



# Lakeside Longing

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**Category:** Romance, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** At 30, Quinn Fallon is the epitome of Hollywood success: fame, fortune, and a string of high-profile romances with the industry's most eligible bachelors. But when an on-screen kiss with a woman ignites unexpected feelings, Quinn's picture-perfect world begins to crumble.

In search of escape from the relentless paparazzi and the pressure of her public persona, Quinn retreats to a secluded lake house in upstate New York, just minutes from her parents' home. There, she unexpectedly reconnects with Rebecca Moretti, her mother's captivating 48-year-old best friend. Recently divorced and embracing her authentic self, Rebecca opens Quinn's eyes to a world of passion and possibility she never knew existed.

As autumn leaves turn, Quinn finds herself irresistibly drawn to Rebecca, questioning everything she thought she knew about herself and her desires. Their growing connection challenges Quinn's long-held assumptions about her own sexuality, leading her on a journey of self-discovery she never anticipated.

But their blossoming relationship is far from simple. Quinn grapples with the potential impact on her public image and career, while Rebecca must navigate the delicate balance between her feelings for Quinn and her decades-long friendship with Quinn's mother.

With everything at stake, both women must decide what they're willing to risk for love. Will they embrace their unexpected connection and rewrite their own stories, or will fear and obligation keep them forever apart?

**Total Pages (Source):** 33

Quinn Fallon gently guided her rental car down the familiar winding road. She turned down her upbeat playlist that she'd been distracting herself with for the last two hours as she looked out for the house she'd rented. The leaves were just beginning to hint at the change of seasons, with subtle splashes of gold and orange peeking out amidst the sea of green.

As Quinn drove deeper into the forest, she could feel herself getting restless again. She hadn't told anyone other than her manager that she was leaving. Even her parents didn't know she was staying after her mother turned fifty next week. They just thought Quinn was here for her birthday, but right now, she had no idea how or when she'd go back to her home tucked away in the Hollywood hills, never mind when she would act again.

The lake came into view, its surface a perfect mirror reflecting the partly cloudy sky above. The sight took Quinn's breath away, even after all these years. She was so lucky she'd grown up here, and it was hard to believe how much her life had changed since she'd left here nine years ago.

She turned onto a gravel driveway as she spotted the olive green door of her rental house. This lake house, just a two-minute drive from her parents' place, would be her home for the next year.

Killing the engine, Quinn sat for a moment, letting her gaze roam over the structure. It was similar to her parents' place – weathered clapboard siding, a wide porch, shutters framing the windows – but with its own unique charm.

Quinn opened the car door and stepped out, inhaling deeply. The air was crisp and cool, tinged with the invigorating scent of pine and the fresh, clean smell of the nearby lake. She closed her eyes for a few seconds, the aromas surrounding her bringing back so many happy memories.

Her boots crunched softly on the gravel as she made her way to the trunk. Popping it open, she smiled wryly at her designer suitcases, so out of place in this rustic setting. As she lifted the first bag, a gentle breeze swept in from the lake, rustling the leaves and carrying with it the earthy scent of the forest towards her.

Quinn paused, bag in hand, and turned to face the lake. The breeze played with her hair, sending golden strands dancing across her vision. She brushed them aside, her gaze drawn to the tree line on the far shore. Even from this distance, she could see the patchwork of colors beginning to emerge – hints of amber and scarlet in the vast expanse of green.

Why didn't she make the time to come back here more often? She hadn't spent more than a day or two here since she'd left, mostly at Christmas, occasionally for Thanksgiving if she wasn't filming, and one year for the Fourth of July. If she wasn't in the middle of making a movie, she was promoting her last one, and in what little free time she did have, she was often supporting whatever guy she was dating or some of her friends at their movie premiers or going to some awards show. She knew she'd miss events while she was here, but she just had to get away, and she'd have to let her team do damage control and make up excuses for why she was suddenly unavailable.

The thought of her public persona sent a shiver through Quinn that had nothing to do with the chilly September air. Out here, surrounded by nature, the glitz and glamour of her Los Angeles life felt distant and somehow less real. Who was she, really, without the makeup and carefully cultivated image?

Quinn shook her head, pushing the existential questions aside for the moment. She had time to figure it all out. That's why she was here. She just needed some time and space to think, to breathe. To understand what the hell was going on with her.

As she turned back to the car to retrieve her second bag, Quinn's phone buzzed in her pocket. She fished it out, her heart skipping a beat when she saw Piper's name on the screen. For a moment, she considered ignoring the call. But Piper was her best friend, one of the few people in the industry she truly trusted. With a deep breath, Quinn swiped to accept the video call as she walked up the steps to the porch and followed it to the back of the house.

"Hey," Piper said with a smile. Her face was free of any makeup and her brown hair was tied back in a ponytail. Quinn could just about make out the sound of waves crashing into the shoreline in the distance. "Where are you? I thought you were between jobs."

Quinn ran a hand through her slightly tousled hair. In the small screen, she caught a glimpse of herself – cheeks flushed from the fresh air, eyes tired and uncertain. She hardly recognized the woman staring back at her.

"I'm in upstate New York," she said, her voice sounding strange to her own ears. "I rented a lake house. It's just a couple minutes from my parents' place. My mom's turning fifty next week."

Piper's brow furrowed. "Is she? I never would have guessed. I was going to ask you if you wanted to come up to the beach house for a few days, but maybe when you get back?"

Quinn bit her lip, her gaze drifting back to the lake. The gentle breeze sent soft ripples across its surface. "I think I'm going to stay out here for a while. I rented the house for a year."

Piper's mouth fell open. "A year? What kind of strings did you have to pull to clear your schedule like that? Maybe I need to change managers."

Quinn swallowed. "I didn't have anything lined up, and I knew I needed a break so..." She shrugged. "Here I am."

Piper didn't say anything for a few seconds. "Quinn, are you okay?"

Quinn pressed her lips together. How could she explain what she barely understood herself?

"Piper," she began, her voice barely above a whisper, "can I ask you something? Have you ever... felt anything when you kissed a guy on set?"

Leaves rustled beside her as a chipmunk scurried by.

"No."

Quinn's heart raced as she pressed on. "What about women?"

Again, Piper's response was immediate. "No. Why?"

The question hung in the air, heavy with implication. Quinn opened her mouth to respond, but the words wouldn't come. How could she explain the unexpected spark that had ignited during what should have been just another on-screen kiss? How could she describe the way it had shaken the very foundations of her identity?

Quinn turned away from the lake, her reflection in the glass door of the lake house catching her eye. She saw the uncertainty, the fear, and the confusion that she'd been trying to outrun. Piper's voice brought her back to the present.

“Quinn, talk to me. What’s going on?” Piper’s voice was soft, concerned.

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*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 3:52 pm*

Quinn took a deep breath, her heart pounding in her chest. “I don’t know.” She started pacing, trying to collect her thoughts. “Maybe that was why I was so worried about taking on that role. I felt more nervous in the lead-up to filming than I ever have before.” She paused, her gaze drifting over the lake. “I thought it was just guilt. Yet another straight woman playing a lesbian when there are plenty of queer actresses who would have killed for that part.”

“Did something happen?”

Quinn swallowed hard. “When it came time for the kiss, I thought I’d be fine. It’s just acting, right? Two straight women playing their parts. But then I looked into her eyes, and there was this... This spark.” She shook her head as she spoke, still not quite believing that any of this had happened. “The way she touched my face... It felt electric. It was as if everything went quiet, and it was just the two of us in that moment.” Quinn hesitated, trying to find the words. “It felt real, Piper. I know everyone on set said that we had this amazing chemistry, but there was a level of vulnerability that I didn’t anticipate. I mean, I’ve kissed countless guys both on camera and off camera, and it always felt like... Okay. Nothing world-altering. But this time? I felt seen, like she was looking into parts of me that I’ve kept hidden. I know she was acting. And she did a fantastic job. But I know I wasn’t. Not like she was. And now I feel sick with guilt.”

“Quinn.” Piper’s voice was so soft. “I wish I could hug you right now.”

“Me too.” A tear streaked down her cheek before she could wipe it away.

“What happened after that?”

Quinn shrugged. “Nothing. Well, I somehow managed one more take, but I don’t even remember it, and I’m pretty sure I messed up my lines. I was a nervous wreck by that point. I kept thinking, can she tell? Does she know that I felt something? We’ve never worked together before, and I doubt we ever will again.”

“When did this happen?”

“A month ago.”

Piper sighed. “Why didn’t you call me?”

Quinn swiped at her eye as another tear threatened to fall. “I couldn’t even think about it. I can barely think about it now.”

“Do you think you’re bi?”

Quinn sucked in a breath. “I think I’ve been so caught up feeling guilty and how the whole thing was so unprofessional that I haven’t really processed what happened. But Piper... I felt more on that set than I ever have in my entire life,” she said, her voice cracking.

“Aw, Quinn.”

“How could I not know this about myself?”

Piper gave her this adorable, sad smile. “Not everybody figures it out when they’re teenagers.”

“I know, but...” Quinn exhaled. “It’s not even like I’m actually attracted to this woman. It was... I think it was just that she was a woman.” She stopped pacing. “Piper, I’m gay, aren’t I?”



Piper's lips slid into a smile. "You know that's for you to figure out, but it does sound like it. Can I be the first to welcome you to the club?"

Quinn's hand went to her forehead. "How did I not know?"

Piper laughed softly. "It's really just hitting you now, isn't it?"

"I'm shaking," Quinn said out loud as she slid her hand away and held it out in front of her, her fingers trembling. "I'm actually shaking."

"It's okay," Piper said softly. "It's a lot to process. You just need time to figure things out."

Quinn eased herself into one of the Adirondack chairs, her legs suddenly weak. She thought back to high school, to her friends, to her teachers, but she came up with nothing. She hadn't been attracted to one of them.

Her phone buzzed in her hand, her mother's name on the screen, and a wave of nausea hit Quinn. "I'm going to have to come out." She'd said it to herself, momentarily forgetting that Piper was there.

Piper smiled. "Quinn, one step at a time."

"No, my mother's calling. I'm going over there for dinner. They're going to know that something's wrong."

"It's going to be fine. Just tell them you're burnt out. Don't say anything until you're ready to, okay? I highly doubt your parents are going to throw you out."

That snapped Quinn out of her spiral. "Shit. I'm sorry, Piper." She shook her head.

“It’s okay. It happened. I survived. And I’m telling you that your family are not going to be anything like my parents were. Based on everything you’ve told me about them, it’s just not going to happen.”

“I know.” Quinn took a deep breath. “I better call her back.”

## Page 3

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“Okay. Hey, I’m just as shocked as you are,” Piper said with a smile. “But I’m so happy for you.”

“I don’t know what to think.” She leaned back fully, resting her head against the wood. “I feel... Drunk or something.”

“Wait til you fall in love.”

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The aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with the warmth of the autumn sun filtering through the large windows of the cozy café. Rebecca Moretti leaned back in her chair, her hands wrapped around a steaming mug of chai latte, savoring the comforting blend of spices. Across from her, Sarah Fallon took a sip of her cappuccino, a smile tugging at her lips as she set her mug down.

“So, how did your date go last week?” Sarah asked.

Rebecca smiled, recalling the evening she had spent with the charming woman she’d met online. “It was nice,” she said, her voice soft and contemplative. “We had dinner at a little Italian place a little over an hour from here. We wanted to meet somewhere that was halfway, but yeah, she was lovely. Great sense of humor, easy to talk to.”

“But?” Sarah prompted, sensing the hesitation in Rebecca’s tone.

“But she lives two and a half hours away,” Rebecca sighed, her fingers tracing the intricate pattern on her mug. “I’m not sure there’s much point in pursuing it.”

“How are there no gay women here?”

“There are, but they’re spoken for. All four of them,” Rebecca said with a slight roll of her eyes. “It’s just the way it is. Facebook tells me that three women and five men that I graduated with are gay, and they all live in New York, Seattle, or somewhere in California. It’s just easier to leave.”

“Would you have left? If you’d known?”

Rebecca opened her mouth and closed it again. “I don’t know.” Sometimes, Rebecca wished that she could have had more self-awareness when she was younger. “Things were different back then. I didn’t really think beyond finding a guy to settle down with, and Anthony was the obvious choice. We spent all our time together anyway.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever said this out loud, but I’m proud of you.” Sarah leaned forward, her blond hair falling across her shoulders. “I’m serious. If I were in your shoes, I would have stayed married.”

“Yeah, but you had children. I didn’t.” Rebecca took a sip of her coffee. “But thank you for saying that. I still feel guilty though. That I wasted Anthony’s time. He’s starting over too. It’s not just me out there dating.”

“You have nothing to feel guilty about.”

“I know, but...”

“But nothing. I think you forget sometimes how easy it would have been for you to keep going as you were. You weren’t unhappy, right?”

“No. I wasn’t. But I realized I was into women when I was twenty-five so I stayed in that marriage for twenty more years.” Rebecca shook her head. “I still can’t believe it

took me as long as it did to tell Anthony.”

“But you did tell him. And here you are, three years later, officially divorced and trying to meet someone. And I know you will.”

“I don’t know. Not everybody is as lucky as you.”

Sarah smiled, the lines around her eyes fanning as she did. “Don’t I know it. Reagan barely tells me who she’s seeing, and well, I have to hear about Quinn’s love life from the tabloids while I’m waiting in line at the grocery store. I would love for both of my daughters to settle down, but there’s no sign of it.”

Rebecca brought her mug to her lips and took another drink. Sometimes, she forgot that Sarah’s oldest daughter, that athletic teenager who always looked after her younger sister, was now a world-famous actress. “They’re still young.”

“Quinn just turned thirty, and every time I think that I’m going to have one of Hollywood’s rising stars as a son-in-law I find out that she’s called things off. Again.”

“How is she? I can’t even imagine how insane her life must be, having photographers follow her and having her personal life all over social media.”

“Normally, I’d say your guess is as good as mine. I rarely get more than a few minutes on the phone with her, but she’s here. She came back yesterday.”

“For your birthday?”

Sarah nodded. “I don’t know how much longer she’s staying, but yeah, she said she wouldn’t miss it, although I’m not sure how she’s going to navigate it.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, to most of my friends and co-workers, even if they’ve known Quinn all her life, she is still famous, and Quinn knows that she’ll draw a certain level of attention. I don’t know. I told her not to worry about it, that I’m just happy to have her there, but I don’t know.” Sarah exhaled softly, pausing before she spoke again. “She didn’t seem herself last night at dinner.”

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“How?”

“She was just... I don’t know. Not herself. I couldn’t really put my finger on it. Just my motherly intuition, I guess, or maybe I’m reading into it too much. She just seemed more withdrawn than usual. Maybe, I was imagining things.” Sarah finished her coffee. “Will you see if you notice anything? At the party anyway, assuming you don’t see her before then.”

“Yeah, sure. But I haven’t seen her since she left for California, so I don’t really know how much I’ll be able to notice.”

Sarah’s eyes narrowed. “You haven’t seen her in nine years? How is that possible?”

“No. I’m not at your house for Thanksgiving or Christmas when she’s normally back.”

“She really hasn’t been home much. Well, either way, maybe just see if you can figure out what’s going on with her. She always liked you.”

Rebecca raised an eyebrow. She’d always gotten along well with both of Sarah’s daughters, but she doubted that Quinn liked her any more than any other family friend.

As Rebecca reached for her mug, her phone vibrated against the wooden table, the sound barely audible over the hum of conversation in the café. She glanced down, a smile involuntarily tugging at the corners of her lips as she read the name on the screen.

Sarah raised an eyebrow. “What’s that smile about?”

Rebecca felt a flush creep up her neck, her fingers itching to check the message. She wasn’t used to this—the flutter of excitement, the nervous energy that came with a new connection.

“It’s Chloe,” she finally admitted, her voice soft. “The woman I went on a date with.”

Sarah’s face lit up. “Really? What did she say?”

Rebecca unlocked her phone. “She’s just checking in, seeing how I’m doing.”

A warmth spread through her chest at the thought of Chloe thinking about her, taking the time to reach out. It was a small gesture, but it wasn’t something she was used to. Any of her attempts at dating these last few years never seemed to go beyond a first date. There’d been two one-night stands, but she’d quickly discovered that as much fun as they’d been, she needed something more than that.

Sarah smiled knowingly. “That’s sweet of her. She must be interested.”

Rebecca shrugged, trying to tamp down the hope that was building inside her. “Maybe. I don’t know. It’s still so new.”

“Well, why don’t you invite her to my birthday party?” Sarah suggested, her tone light but encouraging. “It could be a nice way for you two to spend more time together, see how she’d fit into your life.”

Rebecca’s eyes widened at the idea. Invite Chloe to Sarah’s birthday? She imagined Chloe mingling with her friends, getting a glimpse into her life.

“I don’t know,” she said, her fingers hovering over her phone.



“Think about it. I know I’m being selfish, but I’d love to meet her. You were chatting to her for a while before you actually met, right?”

Rebecca nodded. “I think that’s why our first date went so well. We’d moved beyond all the basics and were just able to enjoy each other’s company.”

“I have a good feeling about her,” Sarah said with a warm smile.

Rebecca inhaled a deep breath and started typing, pressing send before she could overthink it. “Okay. I’ve asked her,” she said, locking her phone and putting it back down on the table between them. “I just have to wait and see if she wants to go.”

Sarah started to say something but Rebecca’s phone vibrated.

“She said yes,” Rebecca said as she read the message, hardly believing it. “And she can’t wait.”

“Of course she said yes.” Sarah laughed softly. “I wish I’d gone into the city with you for Pride. I would have loved to have seen all the women drooling over you.”

Rebecca rolled her eyes.

“You’re stunning, and I’m not at all surprised that this Chloe can’t wait to see you again. You’re a catch, Rebecca.”

“You’re good for my ego,” Rebecca said as she slid her phone into her bag, a smile on her face as they got up and left the coffee shop. She hadn’t felt this light in a long time.

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As Quinn stepped into the backyard of her childhood home, a wave of nostalgia washed over her. The late September sun cast a warm glow on the familiar surroundings, from the old oak tree she used to climb as a kid to the weathered picnic table where she'd shared countless summer meals with her family. Today, the yard had been transformed for her mother's 50th birthday party, with a large white tent sheltering elegantly set tables and colorful balloons swaying in the gentle breeze.

Luckily, it was a mild September day, and they could enjoy being outside in the sunshine. The air was filled with the mouthwatering aroma of barbecued food, and Quinn's stomach rumbled in response. Her father had made a last minute decision to fire up the grill when he'd seen the forecast. Inside the house, a buffet had been set up by a catering company with all of her mother's favorite dishes.

Quinn stood on the deck, surveying it all, hoping that everything went well today. Her mother was extremely laid back, but Quinn knew that she'd been looking forward to today since her last birthday. She'd taken on the approach of embracing her fiftieth birthday rather than shying away from it.

Quinn just had to hope that no one would pay her any attention. That was the last thing she wanted. She knew the chances of anything happening were slim. Just about everyone here had known Quinn since she was a kid, but it could still happen, so she'd chosen a pair of comfortable jeans and a fitted navy sweater, trying to blend in. She left her hair to fall in loose waves that fell across her shoulders, and put on the lightest layer of makeup.

She'd kept herself busy, making sure her father had enough burger buns, and that the ice bucket outside was full of beer. But she'd run out of jobs, and found herself

scanning the crowd. Her gaze landed on Rebecca, her mother's best friend, standing beneath the tent with a woman Quinn didn't recognize. The woman next to Rebecca leaned in close, her hand resting on Rebecca's arm with an easy intimacy.

Almost without realizing it, Quinn found herself drifting towards her younger sister, Reagan, who was uncorking another bottle of wine.

"Hey, Rae," Quinn said softly, sidling up beside her. "Who's that with Rebecca?"

Reagan glanced up, her gaze following Quinn's. "Oh, that's Chloe. I just met her like an hour ago, but I think she's Rebecca's girlfriend," she replied nonchalantly as she twisted the screw and eased the cork out.

Quinn felt as if the world had tilted on its axis. "Her what?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Her girlfriend," Reagan repeated, giving Quinn a curious look. "Didn't Mom tell you? Rebecca got divorced a few years ago and came out. I knew she'd been dating, but this is the first time I've seen her with someone."

Quinn shook her head, her mind reeling, her palms suddenly clammy. Rebecca and Anthony had gotten a divorce? Quinn always thought of them as a solid couple. "Did you say Rebecca came out?"

"Yeah." Reagan had a strange look on her face. "How did you not know this? Mom's been her biggest fan. I mean, she always was, but she's been so proud of her. She'd play matchmaker if she could, but I don't think she knows anyone else that's gay."

"I had no idea." It was as if a veil had been lifted, revealing a whole new facet of the woman she thought she knew so well.

As Quinn watched Rebecca and Chloe together, she felt a flurry of emotions she couldn't quite untangle. Shock, certainly, but also curiosity. When had Rebecca figured out that she was into women? Had she known for years? Had she met someone while she was married that made her realize?

Quinn leaned against the deck railing. When she'd talked to Piper the other day, she'd been so caught up in the fact that she'd somehow missed this. How could she not know something so fundamental about herself? She felt like she'd wasted so much time. But she was just thirty. Rebecca was right around her mother's age, and she'd only come up a few years ago?

Quinn felt a strange sense of calm as she watched Rebecca. The copper and golden streaks that ran through her dark hair caught in the sunlight, and she laughed at something Chloe said. Quinn had spent the last few days trying to come to terms with the idea that she'd been living a lie, but she hadn't been. She hadn't known. She hadn't hid anything. She just hadn't realized. And she wasn't the only one apparently.

She inhaled a deep breath. When she thought of all the emotions she'd felt these last few days, she couldn't begin to imagine what Rebecca must have gone through. She had a husband. A great guy who everyone loved. She was in her forties when she came out. The only thing that Quinn could think about was how brave she'd been. What Rebecca did took guts, especially here, in their small town. Quinn couldn't even remember knowing anyone who was gay when she'd grown up here. There'd been no one.

Quinn left the deck and stepped back inside. The kitchen was a hub of activity, with catering staff bustling about and refilling drinks. Quinn barely noticed them, her attention focused inward as she reached for a wine glass and the open bottle of Chardonnay on the counter.

As she poured herself a generous glass, a man's voice came from behind her. "You're

Quinn Fallon.” She could hear the smugness in his voice.

Quinn turned, her heart sinking as she registered the eager expression on the young man’s face. He was wearing the catering company’s uniform, his name tag identifying him as “Brad.”

She forced a polite smile, the one she’d perfected over years in the spotlight. “Yes, that’s me.”

Brad’s eyes widened, his grin stretching from ear to ear. “Wow, I can’t believe it’s really you! I’m such a huge fan. I’ve seen all your movies.”

Quinn took a sip of her wine, bracing herself for what she knew was coming. “Thank you.”

But Brad wasn’t done. He pulled out his phone, his hands shaking with excitement. “Could I get a picture with you? My friends will never believe this!”

Quinn’s stomach churned. This was the part she hated, the part where her personal space and boundaries ceased to matter. She glanced around the kitchen, hoping for an escape, but the other staff members were studiously avoiding her gaze.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t really feel comfortable with photos right now,” she said, trying to keep her tone light.

“Oh, come on, just one quick selfie! It’ll only take a second.”

Before Quinn could protest further, he was at her side, his arm snaking around her shoulders as he held up his phone. Quinn stiffened, the unwanted contact sending a shiver down her spine.

“Brad, please,” she said, trying to step away. “I really don’t?—”

But he wasn’t listening. He pulled her closer, his cheek pressing against hers as he angled the phone. Quinn could smell his cologne, sharp and cloying. This was the moment where things could go from uncomfortable to dangerous, where a fan’s enthusiasm could turn into something darker.

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She was just about to resort to more forceful measures when a familiar voice cut through the tension. She hadn't heard that voice in years, but she'd recognize it anywhere.

"Quinn, there you are!"

Relief flooded through her as she saw Rebecca entering the kitchen, her eyes taking in the scene with a single glance. She moved towards them, her smile warm but her gaze sharp.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she said, smoothly inserting herself between Quinn and Brad, "but your mother is looking for you, Quinn. Something about a special toast."

It was a lie, Quinn knew, but she seized on it gratefully. "Of course," she said, setting down her wine glass. "I'll be right there."

She could feel Brad's disappointment, but he finally let his arm drop, stepping back.

Rebecca's hand was on Quinn's back, a gentle but insistent pressure guiding her out of the kitchen. As the door swung shut behind them, Quinn let out a shaky breath.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"I'm just glad I chose that moment to come inside." Rebecca steered them toward a quiet corner on the deck. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine. It happens all the time. I should have handled that better, but I don't

know. He just caught me off guard.”

Rebecca’s gaze lingered on her. “You shouldn’t have to handle situations like that. I wish people would remember that actresses, athletes, whoever are just like them. That you deserve the same respect. The same privacy.”

Quinn had always thought her mother was lucky to have a friend like Rebecca, and she’d always been supportive of both Quinn and Reagan, going to sports games or high school plays in Quinn’s case, but right now, she was reminded of that more than ever.

“I know,” Quinn agreed, “but unfortunately it’s never going to be like that.”

Behind Rebecca, Quinn watched as Chloe climbed the stairs to the deck. She was probably in her late thirties, and she had a confidence about her that Quinn immediately envied. She tucked a piece of chestnut brown hair behind her ear as she reached the top step, revealing two maybe three earrings. Quinn couldn’t tell from here, and then she spotted a tattoo that was barely visible beneath the sleeve of her long-sleeved shirt.

Quinn was about to excuse herself, assuming Chloe was looking for Rebecca, but before she could, she met Chloe’s eyes, and Quinn knew that expression. It always started with a double take and then when the recognition hit them, their eyes widened slightly and more often than not their mouths fell open. And that was exactly what was happening right now.

Chloe strode across the deck. “I don’t believe it. You’re Quinn Fallon,” she said in a rush. “I’m such a big fan. I know probably everyone says that, but I really am. I’ve seen all your movies, and can I just say, I don’t think I’ve ever been more excited for a movie to come out. When I heard you were playing a queer character... Representation is so important, and I know a lot of people don’t agree with straight



people playing queer characters, but I don't mind. As long as the actress takes that responsibility on with respect and care, who am I to judge?"

Chloe inhaled a deep breath, and she glanced at Rebecca who looked like she wanted to be anywhere but there, her cheeks a deep shade of red now.

"Sorry," Chloe said. "I just word vomited there. I'm so sorry."

Rebecca pressed her lips together. "Quinn, this is Chloe. Chloe, this is Quinn. Sarah's daughter," she said those last words with a little more emphasis as she stared at Chloe.

"Oh." Chloe blinked a few times before she nodded.

"Nice to meet you," Quinn offered as she leaned back against the railing, hoping that Chloe would reel it in now.

"You-you too." Chloe at least looked embarrassed now. "Anyway, I was on my way inside to find a bathroom."

"Go through the kitchen and down the hall. It's the last door on the right," Quinn said, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Thanks," Chloe said before heading inside.

"I'm so sorry," Rebecca said with a sigh.

"It's okay. Maybe a little funny? You know, with the timing. You're there defending my right to privacy and then your girlfriend comes along and jumps right in."

Rebecca shook her head, a smile tugging at her lips. "She's not my girlfriend. Well,

we're dating? I guess? I don't know. It's new. She's young." Her voice trailed off.

"I had no idea," Quinn said as she met Rebecca's eyes. "But congratulations? Is that a weird thing to say?"

Rebecca laughed. "It might be, but I'll take it. I took the long way around, but I got there in the end, and now I'm nearly fifty and dating women in their thirties. Maybe, I'm just having a mid-life crisis," she joked.

"Well, whatever it is, it took a lot of guts. I'm sure it wasn't easy to tell your husband. To start over."

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Rebecca looked out over the garden, and Quinn followed her gaze. “I don’t know what I would have done without your mother. She was the first person I told. And I don’t think I’d ever been as scared in my life.”

“Did you really think you’d lose her as a friend?”

Rebecca shrugged. “Maybe not entirely. But I thought that there was no way that it wouldn’t change things. We did so many things together, the four of us. That dynamic was going to change once I told Anthony, and I don’t know. I had to tell her that I’d basically been lying to her for years. I’d known that I was attracted to women since I was maybe twenty-four, twenty-five. So even if she was okay with me being gay, there was still this deception, I guess. But obviously, I had nothing to worry about. She didn’t blink. She was even ready to be my wingwoman if I wanted to her to.”

“What?” Quinn asked with a smile.

“I know. And for the record, I never did ask her.”

Just then, her mother appeared at the top of the steps. Quinn waved her over, and her mother slid her arm around Rebecca’s waist.

“We were just talking about you,” Rebecca said.

“All good?”

“How could it not be?” Quinn answered with a smile, wishing she’d made more time

for family gatherings like this over the years. She felt like her twenties had been lost to California, especially those first five years after she'd left. She'd taken any and every job that had come her way, and it meant barely making it back for one holiday a year.

And as she watched Rebecca and her mother joke about something, she felt this sense of calm wash over her. When she was ready, she knew that she could come out to her mother and not have to worry about being accepted. She knew Reagan wouldn't care, and she was just about certain that her father wouldn't either, and when she thought about Piper, she was so grateful that she'd never have to worry about being disowned by her own parents.

Quinn had been lucky in so many ways, with the way her career took off, with how amazing her family was, and she just had to hope that when she was ready to go public with this that she'd have that same luck with her.

4

Rebecca stepped out of the cozy coffee shop, the bell above the door jingling softly as it closed behind her. The crisp autumn air nipped at her cheeks, and she instinctively wrapped her hands around the warm to-go cup, savoring the heat that radiated through the cardboard sleeve. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with the earthy scent of fallen leaves, creating a comforting blend that filled her senses.

As she turned to make her way down the sidewalk, Rebecca caught sight of Sarah approaching the shop, her blonde hair tousled by the gentle breeze. A smile tugged at the corners of Rebecca's lips. "Hey."

"Hi," Sarah said with a wave. "Are you in a hurry?"

"No. I finished a project early so I'm giving myself the afternoon off."

“Do you mind if I get a coffee and maybe we can go for a walk?”

“I’d love that.”

She watched as Sarah ducked into the shop, emerging moments later with her own to-go cup in hand. The two women fell into step beside each other, their footsteps falling into a synchronized rhythm on the concrete.

The vibrant hues of the changing leaves painted the tree-lined street in shades of amber, gold, and crimson. Rebecca breathed deeply, the crisp air filling her lungs and invigorating her senses.

“How’s Chloe?” Sarah asked as they headed towards the trail that started behind the library. “She seemed to fit right in.”

Rebecca’s thoughts strayed to Chloe as she strolled alongside Sarah, the crunch of fallen leaves beneath their feet the only noise now that they were away from the main street. Her mind had been preoccupied with the decision she’d made just this morning.

“I ended things with Chloe,” Rebecca said.

Sarah’s eyes narrowed slightly, concern etched on her face as her steps slowed. “What happened? The party was three days ago. You two looked so happy.”

Rebecca hesitated, unsure how to articulate the tangled emotions that had led her to this point. She couldn’t very well tell Sarah about the fangirling episode with Quinn, which had only served to highlight their age difference in a way that made Rebecca cringe. A twinge of embarrassment resurfaced at the memory, and Rebecca’s face warmed despite the autumn chill. “It just didn’t feel right,” she said finally, a vague explanation that barely scratched the surface.

Sarah watched her intently, her expression softening. “Was it something she did?”

Rebecca shook her head. “No, but there was always the distance, and I guess, after spending the entire day with her and seeing her with my friends, I don’t know, I just knew that it wasn’t going to be worth the effort.”

Sarah blew out a breath. “Well, I didn’t see that coming.”

“Maybe I’m being a little too quick to discount it, but at the same time, I’m at a point where I don’t want to waste time.”

“I get that,” Sarah said as she brought her coffee to her lips and took a sip.

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The warmth from the coffee cup seeped into Rebecca's hands, a welcome respite from the crisp autumn air. She took a sip, letting the rich, slightly bitter liquid warm her from the inside out. As much as she appreciated Sarah's concern, she'd rather not keep talking about Chloe.

"How's Quinn doing?" Rebecca asked, her voice carefully casual. "Has she gone back to California yet?"

Sarah's eyebrows lifted slightly, a hint of surprise flickering across her face. "Actually, she told me last night that the lake house she rented wasn't just for a week. She's rented it for a year."

Rebecca's steps faltered, her grip tightening on the coffee cup as she processed Sarah's words. A year. Quinn was staying in their sleepy little town for a year? That news sent a ripple of something unidentifiable through her chest, a mixture of excitement and maybe a little intrigue.

She tried to picture Quinn, the epitome of Hollywood glamour, settling into the quiet rhythms of small-town life. It just didn't make sense. Even though Rebecca didn't follow her career closely, she knew that Quinn's career had taken off in the last few years. Why would she stay away from Hollywood when she was at the height of her career?

Rebecca took another sip of her coffee, using the moment to gather her thoughts. "Did she say why?"

Sarah shook her head, her expression thoughtful. "No. I have no idea why. And I

can't figure it out. Her schedule is normally so jam-packed that I barely can get a fifteen-minute phone call with her, and now she's dropping everything for a year?"

"Maybe she's filming something nearby?"

"No. I asked her that, and she casually said, no, that she doesn't have any more movies lined up." Sarah sighed as they continued walking. "She's never taken a break like this, and another thing I don't get is why she's not staying at home, with us."

"I guess, if she's staying for that long, she'd probably want her own space," Rebecca guessed.

"Well, you're practically neighbors. She gave me the address for the house she's renting, and it's two down from you. Number seventeen. You didn't think there was anything off with her when you were talking to her?"

"No." Rebecca thought back to their brief conversation on the deck. "No. There was nothing strange." She remembered the way Quinn had reacted to one of the catering staff trying to get a selfie, but how else was she supposed to react? She was in her own home. She shouldn't have to take photos with strangers. "Why don't you ask her why she's staying?"

"I will. At some point. We've always had a good relationship but I feel like she always has people looking for information, asking why she said something or didn't say something. She's turned into a very private person. Not that I blame her. I have no idea how she handles it all. So I just don't want to be another person trying to pry into her life. She'll tell me when she's ready, and maybe she's burnt out and needs a break."

"Yeah, that could be it." Rebecca once again thought of the way that Chloe had just walked straight over to them, interrupting their conversation to talk to Quinn. How



was Quinn going to live here for the next year? Every time she went out to get groceries or to pick up a coffee, someone was going to recognize her.

Rebecca's boots crunched softly on the fallen leaves as she and Sarah meandered along the forest trail. A gentle breeze rustled the branches, sending a cascade of leaves spiraling down around them as they walked. To their left, a squirrel darted up a nearby oak, an acorn clutched in its mouth.

"Did you think Chloe was too young for me?" Rebecca asked out of nowhere. It was a thought she'd had right from the start, and she hated to admit that she'd purposely left out that bit of information when she'd told Sarah about her.

Sarah laughed softly beside her. "Please tell me that's not why you really ended things."

"No. It's just... Was it obvious? How much older I was?"

"No." Sarah took a sip of her coffee. "I hadn't even thought about, but now that you're saying it. You're forty-eight, and she's what? Forty?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Ten years is nothing."

"Really?" Rebecca asked as she wrapped both hands around her cup. "Because Anthony and I were the same age, not that that really counts, and you and Jeff are just a year apart."

"All I'm saying is that it didn't even occur to me that she was too young for you or that you were too old for her. You looked good together. I'm sorry that it didn't work out."

“Yeah.” Rebecca took a drink, the coffee warming her. “Me too.” The idea of going back to dating apps or weekends in the city was not something she was looking forward to. It was fun in the beginning, when it was new and full of firsts, but now, she kind of wanted to skip all of that and just be with someone who made her happy.

5

Quinn settled into the weathered Adirondack chair on the back deck of the lake house as the late afternoon sun dappled the water’s surface, creating a mesmerizing dance of light and shadow. A gentle breeze carried the crisp scent of pine and freshly bloomed wildflowers, mingling with the earthy aroma of the lake.

She watched as a pair of kayakers glided across the glassy surface, their paddles creating small ripples that spread outward in perfect symmetry. The distant laughter of children playing on a nearby shore floated across the water, accompanied by the rhythmic lapping of waves against the dock below.

Quinn closed her eyes, letting the warmth of the sun caress her face. The past week had been a whirlwind of emotions, but here, in this tranquil setting, she felt a sense of calm, and even though this was a rental, it was already starting to feel like home. Her nearest neighbors were out of sight on either side, and the trees surrounding the property gave her the privacy she needed from anyone driving by.

Finding out about Rebecca at her mother’s birthday party had sparked something within her – a glimmer of hope, maybe, or a newfound courage to not hide away. If Rebecca could turn her life upside down, why couldn’t she? Yes, it was different for Rebecca. She didn’t have thousands of people commentating on her life every day. She didn’t have fans all over the world waiting for her next movie, putting her on some kind of pedestal, but she did have a marriage to end and probably small town gossip to overcome.

Opening her eyes, Quinn gazed at the lush greenery surrounding the lake. The trees stood tall, their leaves rustling gently in the breeze. She inhaled deeply, filling her lungs with the fresh, crisp air. It was so different from her life in Los Angeles. Her modern home was private, with a beautiful pool area and lush gardens, but sitting here now, Quinn couldn't deny how much she liked being back here.

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She looked down at her phone in the lap, the screen reflecting the vibrant blues and greens of the landscape around her as she unlocked it. Piper answered her video call almost immediately.

“Hey,” Piper said with a smile. “Wow, being back home definitely suits you. You look like you’ve been away at the spa or something.”

Quinn smiled as she rolled her eyes. “I think I’m finally figuring out what it’s like to be myself.”

“Quinn, you’re going to make me cry. I’m so happy for you!”

“Thank you for listening to me the other day.” Quinn ran a hand through her hair as she exhaled. “I was a bit of a mess.”

“Hey, I’m always a phone call away.”

“I know.” Quinn gave Audrey a wave as she came around behind Piper who appeared to be sitting on the deck. Audrey draped her arms around Piper as she said hello. “Hey, Audrey.”

“I hope it’s okay, but Piper told me,” Audrey said as a piece of her black hair came free from her messy bun, and she tucked it behind her ear.

“Yeah, of course,” Quinn said.

“I’m shocked,” Audrey said with a smile, “But I’m so happy for you. It’ll all work

out. Just give it some time.”

“I hope so.” Quinn wasn’t sure if she was talking about her career or her love life, but either way, she wished that it was true.

Audrey gave Piper a kiss on the cheek and then she was gone.

“Work,” Piper said, throwing a glance over her shoulder. “I’ve offered I don’t know how many times to make her a kept woman, and she won’t listen to me.”

Quinn laughed softly. She loved seeing the dynamic between Piper and Audrey. It was so natural and full of warmth. It made her wonder if she could ever have something like that.

“You two are cute,” Quinn said, a hint of wistfulness in her voice.

Piper smiled. “Just give it some time. I know you’ll find your person. I might even know someone. She just got out of a relationship.

“No,” Quinn said, her smile fading. “No. I’m not being set up. I have to figure out myself first before I even think about getting involved with someone.” She took a deep breath, a nervous energy running through her at the thought of being on a date with a woman, of leaning in to kiss her. “I don’t even know how long that’s going to take, but I think I’m starting to get over this idea that I’ve wasted so much time. At my mother’s birthday party the other day, I saw her friend there. Rebecca. She’s around the same age as my mom, and she was married to a guy, her high school sweetheart I think, but I just found out that she got a divorce and came out.”

“What? No way.” Piper’s eyes went wide. “You had no idea?”

“No. And she was in her mid-forties I guess, so yeah, I think I need to relax a little.

And I think seeing her, there at my mother's house with her girlfriend... Well, Rebecca said that they weren't together, that it was new or something, but anyway, I think seeing her gave me this strange sense of calm? Like if she can do it, I can too? I know I won't be the first actress to come out. I mean, look at Evelyn. She took everybody by surprise, but there's something about seeing someone in my small, kind of conservative town completely change their life."

"Yeah. She could have stayed with her husband and wondered what might have been."

"I know. Plenty of people probably do." Quinn sighed. "So that's the update from here. I'm alive. I'm feeling better."

"You're going to be fine, Quinn. It'll take a while, but Audreys' right. It'll work out for you. Everything always does."

Quinn quirked an eyebrow. She did have that reputation, at least career-wise. The right part always seemed to land in her lap at just the right time. Her love life? Well, that had always been a disaster, but at least she knew why now.

"I'm starting filming on that rom-com next week, so I won't be as free, but call me. I'll get back to when I can. I want to know who the first woman to take your breath away is."

Quinn rolled her eyes. "Okay. I'm sure there are plenty of single queer women right here in my hometown who won't get starstruck when they meet me and stumble over their words."

"I'm serious. Someone's going to sweep you off your feet, and I want to be the first to know about it."

“I have no plans to come back to Los Angeles in the next few months, so you’ll have to tone down those expectations.”

They said goodbye, and Quinn ended the call, setting her phone aside as her gaze drifted back to the lake. She leaned back in the Adirondack chair, letting her fingers trace the weathered wood grain as her mind wandered.

What would it be like to kiss a woman, really kiss her, without the cameras rolling or a script to follow? Quinn’s heart quickened at the thought. She closed her eyes, imagining soft lips against hers, gentle yet insistent. The scent of perfume, floral and light, mixed with the crisp lake air. Delicate fingers threading through her hair, pulling her closer.

In her mind’s eye, she was standing just a few feet away, leaning against the deck rail as this gorgeous woman slid her hand through her hair, bringing their lips together in a heart-stopping kiss. Quinn’s hands went to her waist, needing something to keep herself upright as the kiss deepened, and the thought of her tongue sliding against her own made her breath catch in her throat.

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And when that hand fell away from her hair, lingering on her cheek, Quinn imagined her eyes fluttering open, and she met the most alluring brown eyes flecked with gold. Quinn reached up to brush her dark hair behind her ear, the copper highlights catching in the afternoon sun.

It was so vivid, so real, that it took her a moment to realize who she'd just imagined kissing.

Quinn's eyes snapped open, and she found herself gripping the arms of the chair, her palms damp with sweat. She exhaled slowly, trying to calm her racing pulse.

Why had she been thinking about kissing Rebecca??

Quinn leaned her head back against the wood, her hand on her forehead. This was almost as bad as feeling something during that onscreen kiss. She couldn't be thinking about kissing her mother's best friend.

"What the fuck?" Quinn muttered to herself as she stared up at the trees.

Desperation. That's all it was. She was so desperate to know what it would be like to kiss another woman that she'd just imagined herself with the only lesbian in town she knew.

That had to be it. She wasn't actually attracted to her mother's best friend.

Because that would be a complete disaster.



Rebecca strolled through the local market like she did most Saturdays, the late-morning sun warming her face. The air hummed with the chatter of shoppers and the scent of sweet pastries. As she approached the vegetable stand, she reached for a pepper, and a flash of blonde hair caught her eye. A navy Yankees cap, pulled low, shielded the face, but the figure was unmistakable. She was wearing a white tank top with a navy plaid flannel shirt over it and jeans.

Rebecca glanced over, watching her hand the woman behind the stall a few bills, telling her to keep the change before slinging her now full tote bag over her shoulder and heading for the parking lot.

Rebecca left the pepper, picking up her pace to catch up to her.

“Quinn Fallon? Is that THE Quinn Fallon?” Rebecca called out once they were far enough away from the market, her voice teasing.

Quinn turned. “Rebecca,” she said with a sigh, when she recognized her.

Rebecca smiled. “Driving a ten-year-old Ford? It couldn’t be.”

Quinn’s grin widened, a playful glint in her eyes. “Keep your voice down,” she said, glancing around nervously. “I had Reagan find me the most inconspicuous car she could, and this is what she came up with.”

“I’m joking,” Rebecca said as she watched Quinn unlock the black car and put her tote bag on the floor on the passenger’s side. “That’s clever though. I was wondering what you were going to do for the next year. How you were going to manage everyday things like this.”

Quinn closed the door and leaned against it. “My mother told you I was staying?”

“Yeah. It’s not a secret, is it?” Rebecca asked, remembering how desperate Sarah was to find out what was going on with her daughter.

“No,” Quinn said, crossing her arms over her chest. “Not at all.”

“Well, I was bound to find out sooner rather than later. We’re not quite neighbors, but close enough. I’m number nineteen.”

“I had no idea.”

“I only bought it two years ago. I didn’t want to stay renting indefinitely.” Rebecca knew what Sarah was talking about though. There was something off with Quinn. She seemed on edge almost. “It’s a quiet road. I can see why you picked it.”

Quinn nodded, her eyes rarely staying on Rebecca for more than a few seconds.

It dawned on her then that maybe Quinn didn’t like being out here in the open, with people coming and going from their cars. “Sorry,” Rebecca said. “I’m sure you want to get back and cook something with all those fresh veg.”

“No. Well, I am hungry, but I’m just not sure how this is going to go yet,” she said throwing a glance over her shoulder back towards the market. “I’m not used to this. In L.A. I generally have things planned out and either a driver or security. It’s strange just being here. Wandering around. With no back up.”

Rebecca slid her phone out of the pocket of her jeans and offered it to Quinn. “You should have my number.”

Quinn didn’t say anything as she took the phone and added her number. She finally

met her eyes properly as she handed Rebecca her phone. “I hope Chloe doesn’t get jealous,” she said with a smirk.

Rebecca laughed as she tapped on Quinn’s name to call her. “Now you have mine. But no, Chloe’s not going to get jealous, because she’s not going to know. I ended things... Before they could get too serious.”

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“Oh, I’m sorry.” Quinn took another look over her shoulder. “I’d say she didn’t take that well.”

Rebecca pressed her lips together. “No. She was too young for me really. I probably shouldn’t have agreed to meet her, never mind invite her to your mother’s party.”

Quinn’s eyes narrowed. “It wasn’t because of me was it? I mean, how Chloe was with me. Not me, me.” She took a deep breath. “Sorry, my head’s all over the place out here. I feel like I’m on high alert.”

“Do you have any plans for this evening?” Rebecca asked without really thinking.

“Uh, no. No. I’m was going to make dinner and open a bottle of wine.”

“Do you want to do that with me? At my place?” Rebecca doubted herself for a moment. They’d known each other for years, but never as friends. Just as her best friend’s daughter who she’d always gotten along well with. This was a little out of left field, but she wanted to know that Quinn was really okay, and then she could tell Sarah that, so she could stop worrying about her daughter. “I had very similar plans for this evening, so...”

Quinn hesitated for just long enough that Rebecca wished she hadn’t asked, but then a smile tugged at her lips. “Yeah. I’d like that.”

Rebecca looked down at her watch. She needed time to shower, make dinner, and tidy up a small bit. It was almost one now. “Around four sound good?”

“Perfect. I might make a trip to the liquor store while I’m dressed like this,” she said motioning towards her clothes. “I need to stock the house. Anything you prefer?”

“I’m not fussy. Maybe red? It’s finally starting to feel like fall. I think I’ll light the fire and make something wintry. Are you a vegetarian?”

Quinn laughed softly. “No. Why would you think that?” She threw a glance over her shoulder to the tote bag packed with vegetables, a smile still on her lips. “No, seriously, I’m not. I just wasn’t quite ready to brave the supermarket so… It was going to be a veggy meal tonight.”

“No allergies?”

“None. I will eat just about anything,” Quinn said, her hands in her pockets now.

“Good to know. I’ll see you around four then.”

“Yeah. See you then.”

Rebecca gave her a wave and walked back to the market, thinking ahead to what she’d need for dinner. Well, she needed to decide what she was going to cook first.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket as she slid it out, Sarah’s name on the screen. “Hey,” she said.

“Hi. Got plans for tonight?” Sarah asked.

Rebecca found herself unable to answer for a second. “Yeah, I do. Why?”

“Oh? Hot date?”

Rebecca sucked in a breath and whatever way she did it, she ended up having a coughing fit. “I’m fine,” she said after a few seconds, her voice strained. “No date.”

“I was just going to ask you if you wanted to try that new Mexican place. But maybe some other night?”

“Yeah. Definitely.”

They said goodbye, and Rebecca hung up, wondering why she hadn’t felt comfortable telling Sarah that her plans for this evening were with her daughter. Maybe, she didn’t want Sarah to get her hopes up that Rebecca would come away with anything. That was the only explanation really.

7

The sun was low in the sky, bathing Rebecca’s deck in a warm glow, casting long shadows across the weathered wood. Quinn leaned back in her chair, breathing in the crisp evening air. Candle lanterns flickered softly, their gentle light creating a cozy atmosphere around them.

Dinner had been delicious. Rebecca’s homemade lasagna was full of flavor, and the conversation flowed as easily as the wine. They’d mostly talked about what they had in common: this town and growing up here, how much things had changed over the years, but also how little had.

Quinn swirled her Cabernet, watching the ruby liquid catch the fading light. A sense of contentment washed over her, but beneath it, a nagging curiosity grew. She couldn’t shake the question that had been simmering since she’d learned about Rebecca’s divorce and saw her standing beside Chloe at her mother’s birthday party. How had Rebecca known? She’d been married to a man for so long. What had changed?

The wine warmed her veins, loosening her tongue. Before she could second-guess herself, Quinn set down her glass and turned to Rebecca. “Can I ask you something personal?”

Rebecca nodded, her eyes warm and inviting in the fading light.

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Quinn's heart raced, but she pushed through. "How did you know?" Rebecca held her gaze, and Quinn realized that she was going to have to elaborate. "How did you know that you were gay?"

"You're wondering what made me realize?"

"Yeah," Quinn asked, her heart thumping in her chest.

Rebecca sighed softly. "In hindsight, I should never have married Anthony. I can look back at one of my closest friends in high school, who was not your mother by the way, just to clarify, and say that I had a crush on her. I definitely had a crush on my English teacher. But I guess, growing up here, I didn't know anyone who was gay, and I'd been dating Anthony since I was sixteen. The most natural thing was for us to get married. I'd never dated anyone else. He was my best friend. And honestly, when he asked, I didn't hesitate to say yes."

"How old were you?"

"We were both nineteen." Rebecca took a sip of wine. "I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if we hadn't been that young. And to finally answer your question, I was twenty-four? Twenty-five maybe when I realized that I might have made a mistake. That I'd been ignoring who I really was. This was more than twenty years ago, and back then, there were regular debates on news stations about legalizing gay marriage and was it the right thing to do. I can't put it down to one thing or one moment, but it just felt like I'd woken up from a daze."

Quinn couldn't take her eyes off Rebecca as she spoke.



“I wish I had a better story,” Rebecca said with a hint of a smile. “Well, maybe the story is that it took me another twenty years to actually come out.” She shook her head slowly, almost to herself. “I don’t know what took me so long. It wasn’t just that it was that long before I told Anthony and filed for divorce. I never told anyone. Not even your mother. I guess, a part of me wondered what difference it would make. You know what it’s like here. It’s relatively conservative, and I still can’t name anyone else who’s out who lives here. I guess I thought, what’s the point in turning my life upside down?”

“But you did.”

“Hm. I think it was out of guilt though. Just because I wasn’t ready to put myself out there didn’t mean that Anthony should miss out on a chance at finding someone who actually loves him. He’s actually engaged now. Just last month. To a woman he’s been with for the last year.”

“Oh wow.” Quinn took a drink, the wine warming her.

“Yeah, so that’s my story. Sad and all as it is,” Rebecca added as she brought her glass to her lips and finished her wine.

“I don’t think it’s sad. I think it’s brave.”

Rebecca’s gaze was on the sunset, the sky now a blend of oranges and reds. She left her glass on the table and got up, her boots clicking against the wood planks as she made her way to the rail, leaning against it as she watched the sun set.

Quinn did the same, taking a deep breath on her way over to stand beside her. She took in the skyline that now looked like it was on fire, the oranges so vibrant.

“Was what Chloe said true?” Rebecca asked without looking at her. “That you’re

playing a queer character?”

“Yeah,” Quinn said so quietly that she wasn’t even sure if she’d said it out loud.

“Was that research? Asking me about my experience?”

“No.” Quinn swallowed. “I’ve already finished shooting.” She wiped her now clammy hands on her jeans. She didn’t know why, but she really wanted to tell Rebecca. She knew she had Piper, and maybe Quinn had more in common with her. They were the same age and both lived their life in the spotlight, but she was three-thousand miles away.

“Then why did you want to know?” Rebecca asked, turning to look at her now.

Quinn darted her eyes away. She didn’t even know how to say it without being weird. A shiver ran through her even though she was wearing a jacket, and Rebecca’s hand was on her forearm.

“Let’s go in. I have the fire ready to go,” Rebecca said, already turning to head inside.

Quinn followed her, grabbing her glass on the way, wondering if she’d missed her chance to say something.

Rebecca’s house was similar to the one she was renting, with about the same size kitchen and living area, although this house looked much more lived in. There were cozy throws draped on the back of the brown leather couches and a full wine rack under the stairs. There was a warmth here that was definitely missing from hers.

“More wine?” Rebecca asked as she uncorked a second bottle.

Quinn brought her glass over to the island. “Thanks,” she said as Rebecca refilled her

glass before filling her own.

They moved into the living room, and Rebecca crouched in front of the fire as she lit a match and brought it to the rolled up newspapers beneath the sticks. She also lit a candle that was on the mantelpiece.

Quinn took a seat on the leather couch and watched as the flames caught, their flickering light dancing across the room. She was lost in thought, the crackling of the fire a distant murmur as she turned Rebecca's story over in her mind.

Rebecca sat beside her, close enough that Quinn could feel the energy emanating from her, a mix of calm and the subtle undercurrent of tension that had been there since their conversation began. The unanswered question hung between them, 'Then why did you want to know?' Yet, Quinn found herself retreating into the silence.

The answer was easy, and it was complicated. Quinn wanted to know because she needed to understand how someone else, someone who had built a life with a man, could have taken so long to realize that she was gay. She needed to hear that it was possible to live for years, even decades, before discovering something so important about herself.

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Quinn drew her gaze away from the fire and found Rebecca watching her, a silent question in her warm, brown eyes. It was now or never. She took a deep breath, the words forming on her lips, delicate and fragile as glass.

“I asked because...” Quinn started, her voice barely above a whisper, “I think I’m going through something similar.”

Rebecca’s expression was one of surprise and concern. “Quinn?”

The sound of her name, filled with unspoken questions, gave Quinn the courage to continue. “The reason I asked about your experience... It’s because I’m questioning everything I thought I knew about myself. And it’s terrifying.”

Rebecca nodded slowly, her eyes never leaving Quinn’s face. “It is terrifying,” she agreed, her voice soft and steady. “But it’s also one of the bravest things you’ll ever do.”

Quinn felt a lump form in her throat, the weight of her confession hanging in the air between them.

Rebecca’s expression softened, her eyes reflecting the firelight as she reached out and took Quinn’s hand in her own. It was a simple gesture, one of comfort and solidarity, and it was enough to give Quinn the strength to continue.

“I’ve always thought of myself as straight. I mean, all my relationships have been with men. But then, on set for my last movie, I kissed a woman, and I still don’t know what happened. But I felt something real, something that scared me. Mostly, I’ve been

feeling guilty, because it felt so unprofessional, but that's why I left Los Angeles. I was so restless. Once I'd finished filming, I packed my bags. I mean, I wanted to be here for my mom's birthday, but I just knew that I couldn't go back. Not until I knew what it meant. And even now, when I've spent the last week here, just thinking and coming to this realization, I don't know when I'll be ready to go back."

Rebecca listened, her thumb gently stroking the back of Quinn's hand, grounding her in the moment. "It's okay to be scared, Quinn. It's okay to be confused." She held her gaze. "But why can't you go back?"

"Because I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like to come out?—"

"Hey," Rebecca said, cutting her off. "When did this on set kiss happen?"

"Two weeks ago."

"Okay." Rebecca smiled. "Coming out should be the furthest thing from your mind. There's no rush. Just look at me." Her lips curved into another charming smile. "Or maybe don't. I wouldn't recommend taking twenty years to do it, but you know what I mean."

Quinn did know what she meant, but she also lived a very different lifestyle. Her career depended on how marketable she was, on what the public's opinion of her was. Oh god. The promo for this movie. It would force her to go back in just a few months. Even if she did a lot of it in New York, she'd still be facing questions about what it was like for a straight woman to play a gay character, and she couldn't lie.

Quinn's heart raced as she thought about coming out. She couldn't imagine what it would be like. What would people think of her after dating some of the most famous actors in Hollywood? Would they think she'd been pretending?

She glanced at Rebecca, who was watching her intently. Quinn knew she needed to say something, but the words wouldn't come.

8

Rebecca's gaze lingered on Quinn's profile, her eyes tracing the gentle slope of her nose, the determined set of her jaw. "Hey, where did you just go?" she asked, her voice gentle.

Quinn's shoulders rose and fell with a deep breath before she turned to face Rebecca. "I just realized I won't be able to stay away from LA forever," she said, a hint of resignation creeping into her voice. "The movie's promo and premiere are coming up. I'll have to go back and face all that."

Rebecca's stomach twisted with a pang of sympathy. She knew what it was like to be torn between two worlds, to feel the weight of expectation bearing down on you. "And you're thinking about coming out before then," she said, her words barely above a whisper.

Quinn's eyes met hers, a flash of fear dancing in their depths before she nodded. Rebecca's heart went out to her, remembering the terror she'd felt when she'd finally admitted the truth to herself, to her friends, to Anthony, but it would be so different for Quinn. She had so many people watching her, following her every move.

"Because I'm playing a lesbian, there's going to be questions about what it was like for me, as a straight woman, to play a queer character." Quinn took a drink, her hand trembling ever so slightly.

Rebecca slid her hand away from Quinn's as she stood up and put some larger sticks on the fire.

“If I plan on coming out at all, I have to do it before I go on that press tour,” Quinn said, her eyes lifting to meet Rebecca’s as she stood up from the fire and turned to face her. “Otherwise... It will just look awful. I’d be lying my way through the interviews only to come out a few months later?”

Rebecca sat down beside her again, not knowing what to say, because she had no idea how Quinn lived in the public eye.

“The reason that I asked you how you knew,” Quinn said her voice thick with emotion, “Is because I still can’t understand how I didn’t know this about myself. You said that with hindsight, there were signs. I can’t think of any. There has been nothing up until this point in my life. Nothing.”

“Your mother has been fooled more than once thinking that she was going to have one of Hollywood’s most handsome actors for a son-in-law,” Rebecca said.

“Oh I know. She’s always been more disappointed than me when I told her that I’d ended things.”

Rebecca angled her body towards Quinn. “Were you always the one to end it?”

Quinn nodded.

“Maybe that was your sign.”

Quinn frowned. “What do you mean?”

Rebecca shrugged. “Well, maybe there were no signs that you were attracted to women, but maybe if you thought about it, you might be able to say that you were never really attracted to any of the men that you dated.”

Quinn didn’t say anything. She took a drink before leaving her glass on the coffee table and falling back against the couch. She closed her eyes for a second before turning to meet Rebecca’s gaze. “I think that’s exactly what happened. I kept thinking that the next guy would be the one. That I’d feel something eventually if I met the right guy.” She sighed, covering her face with her hands as she sat forward, her elbows on her thighs. “If I hadn’t taken on that role... Who knows how long I would have gone on like that?”

A thought popped into her head. “How did that role come about? Did they come to you?”

“Yeah.” Quinn’s hands fell away from her face. “They did.”

“And did you immediately accept it? Or was there something holding you back?”

Quinn ran a hand through her blond hair. “I was reluctant to take it. But that was because I didn’t want to be that straight actress taking a part that maybe a queer woman should be playing.”



“Could there have been something there? I’m not saying that’s not true. You could have been concerned about that, but also, deep down maybe feeling a little uneasy.”

“I don’t know,” Quinn said.

“It doesn’t really matter. The important part is that you figured it out. In your own time.”

As Quinn reached for her wine, Rebecca’s gaze drifted to the gentle curve of her neck, the way the soft light from the fire danced across her skin. She downed what was left in her glass.

“I think what scares me the most,” Quinn said, her voice barely above a whisper, “is I feel like I’ve been living in this bubble, this illusion of who I thought I was. And now that it’s been shattered, I don’t know who I am anymore.”

“You’re still the same person, Quinn.” Rebecca reached for both of her hands, and Quinn turned to face her with tears in hereyes. “You have months before you have to worry about coming out, if that’s what you want to do. And as hard as it seems, you won’t be the first actress to do it. Look at Piper... Piper. I can’t think of her last name.”

That brought a dazzling smile to Quinn’s lips. “Piper Emerson. She’s the only other person I’ve told.”

Rebecca returned her smile. “Sometimes I forget what your life really is like now. I know we’re talking about your movie, but I guess I forgot that you’d be friends with someone like Piper Emerson.”

“She’s been great. Listening. Giving me advice. But she’s known that she was into women since she was a teenager, so I feel like I can relate more to you than her oddly

enough.”

“Thank you for telling me,” Rebecca said, aware that she was still holding Quinn’s hands and casually eased them away.

“Thank you for listening. I feel like I’m been talking all evening.”

The fire crackled and hissed, casting a warm glow on Quinn’s features as she leaned back into the couch, her eyes drifting toward the flames. The flickering light danced across her face, illuminating the subtle contours of her cheeks and the soft curve of her lips. Rebecca’s gaze lingered on her, taking in the serene expression that had settled over Quinn’s face.

“I’m glad that you felt comfortable enough to tell me. I know how big of a deal it is to trust someone,” Rebecca said as she stood up to add more to the fire. She reached for a split log, feeling the rough texture of the bark beneath her fingers and placed it on the fire. The flames danced and crackled, casting a warm glow on Quinn’s features as she stood up from the couch.

“I should get going,” Quinn said, her voice husky from the wine.

Rebecca’s gaze flicked to the clock on the mantle, surprised at how late it had gotten. She nodded, feeling a pang of disappointment at the evening’s end.

“Is it okay if I leave my car here?” Quinn asked.

Rebecca agreed, glad that Quinn wasn’t going to risk driving after drinking.

But she felt a sense of responsibility as she stood up to see Quinn out. The evening had worn on, and the wine had flowed, leaving Quinn’s eyes with a soft, glassy sheen. “Let me walk you home,” she said, trying to keep her tone light.

Quinn shook her head, a small smile playing on her lips. “No, I’ll be fine. It’s just a short walk.”

Rebecca hesitated, uncertain if she should press the issue. Quinn did seem a bit tipsy, but she was also a grown woman, capable of taking care of herself. Still, the thought of Quinn stumbling in the dark, alone and vulnerable, made Rebecca’s stomach twist with unease.

“Are you sure?” she asked, trying to keep her concern in check.

Quinn nodded, her smile growing more confident. “Yeah, I’ll be okay. I promise.”

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Rebecca's eyes scanned Quinn's face, searching for any sign of uncertainty, but all she saw was determination. She nodded, deciding to respect Quinn's decision. "Okay, but be careful, okay?"

Quinn laughed, a soft, husky sound that sent a shiver down Rebecca's spine. "I will," she said, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

As Quinn headed for the door, she turned to her, a shy smile on her lips. "Thanks for listening," she said.

Rebecca smiled back, her eyes meeting Quinn's in a shared moment of understanding. "Anytime."

"I might see you tomorrow," Quinn said. "When I get my car."

"I work from home, so you definitely will."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a graphic designer." Rebecca watched as Quinn paused at the door, her hand on the knob.

"I'll see you tomorrow then," Quinn said..

Rebecca felt a small smile tug at the corners of her mouth. "Sounds good." She hesitated, wanting to say more, but not quite sure what. The evening had been so... Comfortable, in a way she hadn't expected.

Quinn glanced back at her, and Rebecca was struck by the vulnerability in her gaze. “Thank you, Rebecca. For everything.”

The sincerity in Quinn’s words made something tighten in Rebecca’s chest. “Of course,” she said.

Quinn slipped out the door, and Rebecca stood there for a moment, the crackle of the fire the only sound. With a quiet sigh, she moved to lock the door, pausing to glance out into the darkness. The night was still, the only light coming from the porch lamps and the sway of the flashlight from Quinn’s phone fading into the distance.

She leaned back against the door, hoping that Quinn would come out to her family sooner rather than later, because Rebecca would have to pretend to have no idea what was going on with Quinn if Sarah asked her again, and she hated lying to her best friend.

9

Quinn sat on her deck, cradling a steaming mug of coffee between her hands. The morning air was crisp, but her thoughts were focused on the previous night with Rebecca. She couldn’t stop thinking about how understanding and attentive Rebecca had been, how she’d listened without judgment as Quinn poured out her heart.

And then there was the undeniable attraction. Quinn’s mind drifted back to how beautiful Rebecca had looked on the couch beside her, the firelight dancing across her features. She remembered the tingling sensation that had shot up her arm when Rebecca’s hand had covered her own, a gesture of comfort that had sent Quinn’s pulse racing.

It was almost laughable, really, that the first woman Quinn found herself truly drawn to was her mother’s best friend. The on-set kiss had been different. She’d been lost in

the moment while she'd been acting and embodying her character as best as she could. But the jolt she'd felt when her co-star's lips met hers had been a wake-up call that had shaken Quinn to her core.

Now, as she sat alone with her thoughts, Quinn could no longer deny her attraction to Rebecca. It was more than the fact that Rebecca was incredibly beautiful. It was the way Rebecca carried herself. It was the way she listened, how thoughtful she was even just inviting Quinn over for dinner.

But Rebecca was out of her league. Quinn knew that. She'd even said that Chloe, at thirty-eight, was too young for her. What chance did Quinn have of capturing Rebecca's interest? The thought left a hollow ache in her chest.

She stared out at the lake, watching the sunlight dance across the ripples, and wondered how she was supposed to navigate this newfound desire, this unexpected longing for a woman who seemed so tantalizingly close and yet so impossibly far away.

Quinn remembered sitting in this very spot just two days ago, the deck warm beneath her as the sun dipped lower in the sky. She'd been curious, her mind wandering to places she'd never allowed herself to explore before. So she'd indulged in a fantasy, an image of herself kissing a woman, slow and gentle, their lips soft against each other.

And now, as she sat here again, the memory of that fantasy collided with the reality of last night. Rebecca's face had been inches from hers, concern and compassion in her warm brown eyes. And in that moment, Quinn's imagination had taken over, picturing what it would be like to lean forward, to close the distance, and taste the wine on Rebecca's lips.

The memory made her cheeks heat up. She'd never felt this way before. She'd never

daydreamed about being with someone. She'd never thought of someone and felt her body respond as if they were here right now.

And now, reality hit her like a ton of bricks. Quinn knew nothing was ever going to happen with Rebecca. She could admit to herself that she found Rebecca attractive, but that didn't change the facts. Rebecca was her mother's age, for starters, and more importantly, she was her mother's best friend.

Quinn knew how these things worked. She knew why actors dated other actors. It was a shared understanding of the industry, of having your name splashed across magazines, of dealing with paparazzi lurking in the shadows.

She let out a long breath. This was crazy. Her heart was racing as if she'd just sprinted up a flight of stairs, and she tried to ignore the turbulent mix of emotions swirling within her. Just the thought of Rebecca sent a rush of adrenaline through her, a mixture of excitement and fear, desire and confusion. It was overwhelming.

And it was stupid. She had to get a grip. This was Rebecca, her mother's best friend. Quinn was supposed to be here to relax, to hide out from the world, not get tangled up in a mess of feelings for someone she barely knew. The whole point of coming here was to get some space, to figure out her own feelings without involving anyone else.

She closed her eyes, willing herself to calm down. Whatever she felt for Rebecca, it wasn't going to lead anywhere. She had to put those thoughts aside, no matter how much they lingered.

She also had to go get her car.

And that meant seeing Rebecca again.

10

It was a crisp September day, the kind that hinted at the coming autumn. Rebecca had been holed up inside, working at her desk, and the fresh breeze was a welcome change. Glancing down the driveway, she spotted Quinn approaching, her gaze focused on the ground as if she were lost in thought.

Rebecca smiled softly as she watched Quinn draw closer. It was almost noon, and she knew Quinn was here to pick up her car. They had shared an intimate dinner the night before, and now, in the light of day, Rebecca felt a warm glow thinking about their connection. She had shared parts of her story that she rarely shared with anyone, and Quinn had reciprocated, their conversation flowing easily despite their age difference.

“Hey,” Quinn called out, glancing up and offering a casual wave. “What a beautiful day, huh?”

“Sure is,” Rebecca agreed, stepping off the porch and walking over to greet her.

The afternoon sun highlighted Quinn’s golden hair and illuminated her vivid blue eyes. She looked relaxed, dressed in jeans and a loose white t-shirt, her face fresh and makeup-free. Rebecca felt a flutter in her chest, and she wasn’t entirely sure why. Maybe it was because of everything they’d shared last night?

“Enjoying the weather?” Rebecca asked, keeping her tone light.



“Mm,” Quinn nodded as she reached her car. “I sat out on my deck all morning.”

“Sounds lovely,” Rebecca said, picturing Quinn enjoying the view of the lake.

“Any plans for the day?”

Rebecca shook her head. “Nothing too exciting. I’ve got some design work to finish up, and then I thought I might take a walk down to the lake later. It’s too nice to stay cooped up inside.”

Quinn nodded, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth. “Yeah, it’s been great being able to enjoy the outdoors here. It’s so peaceful.”

There was a brief pause, and Rebecca sensed that Quinn wanted to linger, perhaps wanting to revisit the previous night’s conversation or explore the spark that seemed to be growing between them.

“What about you? Anything planned for the rest of the day?”

Quinn’s eyes lit up. “Actually, I’m looking forward to watching Piper’s latest movie tonight. I missed it in theaters, but now I can stream it at home.”

Rebecca raised an eyebrow, intrigued by this glimpse into Quinn’s life. “You go to movies with everyone else?”

Quinn smiled. “Not exactly. I go in the middle of the day and wear my baseball cap. There’s usually two or three other people there, so it’s never been a problem if I sit at the back on my own.”

“You’re talking about that supernatural horror, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the one,” Quinn nodded, a hint of surprise in her voice. “Did you see it?”

“No, I missed it in theaters too.”

Quinn’s eyebrows shot up. “Wait, you like horror movies?”

The question caught Rebecca off guard. She chuckled, amused by Quinn’s apparent disbelief. “I do, actually. Why are you so surprised?”

Quinn shrugged, a sheepish grin spreading across her face. “I don’t know. I guess I just didn’t peg you as a horror fan. Plus, my mother hates them. She told me that if I ever did a horror, she wouldn’t be able to watch.”

“She does. That’s why I always have to go on my own. What about you?” Rebecca asked. “Are you into horrors?”

“Not really, to be honest. But Piper and I have this tradition where we always watch each other’s movies, but there’s no rule that I can’t watch from behind my hands,” she said with a smile.

Rebecca laughed.

“Do you want to watch it with me?”

The invitation was unexpected, and for a moment, Rebecca hesitated, considering the implications of spending more time alone with Quinn.

“Are you sure?” Rebecca asked, choosing her words carefully. “I don’t want to intrude on your evening.”

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“No, I want you to. I mean, if you want to,” Quinn added, a hint of uncertainty crossing her face.

Rebecca studied Quinn’s expression, seeing the genuine warmth in her eyes.

And so, with a small smile, she accepted. “I’d love to. What time?”

“How about eight?” Quinn suggested.

“Sounds perfect. I’ll bring a bottle of wine.” A thought occurred to her. “Do you have popcorn?”

“I do,” Quinn said, her lips curving into a grin.

Maybe it was because Rebecca knew what Quinn was going through right now, but she found herself drawn to Quinn in a way she hadn’t expected.

She caught herself staring at Quinn’s smile, the way it lit up her entire face, and she took a deep breath, steadying herself. “Great,” she said, her voice sounding strangely husky to her own ears. She cleared her throat. “I’ll see you at eight, then.”

Quinn said goodbye and got into her car, and Rebecca watched her drive away. When she went back inside and sat at her desk, Rebecca struggled to concentrate.

She knew what the problem was. She felt guilty, because she was in the middle of Sarah and Quinn. Sarah wanted to know what was going on with her daughter, and even though Rebecca knew, she couldn’t say anything to Sarah.

She also felt a bit strange about spending more time with Quinn lately than Sarah, but at the same time, she was so glad that she was there for Quinn.

Even though Quinn had Piper Emerson, Rebecca hoped that after last night, Quinn could trust her and ask her anything.

11

Quinn settled into the couch and placed the large bowl of popcorn between her and Rebecca, the salty smell wafting up and mingling with the scent of wood smoke from the fire. Her glass of wine, almost full, sat on the coffee table in front of her. She picked it up and took a sip.

She reached for the remote to start the movie. Quinn knew that this was a bad idea. Spending more time with Rebecca would only make her feelings harder to ignore. But she pushed the thought aside. She really hadn't been looking forward to watching this movie on her own, and she wasn't going to break her tradition with Piper, no matter how scary this movie was.

The rain outside hit the windows in a rhythmic patter, a soothing background noise that seemed to grow louder as the night wore on. What had started out as a beautiful day shifted into a miserable evening as the sun was setting, and now the rain continued to fall.

Quinn glanced over at Rebecca, who was watching her with a relaxed smile. "Ready?" Quinn asked, trying to sound casual.

Rebecca nodded, and Quinn hit play.

Rebecca reached for a handful of popcorn, seemingly unfazed by the ominous music swelling from the television.

“I can’t believe you voluntarily watch horrors,” Quinn said, shaking her head in disbelief.

Rebecca let out a lighthearted laugh, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “I remember the trailer for this. It’s not going to be that bad,” she assured her, settling back into the couch.

As the movie began, Quinn found herself on edge, jumping at every creepy moment. She glanced sidelong at Rebecca, who was engrossed in the film, seemingly unperturbed by the early scares unfolding on the screen.

Quinn’s hand brushed against Rebecca’s as they both reached into the popcorn bowl, and she felt a jolt of electricity run through her. Quickly, she withdrew her hand, her heart pounding in her chest. Needing a distraction, she stood up and added another log to the crackling fire, then returned to the kitchen to refill their wine glasses.

Settling back onto the couch, Quinn found herself drifting closer to Rebecca, drawn in by her calm presence and the warmth radiating from her body. As the movie continued, Quinn jumped several times, her nerves heightened by the suspenseful soundtrack and the increasing sense of dread as Piper’s character struggled with the demonic forces taking over the old house she’d inherited.

Quinn’s heart raced as the movie reached its climactic moments. She glanced over at Rebecca, whose brow was furrowed in concentration, completely engrossed in the film. Quinn couldn’t believe how calm and collected Rebecca seemed, while she felt so on edge.

Sinking deeper into the couch, the empty bowl on the floor beside the couch, Quinn tried to focus on the movie, but her mind kept wandering back to the woman sitting beside her. The warmth of Rebecca’s arm brushing against her own made Quinn very aware of their proximity.

Quinn's thoughts drifted to the night before, when she had confided in Rebecca about what had happened on set. Her attention was no longer on the movie, and it was impossible to ignore just how much Quinn wanted to lean into those innocent touches.

The slamming of a door on screen startled her so much that she instinctively reached for Rebecca's hand.

Rebecca looked at her, surprise flickering across her face before she gave Quinn a reassuring smile. Rebecca held onto her hand, her thumb brushing gently over Quinn's knuckles.

Quinn's breath hitched in her throat as she felt the heat radiating from Rebecca's touch. She looked down at their intertwined hands, feeling a strange mix of fear and excitement coursing through her veins.

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Rebecca leaned closer to Quinn, whispering in her ear, “You okay?” Her voice was soft and soothing, and Quinn found herself nodding without thinking. She could feel Rebecca’s breath against her neck, and it sent shivers down her spine.

Quinn tried to shake off the strange sensation that had taken hold of her. She couldn’t believe how easily she had been swept up in this moment with Rebecca. She knew it was wrong, so wrong, but she couldn’t help herself. She wanted to lean into Rebecca, to feel the warmth of her body pressed against hers.

Quinn closed her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath as she tried to calm herself down. She knew she needed to focus on something else, anything else, to distract herself from the intense feelings that were running through her body.

She opened her eyes and turned to look at Rebecca, who was watching her with concern etched across her face. “I’m fine,” Quinn said quickly, trying to sound casual and unaffected by what had just happened between them.

Rebecca nodded slowly. “Okay,” she said softly before letting go of Quinn’s hand and turning back towards the movie.

The movie continued, but Quinn couldn’t concentrate. Rebecca’s touch lingered in her mind. She took a large gulp of wine, the rich, warm flavors burning a trail down her throat. Attempting to distract herself, Quinn focused on the details of the film – the dusty setting, the creaking floorboards, the flickering candlelight. She tried to analyze the edits, the pacing, the acting, anything to take her mind off the growing sense of disquiet within her.

But every time she caught a glimpse of Rebecca, Quinn felt an undeniable spark she couldn't ignore.

As the movie neared its end, the tension in the room thickened. Quinn's anxiety grew, her hands clenching and unclenching in her lap, but the tension wasn't entirely from the film.

Quinn's gaze kept drifting to Rebecca throughout the remainder of the movie. She couldn't help but notice the subtle movements—the slight tilt of Rebecca's head as she focused on the screen, the way her eyes widened during a particularly intense scene, the tiny creases that formed between her eyebrows when she was absorbed in the suspenseful moments.

It was strange for Quinn to feel so drawn to someone, especially in such a short amount of time. She had never felt this way before, and it was unsettling, exhilarating, and terrifying all at once.

The final scenes of the movie unfolded, and Quinn couldn't deny that Piper had done an exceptional job portraying the lead character's descent into madness as she grappled with the supernatural forces within the house.

As the credits began to roll, Rebecca reached for the remote and lowered the volume, not turning off the television. She turned towards Quinn, and in the glow of the screen, Quinn could see the softness in her eyes. "So, what did you think?"

Quinn took a moment to gather her thoughts. "It was intense," she finally said, meeting Rebecca's gaze. "Piper did an amazing job, as usual. She really can take on any role, any genre."

Rebecca smiled, and Quinn's heart skipped a beat at the warmth in her eyes. "She was excellent." There was a brief pause, and Quinn felt a charged silence build



between them. Rebecca's gaze remained on her, and Quinn could see the firelight dancing in her eyes. "Quinn, I want to be completely honest with you."

Quinn swallowed. Was Rebecca feeling this too? "Okay," she said, her heart beating loudly in her ears.

"Sarah is worried about you. She has been since you came back, but especially when you told her that you're renting this place for a year. She thinks there's something wrong. Obviously, I would never tell her about what you told me. But I'm just letting you know that she's worried."

Quinn's stomach dropped, and she tore her eyes away from Rebecca. How could she have thought that someone like Rebecca would feel the same way about her? She cleared her throat and reached for her wine. "I know. She's been acting weird too." She took a long drink, feeling more foolish and embarrassed than she had in a long time.

"Before her birthday, she asked me to see if I noticed anything unusual about you. I said I would even though I didn't think you'd tell me anything."

Quinn felt like she'd just taken a punch to the stomach. She blindly put her glass down and focused on taking a deep breath in. Rebecca had only asked her over for dinner so that she could try to find out what was going on with her and tell her mother?

This was worse than being rejected.

Rebecca continued. "I just want you to know that I would never betray your trust, no matter how good of a friend your mother is to me."

Quinn could only nod. She didn't trust herself to speak.

“And that while I agreed to try and talk to you at the party, I asked you over last night on a whim. It had nothing to do with her.” A hint of a smile ghosted Rebecca’s lips. “I’m not attempting to play detective. I’ve enjoyed these last few days, and I just wanted to make that clear incase it comes out after the fact, that your mother had asked me to do that.”

Quinn pushed herself off the couch without saying anything, crouching down in front of the fire and adding a few sticks and then another log to the flames.

12

Rebecca watched from the couch as Quinn crouched in front of the fire and added another log. Quinn still hadn’t said anything. Rebecca had only wanted to be honest, to help Quinn’s mother understand what was going on, but now she worried she may have overstepped and been too honest.

Rising from the sofa, Rebecca came around the coffee table to stand beside Quinn, who stood to meet her gaze. Rebecca could have sworn she saw the shimmer of tears in those vivid blue eyes, and her heart ached at the sight.

The rain was coming down harder now, the patter against the windows and roof providing a soothing backdrop to the charged silence between them.

“Hey,” Rebecca said softly, reaching up to gently brush a stray lock of golden hair behind Quinn’s ear. Her fingertips lingered, tracing the delicate curve of Quinn’s cheek. “What’s wrong?”

Rebecca’s voice was laced with concern, her brow furrowed as she searched Quinn’s face, desperate to understand what was troubling her. This wasn’t the confident, composed actress she had come to know. This was a raw version of Quinn, one that was even more vulnerable than last night

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Cautiously, she placed her hand on Quinn's arm, the warmth of her skin sending a spark of electricity through Rebecca's veins.

"Talk to me," Rebecca pleaded, her eyes imploring Quinn to open up.

Quinn met her gaze, those vivid blue eyes glimmering in the firelight, and for a heartbeat, Rebecca lost herself in them. But the moment was quickly eclipsed by Quinn's expression, which flickered with hesitation.

"I'm fine," Quinn said, though her voice lacked conviction. "I just... I have to figure out how to come out to my mom."

"You don't have to do it if you're not ready," she said gently. "I just wanted you to know that Sarah is worried about you."

Quinn sighed. "I know, and I know she won't have a bad reaction. But it still has to happen."

Rebecca's hand fell away from Quinn's arm, suddenly feeling guilty for even saying anything. "Look, I hope what I said didn't make you feel like you have to go talk to her tomorrow. I just wanted you to know that she's concerned about you."

"No. I know." Quinn glanced down to the fire and then her gaze lifted, avoiding Rebecca to look out the window.

"I should probably head home," Rebecca said after a moment, knowing the sensible thing would be to leave Quinn to think about what she wanted to do.

Quinn shook her head, her expression shifting from contemplation to a subtle urgency. “The rain’s heavier now. You shouldn’t walk home in that. Just stay in the guest room,” she said, her tone firm yet kind.

Rebecca hesitated. “Are you sure?”

Quinn carried the empty popcorn bowl into the kitchen and returned with a new bottle of wine, topping up their glasses.

“Thanks,” Rebecca said. She took a moment to observe the way the warm glow of the fire reflected in her eyes, adding a depth to their vivid blue. She caught herself lingering on those eyes a little too long and quickly averted her gaze, reaching for her glass. She took a sip, the smooth liquid warming her throat, but her attention remained fixed on Quinn, who had resumed her place on the couch.

Rebecca’s chest tightened as she took in Quinn’s profile, the dancing firelight casting shadows across her face. There was an elegance to her, a product of her Hollywood lifestyle, maybe, but it was more than that. There was an aura about her, something magnetic almost.

As if sensing Rebecca’s gaze, Quinn turned to face her, and for a fleeting moment, their eyes met. Rebecca felt her breath hitch ever so slightly, an involuntary reaction to the intensity she saw reflected back at her.

The rain pounded relentlessly against the windows, and Quinn ran a hand through her hair, looking like she was lost in her own thoughts.

Rebecca still wasn’t sure what had happened a few minutes ago, when she’d gone to Quinn after she’d added wood to the fire. There had been something in her eyes that Rebecca was almost afraid to put words to.

For just a brief few seconds, Rebecca could have sworn that Quinn had glanced at Rebecca's lips, but there was no way that was actually what happened.

But when Rebecca thought back over that moment again, she knew it was true.

And then Rebecca found herself imagining what it would be like to reach out and trace the delicate curve of Quinn's jaw, to lean in and breathe in the faint scent of her perfume, to feel the softness of her skin beneath her fingertips. But even as these thoughts flitted through her mind, she recognized the impossibility of acting on them. This was Quinn, her best friend's daughter who was eighteen years younger than her.

Rebecca found herself staring at Quinn, her heart pounding in her chest. She shouldn't even be thinking about this, even if she knew it wouldn't happen.

Could she blame it on the wine? She'd only had two glasses.

If anyone had asked her if she thought that Quinn Fallon, the actress, was attractive, Rebecca wouldn't have hesitated in answering. Yes. Of course she did. Most people would say Quinn was beautiful.

But it was more than that. Something had happened between yesterday and today. How or what Rebecca really wasn't sure.

Because right now, Rebecca knew that she was looking at Quinn with a longing in her eyes.

Quinn noticed Rebecca's gaze and raised an eyebrow, a small smile playing at the corners of her lips. "What are you thinking about?"

Rebecca swallowed hard, trying to gather her thoughts. She took a sip of wine while she tried to figure out what to say, because she absolutely could not say what she'd

just been thinking about.

“I’m thinking about whether or not I should delete my dating profile,” Rebecca said, returning Quinn’s smile. “I think I might need a break from dating.” She took another drink. “Maybe I could be your wingwoman. Although... Sorry.” She silently cursed herself. “I still forget that you can’t just go to a gay bar.”

Quinn sipped her wine. “I like that you forget that.”

“You do?”

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Quinn nodded. “I think you might be the first person I’ve ever felt comfortable around who wasn’t in the business.”

“Oh,” Rebecca said quietly. And then she remembered the way that Chloe had acted, and it made sense. That was probably a completely normal interaction for Quinn.

“Sorry, that was probably a strange thing to say.”

“No. Don’t apologize.” Rebecca left her glass on the coffee table. She had to slow down. “I should be the one saying sorry. I’m here complaining about online dating, and you can’t really do that at all.”

“No, but Piper already has someone she wants to set me up with,” Quinn said with a half-smile.

“Okay maybe you don’t have it that bad then,” Rebecca said with a laugh. “You’ll be dating a very talented actress or singer in no time.”

Quinn looked away, an almost sad expression on her face. “Maybe, but I’m interested in someone else. Someone I shouldn’t be, but I guess that’s my luck right now.”

Rebecca mentally ran through her limited knowledge of out actresses, but as far as she knew, they were all in relationships. Unless, there was someone new. She wasn’t great at keeping up with celebrity news.

Maybe it was someone who wasn’t out. Maybe it was someone Quinn knew through a friend.

And then she remembered the way Quinn had looked at her by the fire.

No. Quinn couldn't mean her.

For a moment, time seemed to stand still as they gazed into each other's eyes.

"You know who I'm talking about," Quinn said softly, "Don't you?"

Rebecca felt her breath catch in her throat as Quinn's words registered. This couldn't be happening. This was not something she could give into.

She knew she should say something, anything, to break the spellbinding silence that had descended upon them.

Quinn smoothly moved a little closer to her, and Rebecca mirrored her movement without thinking about it, and now they were mere inches apart.

Rebecca licked her lips, her mouth suddenly dry, as she grappled with the torrent of emotions swirling within her. She knew she should resist, that this would never work, but her eyes flicked to Quinn's lips, and she saw the slightest hint of a smile play at the corners of her mouth. It was all the invitation she needed.

Leaning forward, Rebecca closed the distance between them, her lips brushing softly against Quinn's. It was a gentle, exploratory kiss, a question rather than a statement. But as Quinn responded with a whimper, her lips parting slightly, Rebecca felt a wave of desire wash over her, threatening to overwhelm her senses.

She pulled Quinn closer, her hand on Quinn's cheek, as the kiss deepened. All thoughts of resistance melted away as she lost herself in the sensations flooding her body. It was as if every nerve ending was awakened, every touch and taste magnified. But even as she surrendered to the moment, a nagging voice of doubt whispered in



the back of her mind that she shouldn't have kissed her, no matter how much she'd wanted to.

As if sensing her hesitation, Quinn pulled back slightly, her eyes searching Rebecca's face. Rebecca saw the desire and confusion swirling in her eyes, a reflection of her own conflicted emotions.

"We shouldn't," Rebecca murmured, even as her hand caressed Quinn's cheek. "This is a bad idea."

But even as the words left her mouth, Rebecca knew she didn't truly want to stop. She wanted to keep kissing Quinn as crazy as all of this was.

13

Quinn stared into Rebecca's eyes, her own wide with disbelief. She had just shared her first real kiss with a woman. A kiss that wasn't for the cameras or an audience. A kiss that had ignited a rush of desire, leaving her wanting more. But it was also a kiss that felt wrong, forbidden even.

"We shouldn't," Rebecca murmured, her hand gently caressing Quinn's cheek. The tenderness of the gesture conflicted with her words. "This is a bad idea."

Quinn's heart hammered in her chest as she struggled to process the whirlwind of emotions swirling within her.

But as Quinn opened her mouth to speak, her words failed her. Instead, she leaned forward, craving another taste of Rebecca's lips. The kiss deepened, and a flood of sensations washed over Quinn, both familiar and entirely new.

Her hands found Rebecca's hips, pulling her closer, longing to feel the warmth of her

body against her own. It was madness. She knew that. Yet, in that moment, all rational thought escaped her.

Rebecca pulled back slightly, a hint of hesitation flashing across her face. “Quinn, we can’t?—”

Before she could finish, Quinn’s thumb brushed across her bottom lip, still tingling from the kiss. “Don’t,” Quinn whispered. She didn’t want to hear the reasons why this was a mistake. Not now, when all she could think about was how right it felt to be in Rebecca’s arms.

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The air between them crackled with unspoken desire. Quinn's breath quickened as she waited for Rebecca to push her away, to remind her of the boundaries they were crossing. Instead, Rebecca's hand found hers, and she interlaced their fingers together.

Rebecca leaned in, and this time, there was no hesitation, no resistance. Their lips met, and the kiss ignited a wildfire within Quinn. It wasn't just the softness of Rebecca's lips against hers or the gentleness of the touch. It was the electric current that coursed through her veins, awakening every nerve ending.

As their tongues met, Quinn felt a surge of desire that took her breath away. Her hands instinctively found Rebecca's face, gently cupping her cheek as she angled her head, deepening the kiss.

A moan escaped Quinn's throat, low and impassioned. She had never known a kiss could be so intoxicating. It wasn't just the press of lips or the dance of tongues. It was the way Rebecca's hand found its way to her waist, pulling her closer, or the subtle scent of her perfume that lingered.

Quinn's heart hammered in her chest as she lost herself in the kiss, her body leaning into Rebecca's touch. She felt a pull unlike anything she had ever experienced, a gravitational force drawing her inexorably toward this woman. It was as if her body knew what it craved even before her mind could fully process it.

In that moment, Quinn felt alive, truly alive, as if her senses had been heightened. The fabric of Rebecca's sweater brushing against her skin sent shivers down her spine.

As the kiss intensified, Quinn's hands began to explore, tangling in Rebecca's hair, anchoring herself to this moment, to this woman, her other hand resting on her jean clad thigh.

A rush of emotions washed over her: desire, fear, elation, and confusion. She knew this was wrong on so many levels, and yet, she couldn't bring herself to care.

Rebecca's taste, a hint of the wine they had shared earlier, lingered on Quinn's lips. She felt drunk on the sensation, lightheaded with desire.

Rebecca's hand gently caressed Quinn's back, sending a shiver down her spine. The touch was electrifying, and Quinn found herself wanting more. She knew she was treading in dangerous waters, yet she couldn't bring herself to pull away. Not now, not when she finally felt like she was truly living.

She had fantasized about this—about tasting Rebecca's lips, about feeling the warmth of her body. But the reality far exceeded her imagination.

Without breaking the kiss, Rebecca gently urged Quinn to straddle her lap, their bodies fitting together perfectly. Quinn's hands found their way to Rebecca's shoulders, her fingers splayed across the soft fabric of her sweater before sliding up her neck.

The kiss became more urgent, fueled by pent-up longing. Quinn could feel Rebecca's heart racing beneath her palm, matching the frantic beat of her own. She wanted this. She wanted to feel Rebecca's hands on her, exploring her body.

And Rebecca's hands roamed, boldly claiming what they had both denied themselves. Quinn moaned into the kiss, arching into the touch. It was as if Rebecca knew exactly where to touch her, exactly how to make her melt.

Quinn's eyes fluttered closed as Rebecca's lips brushed against the sensitive skin of her neck, sending shivers down her spine. She had dreamed of this, fantasized about the feel of Rebecca's lips on her skin, but the reality was infinitely better.

Rebecca's hands slid up her thighs, drawing ever closer to the center of her desire. Quinn's breath caught in her throat as she anticipated the touch. She was aware of the need pulsing between her legs, the want that threatened to consume her.

"Quinn," Rebecca said as she broke the kiss. "We have to stop."

Quinn silenced her with a kiss, and Rebecca responded, parting her lips, allowing Quinn in. She wanted this. She wanted Rebecca with a desperation that surprised her.

Rebecca's hands were on her shoulders now, but they gently pushed her back, and Rebecca's eyes fluttered opened as she leaned back against the couch. "We have to stop."

Quinn pressed her lips together and attempted to slide off Rebecca's lap as gracefully as possible.

"I don't want to," Rebecca said with a sigh.

"But?"

Rebecca shook her head.

"But?" Quinn asked, her voice barely above a whisper. She couldn't quite meet Rebecca's gaze. The intensity of the moment, the raw desire that had flared between them, left her feeling exposed, vulnerable.

Rebecca's hand found hers, their fingers intertwining. "Even if all the reasons why

we shouldn't weren't enough," Rebecca said, her thumb gently stroking Quinn's hand, "I wouldn't feel right moving so fast. This is...new for you."

Quinn finally looked at Rebecca. Her eyes, usually warm and inviting, held a flicker of something Quinn couldn't decipher. Regret? Uncertainty? She searched Rebecca's face for answers, for some indication of what she was thinking, what she was feeling.

"New?" Quinn echoed, the word catching in her throat. It was true. Just weeks ago, she'd been living a completely different life, a life where kissing a woman, wanting a woman, had never even crossed her mind. Now, here she was, straddling Rebecca's lap, her body still thrumming from their kiss, the taste of her still lingering on her lips.

"This whole...experience," Rebecca clarified, her gaze locking with Quinn's. "Questioning your sexuality, exploring these feelings...it's a lot to process. I don't want you to do anything you'll regret."

Quinn's heart ached at Rebecca's words. They were spoken with such care, such concern, that it made the sting of rejection even sharper. She knew, logically, that Rebecca was right. This was a lot to process. But logic had no power against the pull she felt towards this woman, the magnetic force that had drawn her in from the moment they'd reconnected.

She swallowed, trying to dislodge the lump that had formed in her throat. "I don't think I'd regret it," she whispered, the words barely audible even to her own ears. "But I know what you mean."

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Rebecca's expression softened, and she lifted a hand to brush a stray strand of hair away from Quinn's face. The gesture was tender, intimate, and it sent a wave of longing through Quinn. "Please don't think that I don't want to." She leaned in and kissed her softly. "And that's why I'm going to go. If I stay, I know that I can't trust myself."

A wave of disappointment washed over Quinn, a dull ache settling in her chest. Rebecca's words, though gentle, felt like a rejection. She understood the reasoning, the caution behind them, but it didn't make the sting any less potent. She wanted Rebecca, but she was right. It was a lot, this sudden shift in her world, this unexpected pull towards a woman she'd known her whole life, but never truly seen until now.

Quinn nodded slowly, her throat tight. The air, thick with unspoken desire just moments before, now felt heavy, charged with a different kind of tension, full of restraint, of longing.

"Let me walk you out," Quinn offered, her voice regaining a semblance of its usual strength. She needed to move, to break the spell that had woven itself around them.

Quinn followed Rebecca to the front door, the silence between them punctuated only by the steady patter of rain against the windows. She grabbed an umbrella and handed it to Rebecca, their fingers brushing for a fleeting moment. The contact, brief as it was, sent a jolt of electricity through her.

Rebecca hesitated, her hand hovering over the umbrella's handle. Her eyes met Quinn's, a silent conversation passing between them. Rebecca leaned in, her hand

coming up to cup Quinn's cheek. The touch was feather-light, yet it sent a wave of warmth through Quinn, chasing away the chill of the rain, the chill of disappointment.

Their lips met in a soft, lingering kiss. It was different from the kisses they had shared moments before. Less urgent, less demanding, but no less potent. It was a goodbye, a promise, a silent acknowledgment of the unspoken feelings that swirled between them.

"Goodnight, Quinn," Rebecca whispered against her lips, her breath warm on Quinn's skin.

"Goodnight, Rebecca," Quinn replied, her voice barely a whisper, and she watched as Rebecca stepped out into the rain and into the darkness.

14

Rebecca picked up her taco and took a bite. Across the table, Sarah was telling her about her school's newest teacher and how well she's fitting in. Rebecca nodded along, forcing a smile.

She couldn't stop thinking about last night, about the softness of Quinn's lips against hers, the electricity that had sparked between them. It had taken every ounce of her self-control to walk away, to do the right thing. But now, sitting across from Sarah, the guilt was really weighing on her.

Sarah had no idea that her own daughter was grappling with her sexuality, let alone that Rebecca had crossed a line she could never uncross. The kiss played on a loop in Rebecca's mind, taunting her almost.

Later when the waiter was clearing the table, Sarah shifted the topic of conversation.



“I know it’s early to be talking about Thanksgiving, but I wanted to make sure you knew you’re more than welcome at our place this year.”

Rebecca nearly choked on her beer. Heat flooded her face. Thanksgiving at Sarah’s, with Quinn? After what had happened last night? She coughed, grabbing her water instead of her beer.

“You okay?” Sarah asked, concern etched on her face.

Rebecca nodded, still struggling to breathe. “Just swallowed wrong.” She coughed and took a long drink, trying to compose herself.

Sarah’s offer was incredibly kind, especially after Rebecca’s mother had passed away last January. Thanksgiving had always been at her mom’s.

“It’s just...you know,” Rebecca stammered, buying herself time. How could she possibly explain the sudden tightness in her chest, the way her stomach was twisting itself into knots?

Sarah’s smile softened. “I know it’s not the same as your mom’s, but we’d love to have you. It’ll be different this year, with Quinn home for so long.”

Different. That was an understatement. Rebecca’s mind conjured the image of Quinn across the Thanksgiving table, both of them trying to act normal when their eyes would so easily give them away.

“I... I’d love to,” Rebecca managed. She forced a smile, hoping it reached her eyes. There was no way she could say no. Not to Sarah. Not without raising suspicion.

Sarah beamed. “Great! That’s settled then.”

The rest of evening passed in a blur. Guilt twisted in her gut, a heavy knot that tightened with every kind word Sarah spoke, every laugh they shared. Their friendship felt tainted now.

She watched Sarah across the table, the warm glow of the restaurant's string lights reflecting in her friend's eyes. Sarah, so open and trusting, so oblivious to what was going on with her daughter. How could Rebecca have betrayed that trust? How could she have kissed Quinn like that?

The image of Quinn's face, flushed with desire, flashed in Rebecca's mind. The memory of their kisses, the way their lips had fit so perfectly together.

It was wrong, so incredibly wrong.

She had to talk to Quinn. She had to make her understand the gravity of their situation, the potential consequences of their actions. This couldn't continue. It was unfair to Sarah, to Quinn, and to Rebecca herself.

This couldn't be the start of something. Rebecca knew she had to end it, before things went too far.

Quinn sat on the couch, her thoughts consumed by the memory of Rebecca's lips against hers. The softness, the passion, the way her entire body had come alive at the contact—it was seared into her mind, replaying on a constant loop. She'd imagined what it would be like to kiss Rebecca, but the reality had eclipsed those fantasies.

She glanced around the living room, taking in the familiar sight of her parents and Reagan engrossed in the football game. The normalcy of the scene felt surreal, a stark contrast to the tumultuous emotions swirling within her. Quinn had come here tonight with a purpose, a determination to finally share her truth with her mother. But as the evening wore on, the opportunity had never quite presented itself.

Now, as she sat there, the weight of her secret pressed heavily upon her chest. She couldn't keep this to herself any longer. It wasn't just about Rebecca, though the kiss had certainly been a catalyst. It was about embracing who she truly was, about living authentically and openly.

Quinn took a deep breath, steeling herself for what she was about to do. Her heart raced, pounding against her ribcage as if it might burst free at any moment. She licked her lips, her mouth suddenly dry.

"Mom, Dad, Reagan," she began, her voice trembling slightly. "There's something I need to tell you."

Three pairs of eyes turned to her, curiosity and concern etched on their faces. Quinn swallowed hard, her hands clenching into fists as she summoned every ounce of

courage she possessed.

“I’m gay,” she blurted out. “Until very recently I had no idea that I liked women.” Her gaze darted between the three stunned faces. “It was doing my last movie. When I took on that role, I never could have imagined how much I actually had in common with that character. I just wanted you to know.” She swallowed, her throat tight. “I haven’t been pretending all this time. I just didn’t know. I had no idea.”

Quinn’s heart raced as she watched her father mute the TV, the silence in the room deafening. She held her breath, waiting for someone, anyone, to react. Suddenly, Reagan practically leaped out of her armchair to sit down beside Quinn, pulling her into a tight hug.

“I’m proud of you,” Reagan whispered against Quinn’s ear.

Quinn’s eyes stung with unshed tears as she clung to her younger sister, grateful for the unwavering support. She took a shaky breath and looked to her parents, her stomach twisting with nerves.

Her mother spoke first, her brow furrowed. “Are you sure you’re not bi?”

Quinn shook her head, a lump forming in her throat. “I’m not.”

Once again silence filled the living room.

“Whatever you are, it’s fine with me,” her father said after a moment, his voice gruff but sincere. He unmuted the game, the sound of the announcers filling the room once more.

Quinn stared at her mother, her heart pounding as she waited for her reaction. Sarah’s eyes softened, and she stood up, opening her arms wide. Quinn rose to meet her,

allowing her mother to wrap her arms around her.

“You know I love you no matter what,” Sarah murmured, her voice thick with emotion. “I’m shocked. I’m not going to lie.” She pulled back, her hands resting on Quinn’s shoulders as she looked her in the eye. “Thank you for telling us.”

Quinn nodded, a wave of relief washing over her. She’d done it. She’d finally shared her truth with the people who mattered most to her.

The next thought that popped into her head was that she had to tell Rebecca.

16

Rebecca carried her coffee over to the table in the corner of the room beside the fire. Sarah was already there, and there was a strange look on her face that Rebecca couldn’t quite figure out.

“Hey,” Rebecca said as she sat down.

“Hi. Thanks for coming on such short notice.”

“I’ll take any excuse to get away from my computer in the middle of the day,” Rebecca said with a smile. “What’s going on?”

“I finally know what was going on with Quinn.” Sarah’s hands cradled the gray mug, her eyes focusing on something behind Rebecca. “You’ll never believe it,” she said, a smile coming to her lips. “But she came out to us last night. To all of us.”

Rebecca just stared at her friend.

“I know. That was my reaction,” Sarah said as she pushed a piece of blond hair

behind her ear. “I still can’t believe it. I mean, looking back... She was a bit of a tomboy, but that doesn’t mean anything. And she didn’t really have any boyfriends in high school, but then when she went to Los Angeles, she was never single for more than a few weeks.”

Rebecca had to bite back her smile. Quinn had come out not just to Sarah, but to the whole family by the sounds of it. When Rebecca thought back to that first night when Quinn had told her about what had happened while she was filming her latest movie, the inner turmoil... And now she’d come out to her family? It was fast, and it was brave, and Rebecca wanted to go over there right now and tell her that.

“Can you believe it?” Sarah asked. “Maybe you can. Your gaydar’s pretty good, isn’t it?”

“I guess it is,” Rebecca said, her voice a little too high-pitched. She cleared her throat. “Wow. That’s... I’m really happy for her.”

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“Me too. And relieved. She seems so much lighter now. Like a weight has been lifted.” Sarah’s smile softened. “She’s been through so much, you know, with the pressure of Hollywood and everything. I’m just glad she’s finally comfortable being herself.”

Rebecca nodded, unable to meet Sarah’s gaze. “Me too.”

Rebecca’s heart swelled with pride as Sarah shared the news of Quinn’s coming out, but as Sarah’s words hung in the air between them, the reality of their situation settled heavily in Rebecca’s chest. The memory of that night with Quinn, the softness of her lips, the electricity that had coursed through Rebecca’s veins... It had been a moment of weakness, a lapse in judgment that couldn’t be repeated.

Rebecca could live with being Quinn’s first real kiss, a stepping stone on her path to self-discovery. But she couldn’t be her first girlfriend. The mere thought of it made her stomach sink with guilt.

And then there was Sarah’s invitation to Thanksgiving. How would that even work if Rebecca showed up as Quinn’s girlfriend? Sarah and Jeff were the most accepting, loving parents Rebecca knew, but this... This was too much to ask of them. To expect them to welcome their daughter’s much older girlfriend – Sarah’s best friend – into their home, to their family table...

No, Rebecca couldn’t do that to them. She couldn’t do that to herself. As much as it pained her, as much as every fiber of her being longed to explore this connection with Quinn, Rebecca knew what she had to do.

She had to end things before they went any further. She had to make it clear to Quinn that, while she would always be there for her as a friend, anything more was off the table.

17

Quinn stood in her kitchen, the aroma of roasting meat and herbs filling the air. She checked her timer. Dinner would be ready in less than ten minutes. She sat at the breakfast bar while she waited, replaying last night's events. She'd done it. She'd come out, and the world hadn't ended. She'd had a long phone call with Piper earlier, filling her in on everything from kissing Rebecca to coming out to her family.

Piper had actually cried. Even as Quinn told her everything, it still didn't sound real.

She'd picked up her phone more than once today, wanting to text Rebecca, to see if she wanted to come over tonight, to tell her what had happened. But she'd hesitated, not wanting to seem overeager. In the end, she decided to wait a day or two before reaching out.

A knock at the door took her away from her thoughts. Quinn walked to the door, expecting to see Reagan's grinning face when she opened it. Instead, her breath caught in her throat.

Rebecca stood on her doorstep, bathed in the soft glow of evening sunlight. Her off the shoulder teal sweater revealed tanned skin, and her hair cascaded in loose waves, her copper highlights catching in the light. Quinn's heart skipped a beat.

"Hey," Quinn said, unable to keep the smile from spreading across her face.

Rebecca's eyes met hers, an unreadable expression flickering across her features. "Hi," she said softly.



Before Quinn could say another word, Rebecca stepped forward, wrapping her arms around her. Her breath tickled Quinn's ear as she whispered, "I'm so proud of you."

Quinn melted into Rebecca's arms, the warmth of her body and the subtle sweetness of her perfume.

As they pulled apart, a smile played on Quinn's lips. "News travels faster here than it does in Hollywood. It hasn't even been twenty-four hours."

Rebecca's smile was radiant, her eyes crinkling at the corners. "She is my best friend. She told me this afternoon over a coffee." She slid her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. "She's proud of you. And relieved that you're okay."

Quinn's heart swelled at the words. She still couldn't believe how well it had gone. "I know."

A shrill beeping from the kitchen interrupted the moment, and Quinn glanced over her shoulder. "My dinner's ready," she said, turning back to Rebecca. She hesitated for a beat, a sudden nervousness fluttering in her stomach. "Would you like to stay and join me?"

Quinn held her breath, her heart pounding in her ears as she waited for Rebecca's response.

Rebecca's eyes softened, a smile tugging at her lips. "I'd love to."

Quinn turned off the alarm and took the roast chicken out of the oven. The scent of rosemary filled the air as she started filling their plates a few moments later.

As they ate, Quinn asked Rebecca about her job and then her family. She had no idea that both of Rebecca's parents had died in the last five years.

The conversation flowed easily, and as physically attracted as Quinn was to Rebecca, she knew it was more than that. It was more than infatuation or lust. She loved spending time with her, and as much as she wanted to pick up where they'd left off the other night, Quinn was happy listening to Rebecca, to finding out more about her, about what she liked, about what she hated.

But most of all, she loved that Rebecca hadn't asked a single question about her life in Los Angeles. There had been no probing inquiries into the men she'd dated, no curiosity about whether she knew whoever her favorite actress or actor was, and no interest in what it was like to work with any particular person. Rebecca seemed genuinely uninterested in the Hollywood aspect of her life, and it was so refreshing.

18

Rebecca loaded the dishwasher while Quinn topped up their wine.

"Thank you for dinner," Rebecca said, leaning back against the counter. "It was delicious."

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“I’m glad you stayed.” Quinn reached for her glass and took a sip.

Rebecca swallowed. “We need to talk about what happened the other night.”

“I know.”

“It can’t happen again.” Rebecca felt like she was saying the exact opposite of what she wanted, but she had to be the sensible one here.

“Do you regret kissing me?”

Rebecca held Quinn’s gaze, seeing the flicker of worry in those vivid blue eyes. She forced herself to continue. “No. Not for a second. But it’s... It’s?—”

“Complicated,” Quinn finished for her, taking a step closer.

Rebecca nodded, unable to speak past the sudden lump in her throat. She pictured Sarah’s hurt and bewildered face if she ever found out. “Yes,” she whispered. “I can’t keep lying to Sarah. We’ve always shared everything that’s going on, and I hate not being able to be honest with her.”

A tense silence hung between them, heavy with unspoken words and longing. Rebecca wanted to close the distance, to feel the warmth of Quinn’s body against her own. But she knew she couldn’t give in, no matter how compelling the temptation.

Quinn’s eyes pleaded with her, and Rebecca’s heart clenched in her chest. “You didn’t lie to her. You just didn’t tell her about me. Yet.” Quinn’s voice was soft,

hopeful.

Rebecca took a steadying breath, trying to ignore the electricity that seemed to spark between them whenever they were close. “Sarah’s my best friend.” She shook her head, struggling to put her tangled thoughts into words. “This would hit her from both sides. I won’t be the reason you have a falling out with your mom.”

Quinn sighed, frustration flashing in her eyes. “It doesn’t have to be like that. You don’t know how she’ll react.”

Rebecca’s eyes narrowed. “How do you think she’ll take it when I tell her that I’m dating her daughter?”

“It doesn’t have to be a big deal.” Quinn stepped even closer. “She’ll come around if she sees how good we are together.”

Rebecca closed her eyes briefly. This was the first time that she really felt the age difference between them. Quinn was being so naive right now it was laughable. There was no way that Sarah would react well to this.

She looked into Quinn’s eyes, her expression softening. “I can’t be the reason you and your mom drift apart, or worse.” She stepped forward, placing her hand gently on Quinn’s cheek. “I care about you, Quinn. So much more than I expected. But right now, we need to be realistic.”

Quinn opened her mouth, then closed it again. Rebecca could almost hear the thoughts turning in her head as she tried to come up with arguments, anything to make this situation different.

“I get it,” Quinn finally said, her voice barely above a whisper. The hope that had shone in her eyes moments before dimmed, replaced by a shadow of disappointment.

Rebecca's heart ached at the sight.

"It's not that I don't want this," Rebecca said, her thumb gently stroking Quinn's cheekbone. "Believe me, Quinn, I..." She trailed off, unable to articulate the depth of her feelings. It felt too risky, too vulnerable.

Quinn leaned into her touch, her eyes fluttering closed. Rebecca's breath hitched. The simple act of touching her, of feeling the warmth of her skin beneath her fingertips, sent a wave of longing through her. She knew she should pull away, create some distance, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. Not yet.

And then Quinn's lips were hovering dangerously close to hers. Rebecca's breath caught in her throat as she felt the heat of Quinn's body against her own. Every instinct screamed for her to pull away, to put a stop to this before it went any further. But in that moment, she found herself incapable of resistance.

Rebecca kissed Quinn.

It was electric, passionate, and thoroughly intoxicating. Quinn's lips parted, and Rebecca felt herself surrendering to the kiss, exploring the warmth of Quinn's mouth. She tasted the lingering sweetness of the wine on Quinn's lips, and as their tongues touched, a shiver ran through her. She pulled Quinn closer, their bodies pressing together as if there wasn't enough space between them. Rebecca's heart raced as she lost herself in the moment, the taste of Quinn, the feel of her in her arms.

Rebecca's hands came up to slide into Quinn's hair, and the kiss became more urgent as they pressed closer together.

Rebecca knew she should stop. Every rational thought told her to pull away, to put an end to this madness before it consumed them both. But with Quinn's taste still on her lips, her heart racing, and her body alive with desire, she found herself unable to

resist.

Quinn's hands slid around her waist, pulling her closer. Rebecca felt the counter press into her back as Quinn guided her to sit on the edge, their bodies fitting together perfectly. Quinn stepped between her legs, her eyes dark with unspoken desire.

Rebecca's breath quickened as she looked into Quinn's eyes. Her heart pounded in her chest, a mixture of anticipation and trepidation. She knew they were crossing a line, taking this further than either of them had intended. But in that moment, all she could think about was the feel of Quinn's body against her own.

Quinn kissed along Rebecca's jaw and down her neck, making Rebecca shiver. "Let's go upstairs," Quinn murmured against her skin.

Rebecca stiffened slightly at the suggestion, knowing that once they went upstairs there would be no turning back from this moment. But even as she tried to gather her thoughts and find a reason to say no, she could feel herself weakening under Quinn's touch.

They had already admitted that this kiss shouldn't happen again. And yet here they were again in each other's arms.

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Rebecca knew she was already at the point of no return. The sensible, logical part of her brain pleaded with her to step away, to put an end to this before it went further. But as she looked into Quinn's eyes, she saw her own desire reflected back at her, and the last of her resistance crumbled.

She placed her hands on Quinn's waist, feeling the soft fabric of her shirt beneath her fingertips. With a gentle tug, she pulled Quinn closer, feeling the firm warmth of her body. Quinn's eyes fluttered closed as their lips met again, the kiss deepening. Rebecca's hands roamed, exploring the curves of Quinn's body, savoring the feel of her soft skin beneath her palms as she slid her hands under Quinn's shirt.

When Rebecca broke the kiss, she simply nodded, and Quinn took a small step back, giving Rebecca enough room to get down from the counter.

Rebecca's body tingled with anticipation as she took Quinn's hand, leading her out of the kitchen. As they climbed the stairs, their fingers intertwined, and Rebecca's heart raced as Quinn brought them to the end of the short hallway, pushing the door on the left open. She reached for the lamp switch on the dresser, illuminating the bedroom in a soft glow.

Rebecca took a step forward, closing the distance between them. Her hands found Quinn's hips, pulling her close as their lips met once more.

The citrus scent of Quinn's shampoo filled Rebecca's senses as she bent her head to kiss the soft skin at the base of Quinn's throat. Her hands moved to the hem of Quinn's shirt, slowly lifting it, savoring the way Quinn's muscles jumped beneath her touch. As she raised the shirt over Quinn's head, her lips brushed against the soft skin

of her shoulders, eliciting a soft sigh from Quinn.

Rebecca took a moment to admire the sight before her: Quinn in a black lace bra, her skin glowing in the soft lamplight. She placed a gentle kiss on Quinn's shoulder, her lips grazing the curve of her collarbone as she began to undo the button on Quinn's jeans.

As she eased the jeans down Quinn's legs, her hands skimmed the smooth skin of Quinn's hips, enjoying the way Quinn shivered at her touch. She trailed kisses up along the side of Quinn's neck as she gently pushed the jeans down until Quinn stepped out of them.

"You're beautiful," Rebecca murmured, her eyes never leaving Quinn's as she slowly reached behind her to pull her sweater over her head, revealing a simple black bra.

Quinn's breath caught as she took in the sight of Rebecca's curves, her eyes roaming appreciatively over her body.

Rebecca closed the distance between them, her hands sliding around Quinn's waist to pull her close. Quinn's hands moved to Rebecca's back, and Rebecca's breath hitched as she felt Quinn's fingers dance along her spine, sending tingles across her skin. Their lips met again, the kiss deep and hungry.

Rebecca parted her lips, her breath catching as Quinn's tongue gently teased her lower lip. As their mouths moved together in a slow, sensual dance, Rebecca's heart raced. She wasn't sure she had felt this way, this intoxicating mix of desire and urgency.

Rebecca moaned softly into Quinn's mouth as she gently bit Rebecca's lower lip, then soothed it with the tip of her tongue. Quinn's hands moved up Rebecca's sides, igniting a trail of fire beneath her skin. Rebecca's head fell back slightly, exposing



the sensitive skin of her neck, and Quinn took advantage, planting a series of soft, teasing kisses along her throat.

Rebecca's hands trailed up Quinn's back, her fingers tangling in the soft hair at the base of her neck. She pulled Quinn closer, their bodies flush against each other as she tilted her head to find Quinn's lips again.

Each kiss seemed more desperate and urgent than the last. Rebecca could feel the desire building within her, a delicious tension coiling low in her belly. She wanted to explore every inch of her, but she was conscious of the fact that this was Quinn's first time with another woman, and she wanted to take her time, to not get carried away.

She could feel the heat radiating from Quinn's skin, matching the fire burning within her. Rebecca's fingers found the clasp of Quinn's bra and she popped it open with one hand, her palm sliding over the smooth skin of her back. She pressed soft kisses along Quinn's shoulder as she gently eased the straps down her arms until it fell to the ground.

Rebecca took a moment to appreciate the sight, running her hands gently over Quinn's hips before sliding them up to cup her breasts. She felt Quinn's sharp intake of breath as she gently rolled her thumbs over the taut peaks, circling gently.

"Is this okay?" Rebecca asked.

"Yes," Quinn answered, her voice low and breathy.

Rebecca's lips trailed down Quinn's neck, placing soft kisses along her collarbone before nipping at the delicate skin. She felt Quinn's hands tighten on her waist, her breath quickening as Rebecca continued her languid exploration.

Rebecca's hands slid down Quinn's body, her thumbs hooking into the waistband of

her panties. With a gentle tug, she eased them down, kissing the newly revealed skin as they slid off. Stepping back, she paused to appreciate the vision of Quinn's naked body, her skin flushed with desire.

Quinn's eyes watched Rebecca as she slowly sliding her jeans down her legs, and Rebecca enjoyed the way Quinn's gaze followed her every move. With a final shimmy, she stepped out of them, standing before Quinn in her black lace panties.

Quinn closed the distance between them, sliding her hand into Rebecca's hair as she captured her lips again. The kiss became fiery and deep, their tongues dancing desperately.

Rebecca eased Quinn towards the bed until she gently pushed her backwards, and Quinn fell onto it, her eyes never leaving Rebecca's. Quinn's legs wrapped around her waist and Rebecca could feel the warmth between them, a clear indication of just how much Quinn wanted her. But she didn't want this to be rushed, she wanted to savor every second of this. So she claimed Quinn's lips in another kiss as her hand trailed down, gently caressing Quinn's inner thigh.

Rebecca hovered over Quinn, her gaze drinking in the sight of the beautiful woman beneath her. The soft lamplight cast a warm glow over her skin, and Quinn's eyes, a vivid blue, stared up at her with a mixture of desire and vulnerability that made Rebecca's heart ache.

She leaned down, capturing Quinn's lips in a slow, lingering kiss. Her fingers trailed along Quinn's jaw as Rebecca's tongue darted over Quinn's.

Pulling away, Rebecca's lips moved to Quinn's neck, placing soft, teasing kisses along the delicate column of her throat. She felt Quinn's pulse quicken beneath her lips. Her hands slid up Quinn's sides, her thumbs skimming the underside of her breasts, feeling the subtle tremors that coursed through Quinn's body.

“You’re so beautiful,” Rebecca murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

Quinn’s breasts were perfect, the rosy peaks hardening under her gaze. She cupped them gently, her thumbs brushing over the sensitive nipples, eliciting a soft moan from Quinn.

Rebecca dipped her head, capturing one of the taut peaks between her lips. She flicked her tongue over the hardened bud, loving the way Quinn’s back arched off the bed, her fingers tangling in Rebecca’s hair. She gave the same attention on her other breast, her hand caressing the soft flesh, feeling Quinn’s body respond to her touch.

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Rebecca kissed her way down Quinn's stomach while her hands continued to tease Quinn's breasts. Quinn's breathing was already starting to change, her hips lifting off the bed, and Rebecca had barely gotten started.

Rebecca's fingers hooked into the waistband of Quinn's panties, her eyes meeting Quinn's as she began to ease them down. Rebecca tossed them aside and placed a gentle kiss on the inside of Quinn's thigh, feeling the muscles quiver beneath her lips. Her hands slid up the soft skin of Quinn's legs, spreading them wider as she got comfortable between them.

She inhaled the sweet, musky scent of Quinn's arousal, and Rebecca's hands moved to cup the firm swell of Quinn's backside, pulling her closer as she explored the sensitive folds with her tongue.

Quinn's response was immediate, her body arching off the bed as a low moan escaped her lips. Encouraged by Quinn's reaction, Rebecca continued her slow exploration, her tongue circling Quinn's clit, her lips gently sucking and flicking, alternating speed and pressure as Quinn's moans grew.

Rebecca's own body throbbed with need, the ache between her legs growing more insistent with each passing moment. But this wasn't about her.

The warmth of Rebecca's breath on her skin sent shivers down Quinn's spine. She let out a soft gasp as Rebecca's tongue traced languid patterns across her most sensitive spots, sensations unlike anything she had ever known coursing through her. She

threaded her fingers through Rebecca's hair, the softness of it offering a stark contrast to the intense pleasure radiating through her body.

Then, with a gentle push, Rebecca rose, placing kisses along Quinn's body as she ascended, as if mapping out a path of delicious torture. Once she reached Quinn's chest, she paused, her lips hovering over Quinn's racing heart. Her left hand, planted beside Quinn's shoulder, trailed a path up her thigh, her touch feather-light and deliberate.

"Is this okay?" Rebecca murmured, her eyes searching Quinn's face for any hint of hesitation. Her fingers edged closer to the center of Quinn's desire, her touch sending sparks of anticipation through Quinn's body.

Quinn nodded, her breath catching in her throat. "Yes," she whispered, her voice hoarse with need.

There was a moment of stillness, an electric tension, and then, with a slow, deliberate slide, Rebecca entered her. A gasp escaped Quinn's lips as sensations she'd never felt before exploded within her. Her body arched involuntarily, seeking more, and Rebecca obliged, her fingers moving in a steady rhythm.

Quinn felt herself unraveling. This was nothing like she had experienced before. Rebecca's skilled fingers worked their magic, and Quinn tightened her grip on the bedsheets, her eyes fluttering closed as waves of pleasure washed over her.

Quinn's other hand found Rebecca's cheek, her thumb swiping along her jawline before brushing her lips over Rebecca's.

Rebecca moaned into the kiss, adjusting her body weight, kissing her fully now, her tongue swirling with Quinn's.

The pace of Rebecca's fingers quickened and heat flooded her body. Quinn had to break the kiss, her breath came in short gasps, each touch, each caress, bringing her closer to the edge.

"Oh fuck," Quinn moaned.

Rebecca's thumb found her most sensitive spot, and with that, Quinn was catapulted into a realm of pleasure she hadn't known existed. Her body arched off the bed as a rush of sensations washed over her, drowning out all coherent thought. Her toes curled, her calf muscles tight, as her fingers tightened on the bedsheets, and her body pulsed with aftershocks until she was dazed and breathless.

Rebecca propped herself on an elbow, her eyes warm with a mixture of satisfaction and something softer, something that hinted at emotions running deeper than mere physical attraction.

"Quinn," she started, then paused, her fingers absently tracing invisible patterns on Quinn's hip. The contact sent tingles through Quinn's body, and she realized just how intimate this moment was. Rebecca's thumb stroked Quinn's skin in a slow, soothing motion.

With a soft exhale, Quinn closed the distance between them, her lips finding Rebecca's in a hungry kiss. Quinn's hands slid behind Rebecca's back, fumbling with the clasp of her bra until it finally fell open.

Rebecca pushed herself up onto her knees, sitting back to let the straps slide down her arms before tossing it away. Quinn swallowed, her gaze transfixed by Rebecca's breasts—the curve of them, the softness. She felt a sudden, inexplicable urge to lean forward, to let her lips and tongue explore. It was as if an invisible force pulled her closer, and she found herself sitting up.

“You’re stunning,” Quinn said, her eyes taking in Rebecca, and then she was guiding Rebecca onto her back, reversing their positions. “I don’t know where to start,” she whispered as she covered Rebecca’s body with her own, and she forgot to breathe when their bare breasts touched for the first time as she leaned in to brush her lips over Rebecca’s.

They moaned into the kiss. Quinn found Rebecca’s hand and threaded their fingers together against the sheets while her other hand slipped between them to cup her breast.

Rebecca arched into her touch, and Quinn, for the first time, felt the thrill of bringing another woman pleasure. Quinn’s fingers toyed with Rebecca’s nipple. Swiping with her thumb and then teasing the hardened peak with her fingertips.

Rebecca broke the kiss, her breathing already ragged. A lock of hair fell over her eyes, and she looked ridiculously sexy, her lips swollen from all of their kissing. “God, Quinn,” she whispered, her voice husky with desire.

She leaned down, her lips seeking Rebecca’s once more, and Rebecca parted her lips, her tongue searching for Quinn’s.

Slowly, Quinn slid her hand down Rebecca’s stomach, her skin so smooth. Quinn kept going, teasingly slow, until her fingers brushed against the elastic of Rebecca’s underwear. Then, she slipped her hand beneath them.

Rebecca’s hips lifted off the bed as Quinn circled her clit with her fingertips. She moaned, a soft, desperate sound, and tightened her grip on Quinn’s arm.

Rebecca was so wet already, and Quinn could feel her own arousal building again.

Quinn sat up, gently pulling her hand out from Rebecca’s panties, and with a swift

movement, she tugged at the fabric until it slid down Rebecca's legs.



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Positioning herself above Rebecca again, Quinn took in the sight of her. Her eyes trailed over Rebecca's body, lingering on her breasts and her stomach.

"You're so beautiful," Quinn whispered, her fingers gliding up the inside of Rebecca's thigh until she was teasing her clit.

"Quinn, please," Rebecca begged, her voice thick with need. "You're driving me crazy."

Those words sent a thrill through Quinn, and she didn't make her wait, slipping two fingers inside with ease.

Rebecca arched her back, her head thrown back as Quinn found a rhythm.

"Faster," Rebecca breathed, her hips moving in time with Quinn's hand. "Right there, oh God, don't stop."

Quinn quickened the pace, watching the play of emotions on Rebecca's face. She was so gorgeous like this.

Rebecca's breath hitched, her body tensing. "I'm close," she gasped.

Quinn bent down to take one of Rebecca's nipples in her mouth just as she added a third finger, and Rebecca cried out, her body convulsing seconds later.

Quinn moved higher, capturing Rebecca's mouth in a searing kiss as her body shuddered and tensed beneath her. They kissed feverishly, their tongues tangling as

Quinn rode out Rebecca's orgasm with her, feeling her own pleasure spike and crash through her.

She broke the kiss, carefully withdrawing her fingers before getting comfortable beside Rebecca who was trying to catch her breath.

Quinn's heart hammered in her chest. It almost didn't feel real. How had she gotten this lucky?

Rebecca smiled softly as she brushed a strand of hair behind Quinn's ear. "You're incredible," she murmured before kissing her, slowly and thoroughly.

Rebecca's tongue slid against hers, and Quinn moaned, caught between a kiss that was so sensual and the feeling of Rebecca's hand gripping her ass. Her body was alive, more alive than it had ever been.

As the kiss deepened, their hips rocked, a delicious friction building as they ground against each other. Quinn's breath quickened, and she could feel her arousal building again, a familiar tension tightening in her core.

Rebecca broke the kiss, her eyes dark with desire, a hint of a smile playing at the corners of her mouth. She rolled Quinn onto her back, taking control with a confidence that sent sparks of anticipation racing through Quinn.

"You're so beautiful," Rebecca murmured, her breath ghosting over Quinn's skin. "I want to feel you everywhere."

Her hips began to move, grinding against Quinn's, their clits rubbing together in a tantalizing rhythm.

"Oh fuck," Quinn moaned as a bolt of pleasure shot through her. Her head fell back,

and her eyes slammed shut.

Rebecca leaned down, her tongue tracing a path along Quinn's neck, her hands roaming over Quinn's body. Her mouth found Quinn's nipple, and she sucked, her tongue flicking over her, teasing her.

Quinn arched her back, a soft cry escaping her lips. Her hands clutched at Rebecca's shoulders, her body moving instinctively to meet each rock of Rebecca's hips.

Rebecca's mouth was everywhere while her hips rolled, pushing Quinn closer and closer to the edge. She could feel the coil tightening, a heat building deep within her.

"Rebecca," she gasped, her hips grinding back against Rebecca's. "I'm so close."

Rebecca's hands found Quinn's, pushing them back against the bed as she moved with shorter thrusts.

Quinn cried out, her body tensing as her orgasm crashed over her, wave after wave of pleasure pulsing through her. She could feel Rebecca's body shake a few seconds later, their hips still moving, slowly, drawing out every bit of pleasure.

Rebecca sighed happily, releasing Quinn's hand as she tousled her hair, their legs tangling together now as they shared a slow, intimate kiss.

Quinn's body was still buzzing, her skin sensitive to the gentlest brush of Rebecca's fingertips. She felt like she was floating, her limbs heavy, and she was faintly aware of the heat still pulsing between her thighs.

Rebecca propped herself up on an elbow, her eyes filled with a tenderness that made Quinn's heart ache. She traced Quinn's jawline with the backs of her fingers, her touch feather-light.

“You okay?” Rebecca asked softly.

Quinn nodded, her voice still caught somewhere between her racing heart and the tangle of sheets. “More than okay,” she finally managed, her eyes searching Rebecca’s. “That was...” She shook her head, unable to find the words to describe the experience. Words felt inadequate.

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Rebecca seemed to understand, her lips curving into a soft smile as she let her hand trail down Quinn's arm, drawing invisible patterns on her skin. Her thumb brushed Quinn's lower lip, and Quinn's breath hitched at the sensation.

Rebecca's eyes darkened, and she leaned forward, capturing Quinn's lips in a slow, lingering kiss. Quinn's hands slid down Rebecca's back, pulling her closer, wanting to erase any distance between them.

Their lips eventually parted, Quinn's breath mingling with Rebecca's as she rested her forehead against hers.

"Are you tired?" Rebecca asked.

"No." Quinn caught Rebecca by surprise as she rolled them over. She looked down at Rebecca who was smiling up at her. "Not at all. Are you?"

"No." Rebecca held her gaze, but as Quinn's hand slipped between them, finding the slick arousal between Rebecca's legs, her eyes fell shut, a moan escaping her lips.

"Good," Quinn said as she lowered her head, brushing her lips over the sensitive skin beneath Rebecca's ear, thinking about all the things she wanted to do to this woman.

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Rebecca slowly woke up, registering the light streaming through the curtains and the empty space beside her. She stretched, her muscles pleasantly sore, and smiled as memories of the previous night flashed through her mind. The urgency, the passion,

the raw intensity of it all. It had been incredible. But now, in the quiet morning light, doubts crept in. As she sat up, her gaze fell on the clothes strewn across the floor.

Last night had been a blur of desire, but now, she couldn't ignore the reality of their situation. She pushed herself off the bed and gathered up her clothes. She got dressed, pulling her sweater over her head just a few seconds before Quinn emerged from the bathroom. She was wearing pajama shorts and a tank top. There was an easy smile on Quinn's face as she crossed the room while she towel dried her hair.

"Sorry, did I wake you?" Quinn asked

Rebecca shook her head, her throat tight as she met Quinn halfway. "No, I woke up naturally. But I should get going. I have a ton of work to do."

Quinn nodded. "Do you still think this can't happen?" she asked as she draped the wet towel across the footboard, her words hanging in the air between them.

Rebecca's gaze dropped to Quinn's lips, remembering how they'd felt against her own just hours ago. She wanted to say no, to throw caution to the wind and embrace this unexpected connection. But her practical side, the voice of reason had to win.

"I loved everything about last night," she began. "But I don't know how this can work." She gestured between them. "You're my best friend's daughter. I'm nearly twenty years older than you. If your mom found out, it would destroy her. I don't know how we get passed that."

Quinn took a step toward her, closing the distance, and Rebecca's resolve wavered. She could see the determination in Quinn's eyes, the same look she'd seen on her face last night in the kitchen.

"I know it's complicated," Quinn said. "But I don't think that was a one-night stand."

Rebecca pressed her lips together. She knew it wasn't. Not if they were going on their feelings alone.

"And I also think that we're getting way ahead of ourselves," Quinn said. "We're worrying about something that might never happen."

Rebecca ran a hand through her hair. "As in, we might not last long enough to tell her?"

"You're not the only one who can be realistic."

A smile tugged at Rebecca's lips. "Okay, so we either walk away from this now or we see where this goes, and if it's something, then we worry about telling your mother?"

"I think so."

"And then when she's angry at us for not only getting together but also lying to her for weeks we hope that she forgives us? You can't be willing to lose your family over this."

"Maybe not right now."

Rebecca's hands went to Quinn's waist. "Us being together will cause both of us a lot of problems."

"Rebecca, we've both, for different reasons, spent a lot of time not living lives that were true to ourselves. I'm at the point where I just want to be happy. You're worried about my mother? I'm worried about the paparazzi. I won't go unnoticed here forever. Someone will see me, and I'll probably have to buy a house that I can properly secure. I'm going to go back to work at some point, and that's going to take

me away from you for weeks at a time. I'm not naive. I know that there's a lot of obstacles here. But I also know that I've felt more in these last few days with you..." Her voice trailed off.

Rebecca swallowed the lump in her throat. "Okay," she breathed, her voice barely above a whisper. "Okay, let's... let's see where this goes." Her heart pounded against her ribs. It was a reckless decision, but looking into Quinn's eyes, she couldn't bring herself to say no.

A small, hesitant smile reached Quinn's lips.

"But," Rebecca said, a knot of anxiety tightening in her stomach, "there's something I need to say." She hesitated, searching for the right words. "What if... What if this is just because I'm the first woman?" The question hung between them, and she watched Quinn's face, searching for a flicker of doubt, a hint of uncertainty.



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Quinn's expression softened, her eyes searching Rebecca's. "I thought about that," she admitted, her voice quiet. "But this isn't just physical. It's... everything. The way we talk, the way we... connect. I know this is still so new, but I really don't think that's what's going on here."

Rebecca wanted to believe her. She needed to believe her. But what if Quinn was wrong? What if when Quinn went back to Los Angeles and met someone who would understand her life so much better than Rebecca ever could?

"I don't want to walk away from this," Quinn said. "Not yet. Not this easily."

"I don't either," Rebecca admitted.

"I'm not going to tell anyone about this." Quinn reached up to run her fingers along Rebecca's jaw, but then she looked away, her hand falling. "I told Piper. But other than her, I'm not telling anyone. Not even Reagan. And if there is something to tell, in a few weeks or months from now, we'll do it together."

"Has anyone ever told you you're very persuasive?" Rebecca asked with a smile.

"Just my high school drama teacher."

Rebecca laughed as she wrapped her arms around Quinn.

The past month had been the closest thing to perfection that Quinn could remember.

She'd been reading, going on hikes and enjoying the beautiful foliage. She'd even started writing a screenplay, but the best part of the last month had been all of the time she'd spent with Rebecca.

Their relationship, though undefined, felt natural and effortless. The days they spent together flew by. Most evenings were spent together at either of their homes. Staying over had become the norm, and now that it was November, Quinn wasn't sure how much longer they could go on like this. They were so good together. They'd have to tell her mother soon.

But it turned out that Quinn wouldn't have to worry about that, because that morning while Rebecca was in the shower, her mother pulled into her driveway unannounced. It was early. Not too early that they couldn't have come up with an excuse, but there was no covering up the sound of the shower or the fact that Quinn was in the middle of making breakfast for two with two places set at the breakfast bar.

It had all happened in slow motion.

The sound of a car pulling into the gravel driveway cut through the quiet kitchen. Quinn's heart skipped a beat as she walked towards the front door and glanced out the window, recognizing the familiar silver SUV that belonged to her mother.

Panic surged through her. There was nothing she could do. Rebecca's car was in her driveway at eight in the morning.

"Quinn," her mother said with a curious look on her face. "I was just going to ask you if you wanted to go for a drive and maybe a hike? The foliage is peaking this week. But what's Rebecca doing here so early?"

Her gaze swept from the two places set at the breakfast bar to the sound of running water that could be faintly heard from upstairs. Quinn knew she couldn't lie, not to

her mother. Taking a deep breath, she turned to face her, not even sure how she was going to say this.

Before Quinn could speak, she saw her mother's eyes widen as she put the pieces together. Sarah's hand flew to her forehead, and she took a step back.

"Quinn, tell me this isn't what I think it is."

Quinn felt frozen, struck dumb by the shock on her mother's face. She wanted to explain, to make her mother understand, but all she could do was shake her head, unable to find the words.

Sarah's eyes filled with tears as she backed towards the door. "This can't be happening. Not with Rebecca."

The words stung, and Quinn felt a surge of defensive anger. She took a step forward, wanting to reassure her mother, to make her see that this was a good thing.

"Mom, wait. Please. Let me explain."

But it was too late. Her mother was already out the door, hurrying back to her car.

Quinn was left standing there, stunned. She felt like she'd been punched in the gut, the wind knocked out of her.

Her mind raced as she processed what had just transpired. She and Rebecca had been so careful, keeping their relationship private, ensuring that no one suspected a thing. But now, in an instant, it had all blown up in their faces.

And as Rebecca had warned her, her mother was not impressed.

Rebecca stepped into the kitchen, noticing the scattered ingredients on the counter. Quinn had clearly been planning to make breakfast. Her gaze drifted to the deck, where she spotted Quinn pacing back and forth in the chilly morning air.

Concern gripped Rebecca's chest as she slid open the glass door and stepped outside. Quinn's face was ashen, her body visibly shaking. Something was terribly wrong.

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“She knows,” Quinn said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Rebecca’s stomach dropped. “What?” she asked, though she already knew the answer.

Quinn’s eyes, wide with panic, met Rebecca’s. “She was here. Just now. She showed up and the shower was on and your car’s in the driveway.”

Rebecca’s mind raced, trying to process the implications. Sarah had been here. She’d seen Rebecca’s car. The pieces fell into place, and a wave of dread washed over her. Their secret was out, and in the worst possible way.

She reached for Quinn, pulling her close. Quinn’s body trembled against hers, and Rebecca fought to keep her own composure. This was exactly what she’d feared – the reason she’d been so hesitant to pursue this relationship in the first place.

“What happened?” Rebecca asked softly, her hand moving in soothing circles on Quinn’s back.

Quinn pulled away slightly, wrapping her arms around herself. “Before I could even try to explain she was backing out of the house like she’d just seen a ghost.” Quinn exhaled, her breath coming out in a puff of smoke. “Fuck, you were right. She took it so badly, Rebecca. Her face...” She ran a hand through her hair. “I’ve never seen her that upset.”

Rebecca didn’t know what to say. This was not how this was supposed to go. Just yesterday, she’d been wondering if it was time to think about saying something to

Sarah. The last five weeks had been amazing, and Rebecca wanted to tell her best friend about it. She wanted Quinn to be able to be honest with her family and tell them that she'd met someone.

"I'll go talk to her," Rebecca said.

"You'll have to let her cool off a bit."

"This evening then."

"What are you going to say?" Quinn asked.

Rebecca couldn't miss the fear in her voice. She imagined that Quinn was worried that Rebecca would tell Sarah that it was a mistake, a lapse in judgement. She swallowed. "I don't know. What should I say? She's going to ask me if it's serious, assuming that she'll even talk to me."

"It is for me," Quinn said without hesitation.

"For me too." Rebecca pulled Quinn into a hug, running her hand up and down Quinn's back, hoping that she could convince Sarah that this was a good thing, no matter how shocking it might be. They were good together. They made each other happy.

She just had to hope that Sarah would come around.

23

Quinn sat on the hood of her mother's car, her heart racing as she waited. The crisp autumn air nipped at her cheeks, but she barely noticed, her mind consumed with the impending confrontation. For a week, she'd tried to reach out, to explain, to make

things right, but her mother's silence had been deafening.

Quinn had come to the farmer's market like she did most weekends, but this morning, she spotted her mother's car, and instead of going shopping, she perched herself on the hood of her car, patiently waiting for her to return.

And almost an hour later, there she was, carrying two brown bags, one in each arm. But the moment their eyes met, her mother froze.

"Quinn," Sarah said, her voice tight when she finally reached the car. "What are you doing here?"

Quinn slid off the hood, her legs shaky beneath her. "Mom, please. We need to talk."

Sarah's jaw clenched. She moved to the trunk, fumbling with her keys. "I don't think there's anything to say."

"There's everything to say," Quinn insisted, following her mother. "You won't answer my calls. You won't see me. How are we supposed to work through this if you won't even talk to me?"

Sarah shoved her bags into the trunk, her movements jerky and agitated. "Work through what, Quinn? The fact that you're sleeping with my best friend? That you've both been lying to me?"

Quinn flinched at her mother's harsh tone. "It's not like that. We didn't plan this. It just... happened."

Her mother slammed the trunk shut, finally turning to face Quinn. "Do you have any idea how this feels?" Sarah asked, her voice breaking. "To find out my daughter and my best friend have been sneaking around behind my back?"

Quinn closed her eyes. Rebecca had warned her about this very moment. “Would you have had a better reaction if I’d told you the second I started feeling something for her? It was always going to be like this.”

“And shouldn’t that tell you something,” her mother countered, brushing by her to open the driver’s side door.

“I love her,” Quinn said as her mother got in. The admission shocked both of them.



“You what?”

“I know you don’t want to hear it, but this is real. This isn’t an affair where the appeal of it all is the sneaking around. Both of us wanted to tell you.”

Her mother leaned back against the headrest as she sighed. “Quinn, I’m not trying to be difficult. I just want you to be happy.”

“I am. I’m happier than I’ve ever been.”

“But the age difference...”

Quinn shook her head. “It’s irrelevant.”

Her mother didn’t say anything, but she didn’t shut the door and drive away either. Eventually, she spoke, but it was so soft that Quinn wondered if she’d imagined it.

“I miss my best friend, and I miss my daughter.”

Quinn bit the inside of her cheek when her mother turned to her with tears in her eyes. “Can we come to Thanksgiving? Together?”

Her mother inhaled a deep breath. “I never told your father or Reagan.”

Quinn nodded. “I thought you wouldn’t.”

“This might be more shocking than coming out.”

“I know.” Quinn shoved her hands in her coat pocket. “Can we come to Thanksgiving?” she asked again.

This time her mother answered with a simple nod. “I’d like that.” She sighed softly as she turned to look up at her. “It’s going to take me a while to get used to this.”

“I get that.”

“But I will try.”

Quinn felt a smile tugging at her lips, hoping that the worst of this was over, because she wanted nothing more than to go to her parents’ house for Thanksgiving and Christmas and have Rebecca there with her.

There was really only one thing left to do.

She had to come out to the world.

## EPILOGUE

Rebecca fidgeted with the lapels of her blazer as she stood in the green room. She always felt a little out of place in these settings, worlds away from her normal, every day life in rural upstate New York. But she was here for Quinn.

A buzz of anticipation hummed through her as she watched the TV on the wall. Quinn came out in a black dress that showed off her figure and greeted the host with a practiced ease. She acknowledge the audience as she made her way to her seat beside the host’s desk.

Rebecca couldn’t wait to ring in the New Year with Quinn by her side, and when this interview was over, that was exactly what they were going to do.

Rebecca had no idea how she could make this look so easy. The playful banter, the quick remarks, and then they were talking about her latest movie.

Quinn listened as the host gave some background about the movie, and then he asked her, “So I know actors have to research certain roles or spend some time with people who have been through the experiences of your character. I’m curious, what did you do to prepare yourself for this role? I know a lot of actors receive some criticism for playing gay characters, and that’s not what I’m doing here. I think you did an amazing job, and I’m curious what preparations went into it.”

Quinn’s smile could light up a room. “Well, if I’m being totally honest, I didn’t have to do much. This role taught me more about myself than any preparation for it could. While I was filming this movie, I realized that I wasn’t a straight woman playing a queer character. I was a lesbian playing a queer character.”

The audience erupted into a mix of applause and cheers along with a few gasps. Or maybe that gasp had been her own.

Rebecca sunk down into the sofa, her mouth falling open.

“Did you just come out right here on my show?” the host asked with a grin.

“I think I just did,” Quinn answered with a charming smile of her own.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 3:52 pm*

“Well, congratulations, and I’d like to wish you a very Happy New Year.”

They’d cut to a commercial with the audience still cheering, and Rebecca had barely stood up when Quinn was coming through the door.

“What just happened?” Rebecca asked with a smile. “Did you plan that?”

“I knew I wanted to,” Quinn said as she came around the couch to stand beside her. “Doing it was another thing.”

“I’m so proud of you.” Rebecca’s hands went to Quinn’s face.

Quinn held her gaze for a second before her eyes fluttered shut as she leaned in, brushing her lips over Rebecca’s.

Rebecca kissed her back, one hand on her waist, and it was moments like this that felt almost too good to be true.

Somehow, Sarah had come around. Quinn had waited her out, and when they did speak, she’d managed to convince her to give them a chance. A few days later, Sarah reached out to Rebecca, asking to meet for coffee, and it hadn’t taken long for Sarah to see how serious Rebecca was about Quinn.

And spending Thanksgiving and then Christmas with the Fallons had just cemented it.

“Let’s go ring in the New Year,” Quinn murmured against her lips as she pulled

away, a playful smile on her face.

Rebecca took Quinn's hand in hers. "I can't think of a better way to start the new year."