to go grab her flowers off the dresser, then turn around to show them to her.

"I bought these for you. The florist told me that pink roses mean elegance and sweetness. They were also my mother's favorite color of roses. Your mother gave you the name Elizabeth after my mother. One night soon, I will tell you about her. For now, I will take these downstairs to put them in some water."

"I love you, Daddy."

"I love you too, Grace."

After she picks her backpack up off the floor, I grab the red roses off the dresser, then take them down to the kitchen. Annora is already in the kitchen waiting for me. She has two large vases that I didn't even know I had, already filled with water.

When she turns to face me, I stop in my tracks. She is crying. I put the flowers on the counter, then pull her into my arms. She wraps her arms around my waist and hugs me tight.

"Hey. Look, I know I should have talked to you first, but I..."

Annora pulls away enough to pull my head down, so my mouth meets hers. The kiss she gives me is tender yet passionate. When she pulls away, the smile she gives me lets me know I did the right thing.

"Your idea is good. I like it. I was going to suggest something similar or just ask you to move in with me and Grace. There is also the idea

of selling my house and moving us both in here with you."

"Wait, I thought you said we weren't ready for that yet?"

“I was thinking about this today, just like you were. The way we have been this week, just the three of us, I want that every day. However, let’s try your idea first. Do your trial run. For how long?”

With a tug, I pull her closer against me. “How about we try six months? If it still feels right at the end of the six months, we will talk about where we are going to live together as a family after that.”

“Deal. Now, put those flowers in the vases. I am going to get changed for dinner.”

She pulls out of my arms to rush upstairs to get changed. I am not sure what to do, so I just pull the tissue paper off and put the flowers in the vases. Annora can fix them to her liking when we get home later. With nothing else to do down here, I follow her to get myself

changed for dinner with her parents.

Suddenly I am that teenaged boy I used to be when I had my first dinner with her family. I am nervous about sitting down with them again after all these years. The boy I was back then hadn’t been through wars, lost friends, and lost part of myself.

They accepted me into their family over that summer, but will they accept me as I am now?

“Hey, you look like you are going to puke.”

Annora’s voice pulls me out of my thoughts. I turn to look at her after I finish buttoning my shirt. She looks stunning in her pale green dress. She has left her hair down, and it makes me want to tangle my fingers in those soft curls.

Are you nervous about having dinner with my parents? This was your idea. Why are you nervous?”

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“I am not the same person I used to be back then. What if your parents don’t like the new me?”

“Come here.”

She points at a spot on the floor in front of her. I bow my head as I walk out of my closet to where she is standing at the foot of the bed. I feel horrible for thinking how I am, but I just can’t seem to stop the fear that keeps rushing through my head.

"My father was angry when I told him I was pregnant with Grace. He knew you were the father, but he accepted it because he saw something in you back then. Something that he didn't tell me about until years later."

I look up at her then because I feel what she is about to say is important.

"The night before my wedding to Kyle, my father pulled me aside to talk to me."

Anger flairs through me at the mention of Kyle. I hate that man. Is this how she feels every time Dionne gets brought up? Now I feel like

an a**hole.

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked me if I was sure I wanted to marry a man like Kyle. A man who smiles at people but has meanness in his eyes. He saw in Kyle what I didn't see until it was too late. When I asked him who he thought I should marry instead, he smiled at me. Then he told me about a young man he met years ago one summer by the lake. A boy who left to serve his country. That boy showed integrity and kindness."

I swallow the sudden lump in my throat. Her father was talking about me. The night before she was to marry another man, he was telling her he wished she were marrying me instead. Suddenly I feel like a fool for being nervous.

"Did he really say that?"

"He did. You showed him something that summer. Yeah, it pi**ed him off to know you and I had premarital sex and I ended up pregnant, but he respects you. Then, when you stood up and took responsibility for Grace, he was proud of you. He looked your company up. He wanted to know what you and Aaron do."

I am amazed at everything she told me. I never thought her father thought of me like that. "Thank you. Now, let's go have dinner with your parents. Then when we get home tonight, we can talk more about this trial run."

Annora smiles, then closes the distance between our bodies. She presses her body against mine suggestively, making my blood pump faster. Her hand slides up my chest sensually, making my c**k throb.

"Hold that thought right there, baby. I don't want to go to your parents house with a h**d-on. Even though I really like the way you are thinking right now."

Annora laughs, then leaves the room. I take a moment to think about anything other than getting her naked, pinning her under me, then making her come hard all over my

c**k. F**k, that isn't helping either. I have never had this strong of a reaction to any woman but her. She can make my heart race just by giving me a certain look.

She owns me.

She owns every fiber of my being.

I reach into my pocket to rub my finger over the leather pouch that I pick up at the bank on my way home today. Deciding it will be better to put it in the safe in my office, I head downstairs. As I pass Grace's room, I hear Annora talking softly to her.

Rather than stick around to overhear what they are talking about, I keep walking. If it is important, Annora will fill me in later. I walk down the stairs, then head to my office. Once I put the leather pouch in my safe, I head out into the living room to wait for my girls.

While I wait, I check my email with my phone. I read through progress reports from our site managers. Now that we have security in

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place, there have been no more accidents' on the construction sites. That is good news and something Evan confirmed today.

Which reminds me, I need to tell Annora about what happened with Evan. She was right about Ethan Dionne being married. The rest will shock her, or maybe it won't, since some of it didn't really surprise me at all. (1

I felt a little better knowing the truth now. All of it. My gut instinct was right all along. Knowing that I let my guard down for her makes me feel like a fool, I believed her when she told me she loved me. I believed her because I wanted to find something to make my life worth living.

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What I didn't know was that I had something far better to live for than I knew.

I turn my head to look at the stairs when I hear Grace's voice. When I see her coming down the stairs with Annora right behind her, I can't help thinking that I am the luckiest man in the world right now. My amazing daughter has brought so much light into my life since I met her.

Then there is the most beautiful, thoughtful, and s**t woman in the world right behind her. Between the two of them, I can see I will have my hands full in the future. More than I already do. Grace's teenage years will be here before her mother and I know what hit us.

That thought is enough to send a s***ke of apprehension through my system. She is already beautiful to me, but I can already imagine all the boys knocking on my door. Knowing what teenage boys are like, I am not looking forward to those days at all.

"What put that sour look on your face?" Annora asks.

"It suddenly dawned on me that Grace will be a teenager soon. A teenager, Annie. Boys, dating, malls, and learning to drive."

Grace pulls a face when I mention boys and I laugh despite the fear that raced through me at the rest of things I mentioned. Annora laughs, then holds her hand out to me. With a frown on my face, I stand up then walk to her. She grabs my hand when I reach for her, then gives my knuckles a kiss.

"We have a few more years to prepare for that. Let's not rush it or panic. Yet."

I can't help it. Panic has set in and there is no going back.

I will be that dad.

You better believe it.

Run teenage boys.... Run fast.

Loving Quinn Chapter 41

(Quinn)

My nerves return when I pull into the driveway of Annora's parent's home. Even though she reassured me I have nothing to worry about. I can't help but feel nervous. The last time I was here it was to meet my daughter for the first time. I was a heap of nerves then, too.

Her parents welcomed me that night, but her dad got straight to the point of my visit by sending me down the hallway to face Grace. It has been six months since that night. I need so badly for tonight to go smoothly.

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summer, Vivien was always kind to me. She asked me about my family but didn't push when I hesitated to talk about my mom. One afternoon, she pulled me aside to tell me

she was sorry about what happened. There was no pity in her eyes, only sympathy. I felt more relaxed with her after that

Alexander, on the other hand, was cordial but not friendly. He always looked to be distracted by other matters. There was also noticeable tension between him and his wife. Since they are still married, I can only presume they fixed their issues. After all Annora told me earlier, it seems her father paid better attention that summer than I assumed he did.

After taking a deep breath, I get out of the car, then wait for Annora to join me. She grabs my hand, gives it a slight squeeze. Grace dashes past us to the door, but stops to wait for us.

“Take a deep breath and relax, Quinn. I don’t recall you bring this nervous when you met them t

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twelve years ago. They won’t bite.”

I glance at her. “You and Grace are important to me, Annie. I want this life we are building together, the one we dreamed of when we were eighteen. Making a positive impression with your parents this time around is important”

“Quinn, I love you. That is what should matter here, If my parents have an issue with us being together, then that is on them. We are no longer eighteen. Trust me when I say this, you have absolutely nothing to worry about here. My mother and father are on our side here.”

There is so much to worry about in my life right now. This is one part that I wish to work smoothly. So, after nodding my head, we stroll to the front door. Grace opens it and dashes inside, calling for her grandfather. I follow behind Annora, then close the door quietly behind.

I stand in the foyer stiffly with the bouquet I bought in my hand. Annunchuckles at my sudden shyness before she moves me down the hallway toward the kitchen. As we get closer to the kitchen, I can hear Vivien’s voice instructing Grace to go tell her grandfather that dinner is almost ready

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I feel Annora's palm rub over my back, causing me to glance at her. She is smiling as she watches me unwind. Her eyes are conveying "I told you so, which causes me to chuckle quietly.

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Annora snickers, then nods her head. She takes my hand again, then draws me toward the living room. My nervousness returns as she leads me into the room. Her dad is right behind me, and I suddenly feel like I am about to be interviewed like a teenager on prom night.

We walk to a cream-colored love seat, then take our seats. Annora angles her body towards mine while still holding onto my hand. It is like she can feel the nervous energy pumping off me. Relax. Just f**king relax. I tell myself as her dad sits in a brown leather wing-back

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“Are you still active now?”

“Reserves.”

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Chapter Comments Loving Quinn

Chapter 41

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Loving Quinn Chapter 42

(Annora)

Once Quinn finally relaxed, dinner with my parents went better than I thought it would. My mother loved the flowers she bought her. I was extremely curious about when he and my father talked about, but he just laughed and said he would tell me later. Now we are back at his penthouse, and he is putting Grace in her bed.

She fell asleep in the car on the way home, I am currently in the kitchen fixing the roses Quinn bought for me and Grace. I laughed when I saw all he did was put them in the water. Some men just don’t know what to do with flowers.

Once I am done with them, I take the red roses upstairs with me after leaving Grace's pink one on the kitchen island. She can see them in the morning when she has breakfast. I want mine in the bedroom where I can see them all the time. Well, until we go home on Sunday.

Quinn's plan for our living arrangements for the next six months is a good plan. My bed isn't nearly as big as his, so sleeping there with him will be fun. He is taller than I am, so his feet may hang off the end of my queen-sized bed. I can see it already in my head. It causes me to laugh as I enter our bedroom.

I hear his voice when I walk in, but I don't see him. The slight breeze that I feel blow through the room makes me look towards the balcony door. It is open a c**k and I can now see his shadow on the ground. Gently I sit the vase of rose on the dress then walk to the

door.

"I can't wait for you to meet her, Tori. Grace is amazing." Quinn says.

He is on the phone. I feel a bit embarrassed for eavesdropping, but he left the door open, so I walk to stand where he can see be on this

side of the door.

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"Yes. I reserved to penthouse suite for you two. I also made reservations for you guys for dinner tomorrow night." He laughs at something/ she said before he responds. "I thought it would be nice for you to have a family night out together. Aaron has missed you, but he won't say anything. Yes, he is his father's son."

Tori is Victoria Carter, Aaron's mother. He mentioned her earlier when he was telling my mom about his father. She is coming into town tomorrow with her husband. Quinn already told me this, but it didn't occur to me that is who he is talking to. The name Tori made me think of other things, and now I am ashamed of myself.

When I met her that summer, she introduced herself as Victoria, I never knew her nickname. She was always nice to me. Now I do and I feel like a fool for my jealous thoughts.

"Ok, I will see you on Saturday, Goodnight."

After he hangs up the phone, he turns to come back inside, but stops when he sees me at the balcony door. He gives me a huge smile as he walks inside. Something in my eyes must have given my thoughts away because he frowns after closing the door behind him,

“What?”

Do I admit to him what my first thought was when I heard him talking on the phone to another woman? I can't even believe that my first instinct was thinking he was cheating. Quinn has spent every spare minute that he isn't at work with me and Grace in some way.

“Did you think-Tori was my mistress or a booty call?”

feel my cheeks heat at the accusatory tone in his voice. Unable to meet the weight of his stare, I look down at the ground, then nod my head in shame. When he says nothing and the silence in the room becomes so heavy that I feel like I can't breathe, I look raise my head.

Quinn isn't by the balcony door. I look around the room for him, only to find that he is no longer in the room with me. He is angry at me, So he left the room. He told me that if I ever made him angry, like I just did, he would leave the room until he calmed down.

Rather than make an unpleasant situation worse, I take a deep breath, then head into the bathroom to get ready for bed. When I come back out, Quinn is sitting on the end of the bed. In his hand is a worn either pouch that looks like it has seen better days. As our eyes meet, I see no anger in those sea-green depths,

“Come sit by me, please, Annie.”

I swallow hard, then do as he requests. His eyes soften as I sit next to him. I lean into the palm of his hand when he reaches up and cups my cheek.

“Twelve years ago, I made a promise to you. It was something I knew in my heart that I may never keep, but I made it anyway, I promised you that one day I would come back to you.”

Before I can stop them, tears slide down my cheeks. I remember that night. It was the same night I gave him the St. Michael's medal. I gave him a going away present, and he gave me Grace.

“The first chance I had after I was deployed for the first time, I bought something for you that I planned to give you when I saw you next. In my mind, that was going to be soon. In reality, it was twelve years later.”

I watch as he opens the leather pouch. His fingers fish around inside for a moment before he pulls something out. My eyes go wide when I realize he is holding a ring in between his thumb and forefinger. It is a simple golden band with a small, marquise cut diamond in the center. It isn't anything grand, but to me it is absolutely perfect.

"I was going to give this to you tomorrow, but I can see that you need to be reminded of my love for you."

20h, Quinn. It is beautiful."

"Now, before you say anything, hear me out first. This ring represents that promise."

He bought me a promise ring. One he intended to give me years ago. Now he has the chance. My heart melts in my chest as love for him swamps me. Can he get any sweeter?

"With this ring, I promise you I will be faithful to you. I promise to share my concerns, my fears, and all my problems with you. This is to promise you that when the day comes that we are both ready for that next step, I will happily make that leap with you."

I lift my right hand to let him slip it on my ring finger. To my surprise, it fits like a glove. I will have to ask him how he knew my ring size) all those years ago. Unable to help myself, I hold my hand up to the light to watch the diamond on my hand sparkle. A giggle escapes my lips as he stands up off the bed and lifts me up into his arms.

Quinn carries me to the balcony doors, then after he opens the door, he carries me outside to one of the lounge chairs. Once we are seated, a peaceful silence settles over us. The stars in the sky seem brighter tonight, but I think that is just my mood. I am happy for the first time in far too long.

"I need to tell you about the meeting with Evan and then my lawyer."

Then, just like that, the stars are less bright. Reality pulls me back down to face the music of our situation with Dionne. That woman has been nothing but trouble for Quinn since she showed up here wanting to rekindle what they used to have.

"Did he confirm what you thought about his brother?"

Yes. He even confirmed that Ethan and Dionne were sleeping together before she and I split. Which he agreed to testify to if this lawsuit

goes to trial

"Well, there will be the initial court date where we will plead our case. Give the facts. Make our request for the DNA test. Since there is a possibility of me being the father of her son, her entire case hinges on that test."

"Son? She has a son. What is his name?"

"Logan, I asked Evan how his brother treats the boy, and it isn't good. Bhan ignores him and pretends that Logan doesn't exist."

Outrage fills my veins at how an innocent child is treated. "Why does he treat Logan that way? Is it because she told him that the boy is yours?"

My heart breaks for that little boy.

An innocent victim in Dionne's

game.

I wake up to the sound of Quinn's heavy breathing. His body jerks frantically in his sleep. I know instantly that he is having a nightmare. After the conversation he had at my parent's house tonight, I have a feeling he is dreaming about his mother.

My heart breaks for him. Talking about his father brought all the memories of his mother's death to the surface. So, I take a risk that is who he is dreaming about. I reach out my hand to lay it softly over his heart. His heart is pounding erratically. I can feel it thumping wildly against my palm as I touch him.

Quinn's breath shudders out

out then back in, as if in his dream he is crying. I press my body close to his, then rub my palm over his chest. After a few more minutes of his heavy breathing, he jerks awake. His eyes are wild when they meet mine.

The raw pain in his eyes and the tears slipping down his cheeks makes me lean forward to press my lips against his forehead. "Let it all out, Quinn. I am right here."

He swallows hard a few times, then his hand comes up to grip mine. "I was dreaming about that day the county Sheriff came to our door."

Rather than interrupt him, I lay my hand on his shoulder to let him know I am listening. He needs to talk it out. I listened to the brief story he gave me in the past. I will listen again.

"My father was already worried. She was late, and she was rarely late. The minute we both saw the red and blue lights flashing through the window, I saw fear in his eyes for the first time in my life. I jump when the Sheriff knocked on the front door. I was only eight years old, so I didn't understand right away what was going on. Why they were there."

I sit up to grab the glass of water off the nightstand on my side of the bed. I take a sip, then hand him the glass. He sits up and leans his back against the headboard before he takes the glass from me. After drinking the rest of the glass, he puts it on his nightstand, then stares out into the darkness of our room. Just when I think he is done talking about that day, he takes a deep breath, then continues.

"When my father opened the door, I was in the hallway. I could see the Sheriff's face as he took his hat off. Even at eight years old, I knew. I just knew something horrible had happened. Before the Sherrif could even say anything, my father started shaking his head, just back and forth in obvious denial."

"I will never forget the sound he made after he was told that my mother was killed in an auto accident just three miles from our house. He fell to his knees, screamed at the Sheriff, then just broke down and sobbed. Her was incoherent after that. Just withdrew into himself."

He stops talking to glance at me. His eyes are still haunted, but the tears have dried. I don't like how pale he is, but I know that will go away after he gets some sleep. I will do my best to soothe him to sleep when he finally gets all those memories out of his head. He holds

his hand out and I take it. This is all I can do for now.

Quinn looks away from me, then speaks again.

"The deputy with the Sherrif saw me standing there in the hallway with tears in my eyes. They ended up taking me to my grandmother, who lived an hour away, because my dad just checked out m*y. I liv**ed with her for two years before she died, and child services took me to my dad."

He falls silent again, but this time, I feel like he has said all he wants to about that day. I lift his hand to my lips and give his knuckles a gentle kiss. There are no words to say in a situation like the one he lived through. When he told me about his mother's death twelve years ago, all I could tell him was how sorry I was for his loss.

That line seems over-used and insincere to me now.

"I want to tell Grace about her grandmother. If I can share my memories of her with my daughter, I think maybe it will be...." Quinn looks

at me as he struggles to articulate his thoughts.

"It can be a way to bond further with your daughter as a way to help you heal. You will never forget your mother, Quinn. Share her with Grace."

He nods his head, then turns to look at me. "Thank you for letting me talk it out. It was what I needed to do after that dream. I love you,

Annie,"

I lean in to press my forehead against his. "I love you too, Quinn."

We get comfortable again to try to sleep. Quinn rolls me over onto my side, then scoots close behind me to cradle my back against his chest. My a** is pressed firmly against his groin. With his powerful arms wrapped around me, I feel completely safe.

However, I feel it should be me holding him instead, to give him the comfort he needs. When he rubs his nose into my hair and sighs in content, I realize I am giving him the comfort he needs. Just by me being right here in his arms.

"I love the smell of your shampoo, the smell of your skin and the way you fit against me. It is going to be rough sleeping alone again when you go home."

Wiggling in his arms, I roll over to face him. "I feel the same way. Think of it this way, the t night together again explosive."

"That is a promise I am going to hold you to, Annie."

time apart during the night will make our first