

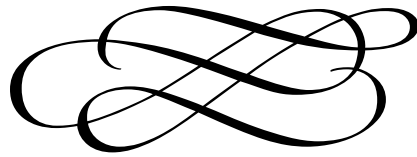


NEVER
AGAIN

R.L.
MATHEWSON

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

NEVER AGAIN



R.L. MATHEWSON

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For my Children

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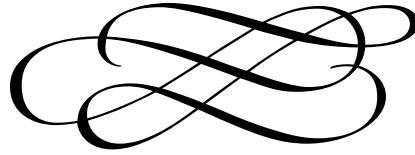
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PROLOGUE



**Chesterville, MA
Fifteen Years Earlier**

“Let me break your legs,” Grandma said as her eyes narrowed dangerously on his legs while her grip tightened around her cane, letting him know that she was already imagining doing it.

“That’s real sweet, Grandma, but I think I’ll be fine,” Quinn assured her as he leaned down and pulled the small, feisty woman who’d raised him since he was a baby into his arms only to smile when she whispered, “I can make it look like an accident.”

“I know you can,” Quinn said with a teasing smile as he reluctantly released her and-

“Can I have your room when you die?” came the curious question that drew his attention to find his little cousin staring up at him.

Chuckling, Quinn reached over and ruffled Jaxon’s messy hair. “You can have it now,” he said, dropping his hand away so that he could grab his duffle bag and-

“It will only hurt for a minute,” Grandma promised with a solemn nod.

“It’s just boot camp, Grandma. I’ll be fine,” Quinn said as he leaned down and kissed her forehead. “Promise.”

For a moment, she didn’t say anything as she narrowed light grey eyes that matched his own while she considered him. “You don’t have to do this. I can find the money to pay for college.”

Biting back a sigh, Quinn murmured, “I know, Grandma,” knowing better

than to remind her that he wasn't planning on going to college. He'd learned his lesson the first time. But then again, that was his fault for not making sure that she didn't have her cane before he broke the news to her. God, she was quick when she wanted to be, Quinn thought with a fond smile for the small, terrifying woman that he was going to miss.

"Then, let me break your legs," Grandma said, determined to do whatever it took to stop him from going through with this.

Before he had a chance to respond, Jaxon said, "Your train's leaving," making Quinn frown as he glanced over his shoulder and-

Shit!

"I love you and I'll write as soon as I can!" Quinn said, giving the small woman determined to hobble him one last kiss before he moved his ass, weaving his way through the early morning crowd and onto the train just as the last horn blew, announcing the departure of the seven-ten a.m. train to Boston.

"It will only hurt for a minute!" came the promise that had Quinn smiling as he stepped into the nearest car and looked out the window to watch his grandmother and cousin waving goodbye to him from the platform until the train slowly rounded a corner, and then, they were gone.

Swallowing hard, Quinn reminded himself that he'd see them in a couple of months as he moved to take a seat by the window when a small chime had him pulling his phone out of his pocket and-

I can make it look like an accident!

-chuckled as he moved to sit down when a flash of movement to his right had him telling himself that this wasn't fucking happening.

Not today.

For a moment, he considered pretending that he didn't see her only to end up sighing heavily as he watched the little girl that had been making his life a living hell for the past ten years suddenly drop out of sight. He should have known that this would happen, Quinn thought as he made his way down the aisle and tossed his bag on the overhead rack before dropping down on the bench where the little pain in the ass was currently hiding.

As he sat there waiting for her to make her next move, Quinn scrolled through his contacts, looking for someone that he could talk into coming to get her before she got herself in more trouble, only to end up sighing when a small hand blindly reached up from underneath the bench and tried to snatch his phone out of his hands. Shaking his head because this was just sad, Quinn

said, “You’re getting off at the next stop, Bailey.”

There was a slight pause, and then, he heard the familiar long-suffering sigh as Bailey Smith climbed out from underneath the bench, dragging the oversized backpack that she never seemed to go anywhere without, behind her and stood up. That was followed by clearing her throat as she gestured for him to move his legs along with a murmured, “Excuse me,” that he ignored as he stretched his legs out, ensuring that she wasn’t going anywhere.

“Want to tell me why you’re running away?” Quinn drawled, not bothering to look up as he continued scrolling, debating calling her foster parents, but...

He’d rather avoid that if he could.

No matter how much she annoyed him, and god, did she fucking annoy him, he didn’t want to see her in trouble. Her foster parents were in way over their heads and had absolutely no idea what to do with her, so whenever Bailey did anything questionable, they grounded her, taking away her books, video games, and her ability to drive him crazy, which left her with one very big fucking problem.

“What did Kelly do now?” Quinn asked, quickly running his eyes over her from the hood of her sweatshirt covering her long, wavy caramel hair and fucking sighed when he reached up and pushed her hood back, revealing a rather impressive bruise marring the right side of her face.

Blinking, Bailey asked, “What makes you think that she did something?”

“That bruise, for starters,” Quinn murmured absently as he returned his attention to the problem at hand, finding someone to pick the little pain in the ass up and get her back home before her foster parents had a chance to miss her.

“Fair enough,” came the thoughtful murmur seconds before she finally gave up waiting for him to move his legs out of the way and dropped down on the bench next to him. “I’m not going back.”

“You really are, though,” Quinn drawled as he debated asking his grandmother to pick her up only to decide against it knowing that it would end with his grandmother going for her cane when one of her foster parents said something to piss her off.

That left Coach.

He hated asking for a favor, but he really didn’t have a choice, Quinn thought as he sent Coach a quick text message explaining the situation. Barely thirty seconds later, Coach responded, letting him know that he’d pick

the little pain in the ass up at the next stop in an hour. Knowing better than to trust her to wait, Quinn considered waiting with her to make sure that she didn't take off, but that wasn't an option, not unless he wanted to miss his flight and he knew better than to miss his flight. Not after his recruiter warned him what would happen if he didn't show up to boot camp on time.

"You need to tell your foster parents what Kelly and her little friends are doing," Quinn said, sending one last text thanking Coach for putting up with the little pain in the ass before he slid his phone back in his pocket and focused on the small girl sitting next to him.

"You want me to tattletale?" Bailey asked, frowning at him. "Seriously? That's your plan?"

"Do you have a better plan?" Quinn countered, even as he had to agree that telling Jennifer and Steve what their favorite foster child was doing probably wouldn't help.

"Yes," she said with a firm nod as she gestured around them.

"You're not going with me," Quinn said, deciding to put an end to this asinine plan of hers before it got out of hand.

"Why would I want to go with you?" the little girl that had been following him everywhere since he'd made the mistake of coming to her rescue the first time Kelly and her friends tied her up and stuffed her into the janitor's closet asked.

"Because you follow me everywhere," Quinn said, sighing heavily as he rubbed his hands down his face as the exhaustion that he'd been fighting all morning finally started to catch up with him.

Between running around trying to get everything in order for boot camp and keeping one eye open while he slept just in case Grandma decided to put her plans to keep him from joining the Marines into action, he was fucking exhausted. He'd planned on catching some sleep on the train ride to the airport, but instead, he had to babysit the little pain in the ass.

"I see," Bailey murmured, drawing his attention to find her once again frowning in confusion. "And just out of curiosity, what are you basing this on?"

"The fact that I can't seem to go anywhere without you following me?" Quinn said, even though he had to admit that he'd been flattered the first time that he'd realized that she was doing it. She was a cute little thing with big, bright blue eyes and a warm smile, but she was also only fourteen and a pain in his ass.

“Ummm, I live down the street from you and we both went to the same school,” Bailey pointed out with a pitying look that he chose to ignore at the moment.

“And when I’m at football practice?” he asked, watching as the conductor started making his way down the aisle, collecting tickets.

“I like to hide beneath the bleachers, counting down the minutes until I’m forced to go home so that I can avoid ending up another statistic,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly as she pulled out a twenty-dollar bill from her pocket and held it up for the conductor. “Two one-way tickets to Boston, please. My father’s in the bathroom.”

“She’s only going as far as Bridgeport and she’s traveling alone,” Quinn murmured absently as he reached for his wallet only to frown when he didn’t find it.

“He’s in the bathroom,” Bailey repeated while he searched for the wallet that should have been in his back pocket, making him shake his head in disgust if she really thought that story was going to work.

“Where are you going, son?” the conductor asked as Quinn stood up and grabbed his bag off the overhead rack, praying that it was there.

“Boston,” Quinn said, tearing his bag apart only to mumble, “Oh, god, no,” when he couldn’t find his wallet.

This wasn’t happening.

“Ten dollars,” the conductor said firmly, looking really fucking annoyed to have to stand there waiting.

“I can’t find my wallet,” Quinn said, knowing that he had bigger problems at the moment.

His airplane ticket was in his wallet.

“That’s unfortunate,” Bailey said with a heartfelt sigh and a sad shake of her head. “I’m not sure if this is the right time to mention this, but I have no idea who this man is and he keeps asking me if I like puppies,” she added with a helpless shrug that had the conductor narrowing his eyes on him.

“Wait! She’s kidding,” Quinn said as the conductor stepped out of the way and gestured for him to move his ass. “She knows who I am!”

“I have no idea who he is,” Bailey mouthed with another helpless shrug that was going to get her ass spanked as the train slowly came to a stop, letting him know that they’d reached the next stop.

“Don’t do this!” Quinn snapped as the conductor grabbed his arm and dragged him towards the door.

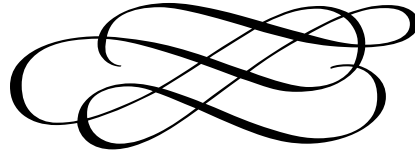
“Do what?” the little brat asked, blinking innocently as Quinn was shoved through the door and, in seconds, found himself shoved onto the platform with his bag in his arms, watching through the window as the little brat held up his wallet and cellphone, letting him know that he was screwed.

“You little brat,” Quinn bit out, moving to go after her when he found his path blocked.

“You’re not getting back on without a ticket,” the conductor said, gesturing for him to get out of the way.

Never taking his eyes off the little brat, Quinn absently nodded as he stepped out of the way, swearing that he would make her pay for this one day.

CHAPTER 1



**Present Day
Haven Technologies Building
Florida**

“They never get enough jelly donuts,” came the sadly mumbled words as the small, plump woman wearing a name tag with “Security” written in bright pink magic marker along with a smiley face stared helplessly down at the box of donuts on her lap as Quinn shifted his focus to the receptionist shoving a handful of popcorn in her mouth as she stared down at her iPad before he decided that he’d seen enough.

“I’m here to see Miss Thompson,” Quinn said, taking in the old candy factory that had been turned into the offices for Haven Technologies, from the original bricks to the large freight elevator in the corner and all the modern technology that had been tastefully blended in before shifting his focus back to the receptionist that was still staring down at her iPad.

“Miss Thompson doesn’t see anyone,” she said, not bothering to look up as she shoved another handful of popcorn in her mouth.

“She’s expecting me,” Quinn said, even as he couldn’t help but wonder why he let Tristan talk him into taking this job.

“A woman that doesn’t see anyone is expecting you?” she asked, sounding bored as she shifted to get more comfortable in her chair.

“Yes,” Quinn said before asking, “Are you going to let her know that I’m here?”

“No, but what I will do is call security,” she said as Quinn glanced over

his shoulder at the small, plump woman sitting by the door to find her swallowing hard as she whispered, "Please don't make her call security."

Sighing heavily, Quinn returned his attention to the woman determined to ignore him and reached over the counter and grabbed her iPad. Ignoring her outraged gasp, Quinn said, "Call Miss Thompson and tell her that Quinn Jackson is here to see her."

"My iPad..." the secretary mumbled sadly as she watched Quinn turn it off and place it on the counter.

"Call her," Quinn said more firmly as he stared her down.

Nodding, she kept her glare locked with his as she said, "Pam."

"Oh, God, no..." came the weakly murmured response from behind him.

"Take care of him," the receptionist said smugly as Quinn slowly turned his head to find Pam standing behind him, gesturing weakly towards the glass doors as she opened her mouth to say something only to think better of it, close it, swallow, clear her throat, and make a sound that was somewhere between a whimper and a sigh.

"I'm afraid that I'm going to have to ask you to leave," she finally managed to get out only to immediately follow that up with a mumbled, "Please don't kill me," as she looked up at him, her gaze locking on the scar above his eyebrow.

"Is Miss Thompson upstairs?" Quinn asked with a pointed look at the freight elevator to his right.

"No?" Pam mumbled weakly as she began worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she sent a pleading look at the receptionist, who was now gesturing for Pam to get on with it.

"And if I decide to go have a look to find out for myself?" he asked, watching as she began wringing her hands together.

"Please don't do that," she mumbled weakly.

Nodding, Quinn gestured towards the elevator as he said, "Let's go find her."

"Let's not," Pam said, shaking her head frantically.

"I'm afraid that's not an option," Quinn said as he made his way to the elevator and pressed the call button as the two women began frantically whispering behind him.

"I really can't let you do that," Pam said, sounding panicked as Quinn pushed the gate open and stepped into the elevator.

"Which is why you're coming with me," Quinn said, gesturing for her to

join him.

“I’d really rather not have to do that either,” Pam mumbled weakly, only to throw a pleading look at the receptionist to find her on the phone and-

“They’re expecting you upstairs,” came the annoyed announcement as she gestured for the small woman that looked even more panicked for some reason, to go with him.

“Thank you,” Quinn murmured absently as he took note of the selection of call buttons in the elevator: Lobby, Test Floor, Offices, and Private: Please Don’t Press.

Curious, Quinn pressed the last button to see where it would take him as Pam reluctantly joined him and-

“Wait. What are you doing?” she demanded.

“Finding out why I was hired,” Quinn said as the elevator slowly began its ascent, carrying them past the second floor and the sounds of video games before slowly bringing them past the third floor and the sounds of an Indiana Jones movie playing as he took in the open floorplan, the people walking around, lounging on couches, and playing table tennis until finally, they arrived at their destination.

“She’s not going to like this,” Pam mumbled as the elevator came to a stop.

“Tell me about Miss Thompson,” Quinn said, shoving the elevator gate open and took in the large apartment loft, noting everything from the clothes thrown over the back of the leather couch that sectioned off the living room area to the kitchen counters covered in cereal boxes, cookies, and empty fast-food bags before shifting his attention to the large window overlooking the fire escape that had been left open before he pulled the gate back into place and pressed the button for the third floor.

When he realized that she hadn’t answered him, Quinn looked over to find the small woman standing there with her lips firmly pressed together. “Not going to tell me?”

After a slight hesitation, Pam shook her head.

Nodding, he absently noted that Miss Thompson’s employees were loyal. That was something at least, Quinn thought as he shoved the gate open and found himself watching as a meticulously dressed man in his late twenties headed their way with a warm smile. “You must be Mr. Jackson.”

“And you are...” Quinn drawled as he stepped off the elevator and took in the busy floor, noting that no one else seemed to have noticed him yet.

“Sorry. I’m Nathan. I’m the one that called Tristan for help,” the man with the warm smile said as his gaze flickered to Pam, who was still cowering in the elevator.

“I-I don’t know how he got past me,” she mumbled even as she reached over and frantically hit the button for the lobby.

“Luck,” Quinn said dryly as he took in the large room, his gaze moving from the only sectioned-off office on the far side of the room to the open kitchen to his left and found himself looking for the mystery woman that had his best friend calling him at two in the morning and calling in every favor he owed him. “You want to tell me why I’m here?”

“Tristan didn’t tell you?”

“He didn’t get a chance,” Quinn said, still wondering what was so special about this job that had Tristan breaking his own rules by having him take this job without any information. The only thing that he knew was that Miss Thompson was the CEO and founder of Haven Technologies, wealthy, and needed protection.

It wasn’t much to go on, but it was a start.

“We should talk in my-” Nathan began to say, only to sigh when his name was called over the intercom. “I’m sorry. I have to take this call. Why don’t you help yourself to a cup of coffee while you wait?” Nathan said, gesturing to the kitchen.

“Thank you,” Quinn murmured, deciding that this was a good time to learn everything that he could about Miss Thompson.

“I’ll only be a few minutes,” Nathan said with a nod of thanks as he quickly made his way across the large room.

Nodding absently, Quinn walked over to the coffee pot and poured himself a cup as he pulled his phone out of his pocket and-

“Is that coffee?” came the hopeful question that had Quinn looking up only to find himself nodding dumbly as he took in the woman that had completely fucked him over once upon a time, licking her lips nervously as she glanced from the cup in his hands to send a nervous glance over her shoulder before focusing back on the coffee with an unholy gleam in her eye.

“Do you want some?” Quinn asked, waiting for the moment when she realized that he’d finally found her.

“Can, ummm, can I have sugar?” Bailey Smith, the woman that he’d waited fifteen years to make pay for what she did, asked as she shot another nervous glance over her shoulder as he stood there, running his eyes over her,

taking in all the changes that the years had brought. She was taller than he remembered, but not by much. Her hair was still the same beautiful caramel color that he remembered, her blue eyes were somehow brighter, she'd filled out in all the right places, and she was still unbelievably fucking adorable, he thought as his gaze dropped to the light scars marring her wrist to make sure that it was really her and when he saw them...

"Anything else?" Quinn asked as his gaze shifted to the small sugar bowl on the counter and added a spoonful of sugar.

"Two scoops. No, make that three," Bailey whispered as he added two more scoops while he stood there, thinking of all those things that he'd planned to say to her if he ever saw her again.

Because of her, he'd missed his flight and got his ass chewed out by his recruiter, and once he finally made it to boot camp two days later because he'd stupidly gone looking for her to make sure that she was safe, his drill sergeant decided to make an example of him. For the next three months, he'd thought about her during all those extra miles that he'd been forced to run with a full pack on in ninety-degree weather, the pushups that he did morning, noon, and night when he wasn't peeling potatoes, scrubbing toilets, or wishing that he'd never helped the little brat in the first place.

"Thanks!" the woman that still hadn't looked at him said with a grateful smile as she took the coffee from him and-

"Oh, God, no..." came the horrified murmur that had Quinn turning his head to see who'd spoken, only to frown when Bailey wrapped her hands tightly around the coffee cup and tilted it back, gulping down the hot liquid as fast as she could when a woman was suddenly there, trying to wrestle the cup away from the little brat.

"It's mine!" Bailey cried, hugging the cup against her chest as she tried to make a run for it, but unfortunately for her, the other woman was faster.

"What's going on?" someone asked.

"He gave her caffeine!" the woman currently trying to wrestle the cup of coffee away from Bailey snapped.

"Shit!"

"How much did she drink?" came the frantic question that had Quinn frowning while he watched as several people suddenly flooded the kitchen and grabbed hold of Bailey, who was really fucking determined to finish off the rest of that coffee, and took her to the floor where she squirmed, grumbled, and wiggled all while trying to get her hands back on that cup of

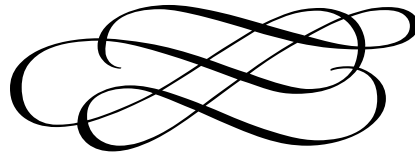
coffee.

“Enough!” came the answer that elicited more groans while Quinn stood there, shaking his head in wonder as several more people joined them and-

“Ow! She bit me!”

-had him deciding that he'd had enough as he reached down and pulled the little brat free, deciding that it was time that they finally had that talk.

CHAPTER 2



She should probably be concerned that she was being kidnapped, and she was, she really was, but at the moment, all Bailey could think about was the fact that he'd carried her into Mary Lee's Coffee Shop.

When he placed her down on her feet, Bailey sighed with satisfaction as she turned around and faced the incredibly nervous woman waiting to take her order. With an absently murmured "Thank you" to the man that kidnapped her, she focused on the task at hand.

Getting her greedy little hands on more caffeine before Nathan realized where she was and put a stop to it.

"Can I please have two large caramel coffees with four sugars and extra caramel sauce?" Bailey asked with a hopeful smile as she watched the woman standing behind the counter noticeably swallow as she sent a questioning look at her manager, who Bailey couldn't help but notice kept sending hopeful glances towards the Haven Technologies' building across the street.

"S-Sure," the cashier said as she reluctantly rang up her order right around the time that Bailey realized that she was being rude.

"Do you want anything?" Bailey asked her kidnapper, unable to take her eyes off the cashier, afraid that if she did that, she would disappear along with her only hopes of getting more caffeine today.

"Medium black coffee," came the coldly spoken answer that had Bailey absently nodding as she reached for her money only to realize that she didn't have any.

Before she could ask her kidnapper for a small loan, he was reaching past

her and placing a twenty-dollar bill on the counter. “Thank you,” Bailey said, licking her lips anxiously as she watched the manager give up waiting for Nathan to put a stop to this and set to work making their drinks. She really didn’t think that she was going to be able to drink both coffees before Nathan finally showed up, but she was going to try. It had been so long since she had the delicious bitter-sweet treat, and now that she’d had a taste, she was determined to get her hands on more.

The manager barely managed to put the first cup of caramel coffee on the counter when Bailey had her greedy little hands wrapped around it and was taking her first sip as she closed her eyes on a dreamy sigh and enjoyed the delicious hot liquid that soothed her very soul. God, she could live off this stuff, but that wasn’t an option, not after what happened at the last Christmas party with that elf. It didn’t matter how many times she’d apologized for that simple misunderstanding, they were still determined to keep her away from caffeine.

But no more, Bailey decided with a firm nod as she opened her eyes and realized that she had a few questions for her kidnapper. One, of course, was wondering why he was suddenly caging her in against the counter. The other, which was just as important, was wondering why he looked so pissed. She should definitely be concerned about that, Bailey thought as she enjoyed another sip of coffee. The last, and in no way less important, was wondering why he looked so familiar.

“Do you have any idea how long I’ve waited for this moment?” the man that she’d somehow managed to piss off demanded through clenched teeth, making her blink because she’d never actually seen someone manage to do that before. While she considered his question, Bailey took another sip as she ran her gaze over him, taking in his short, jet-black hair, the thick scar above his eyebrow, a pair of intense gray eyes, the firm set of his jaw on his incredibly handsome face, the fact that he had at least ten inches on her and an obscene amount of muscle and found herself wondering if he was going to finish his coffee.

“Do you mind if I have that?” Bailey asked with a hopeful smile as she gestured to his untouched cup of coffee.

Keeping his eyes locked with hers, he reached over and grabbed the coffee and took a sip as she felt her shoulders slump in disappointment. She knew that she shouldn’t pout, but she couldn’t help it. With a sad sigh, Bailey took a sip of her coffee as she did her best to figure out what she did to piss

him off.

“You have no idea who I am, do you?” he asked, narrowing his eyes on her when she reluctantly shook her head, not really sure that admitting that was a good idea. Nodding, he took one last sip of his coffee before placing it back on the counter and leaned down until his mouth was next to her ear and said the magical words that brought it all back.

“Do you like puppies?”

“I see,” Bailey murmured, taking a sip of her coffee, hoping to buy herself a little more time as her gaze moved past the large man that definitely had a right to be pissed and-

“My coffee,” she mumbled sadly when he took her coffee from her and finished it off, all while glaring at her.

With a sad sigh, Bailey reached for her second cup of coffee, released another sigh as she mourned the loss of the first cup, and took a sip while she couldn't help but wonder if he was going to kill her here or take her to a secondary location. That led her to wonder if this counted as a secondary location since he'd taken her from her office. That led to her wondering why he'd been at her office in the first place, which of course, somehow led to her grabbing a stack of napkins as she finally figured out how to fix the problem that they'd been having with the code for the latest update.



“What the hell are you doing?” Quinn demanded as he watched the small woman that was already driving him fucking crazy grab another stack of napkins.

“Can't talk. Busy,” Bailey mumbled absently as she scribbled on another napkin only to frown down at it, mumble something unintelligible, and finally, sigh heavily as she balled up the napkin and tossed it aside.

“Oh, joy, you've given her more coffee,” came the dryly murmured words as Nathan dropped down on the bench next to Bailey with a heavy sigh.

“Start talking,” Quinn bit out as he watched Bailey suddenly stop

scribbling, only to mumble sadly, “I don’t remember how *Buffy* ended.”

“She saved the world,” Nathan said as he reached over and patted her on the head.

“Did she end up with Spike?” Bailey asked, looking really fucking hopeful.

“Sure,” Nathan said with a careless shrug.

Nodding, Bailey mumbled, “Good,” before she went back to whatever it was that she was doing.

Shifting his attention back to Quinn, Nathan said, “She doesn’t metabolize caffeine well.”

“Tell me why I’m here,” Quinn said evenly.

Sighing heavily, Nathan rubbed his hands roughly down his face before dropping his hands away and said, “I honestly don’t know where to start.”

“Start by telling me where Miss Thompson is so that I can do my job,” Quinn said, deciding to get to the only reason why he wasn’t heading for the door and finally washing his hands of the little brat.

Frowning, Nathan glanced at the small woman sitting next to him as she happily hummed what sounded like the theme song to *Superman* before glancing back at him. “She’s right here,” Nathan said, looking confused while Quinn sat there telling himself that this wasn’t fucking happening.

“No, that’s Bailey Smith, the little pain in the ass,” Quinn bit out with a glare for the small woman who was now humming the theme song to *Gilligan’s Island*.

“You know her?” Nathan asked, sending Bailey a questioning look as Quinn opened his mouth to answer, only to end up glaring at the little demon when she said, “I made him cry once,” with a solemn nod.

Narrowing his eyes, Quinn said, “I didn’t cry.”

“He did. I felt bad,” Bailey mumbled absently as she reached for her coffee only to end up pouting when Nathan grabbed it before she could.

“Just tell me why I’m here,” Quinn bit out, feeling a headache starting at the back of his head as he shifted his glare from the woman who had some explaining to do back to the man that better have a good reason for him being here.

Nathan’s eyes flickered to the small woman sitting next to him before saying, “We should probably wait before we discuss that.”

“Wait for what?” Quinn asked, only to frown as he watched Bailey suddenly stop scribbling on the napkins with the pen that she stole from him,

blinked in confusion and-

“For that,” Nathan said with a sad shake of his head as he reached over and caught the little brat before her head hit the table. Keeping his hold on the small woman that passed out, Nathan sighed heavily as he stood up and picked her up, throwing her over his shoulder in a well-practiced move that told Quinn that he had to do this a lot. “Like I said, she doesn’t metabolize caffeine well,” Nathan said as he grabbed the napkins Bailey scribbled on and shoved them in his pocket before gesturing to the door.

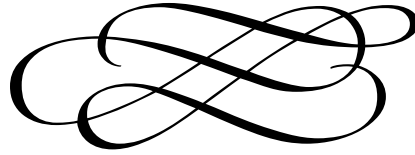
Wondering what kind of trouble she could have gotten herself into, Quinn followed him back across the street, noting that Pam was back in her spot by the door, looking absolutely miserable as they made their way to the elevator.

“I’m curious about something,” Nathan said, throwing him a questioning look as they stepped into the elevator.

“What’s that?” Quinn absently asked as he pressed the button for what he was assuming was Bailey’s apartment.

“How are you supposed to protect a woman that you hate?”

CHAPTER 3



“S tart talking,” Quinn said, his gaze flickering to the other man as he carefully laid Bailey down on the couch before he returned his attention to the text message that was going to save him from this bullshit.

Find someone else.

“You never answered my question,” Nathan said, grabbing a blanket off the back of the couch and laid it over Bailey before he began tucking her in, making sure to shove the blanket between the couch and the cushions that she was lying on, ensuring that she wouldn’t be able to move.

At Quinn’s questioning look, he said, “Trust me.”

Not really caring, Quinn said, “We grew up together,” as he made his way to the windows and closed them, absently noting that whoever took over for him was going to have to upgrade the security system on the entire building.

“That really doesn’t explain why you looked like you were debating throttling her,” Nathan pointed out as a chime drew Quinn’s attention back down to his phone and-

There is no one else.

“That’s because I was,” Quinn said, slipping his phone back into his pocket as he focused his attention on the man that was going to have to find someone else to deal with the little brat. “Why am I here?” he repeated, in no fucking mood to keep playing this game.

“I think it might be better if I showed you,” Nathan said, gesturing to the freight elevator as the gate was slowly pushed open and the softly mumbled, “I can do this,” drew his attention to find Pam standing there, shifting

nervously as she wrung her hands together only to go still when she saw him and mumbled, "I can do this," one last time as she noticeably swallowed.

"She's still out," Nathan said, giving the small woman who was in way over her head a warm smile.

"H-How long before she wakes up?" Pam asked, forcing the words out as she shifted her attention to the couch.

"God only knows," Nathan said, sighing heavily as he moved past her and made his way onto the elevator. With a jerky nod, Pam mumbled, "I can do this," even as her shoulders slumped in defeat as she stood there, staring helplessly at the couch.

"You need to replace her," Quinn said as he closed the gate.

Sighing heavily, Nathan said, "Trust me, I know."

"Why did you hire a woman who's afraid of her own shadow as security?" Quinn asked, quickly coming to the conclusion that they were absolutely full of shit.

It wouldn't be the first time that some rich asshole wasted their time, deciding that they needed a personal bodyguard as their latest accessory to make sure that everyone knew just how fucking rich they were. The problem was, they didn't want a rent-a-cop, they wanted the best, which meant that they were willing to do whatever it took to hire them, and sometimes, that meant selling them a line of bullshit. Tristan was normally good at spotting bullshit tales, which made Quinn wonder what line of bullshit they'd used to get him here.

"Bailey's a pushover," Nathan said with a helpless shrug as he pressed the call button for the second floor.

"Meaning?" Quinn asked, pushing the gate open a moment later when they reached their floor.

"She takes in strays. She thinks it's her job to rescue people," Nathan said as they walked off the elevator and back onto the busy floor.

"And they're taking advantage of her?" Quinn guessed, watching as Nathan frowned in confusion as they headed to the back of the large room.

"God, no, they adore her. They're extremely loyal and would do anything for her," Nathan said, gesturing absently around them. "She does her best to find them jobs, and if she can't find a good fit for them, she'll find them something to do until she does."

"Which still doesn't explain what I'm doing here," Quinn pointed out as they walked into an office sectioned off from the rest of the large room by a

glass wall and bookshelves.

“This is why,” Nathan said, grabbing a file off the desk and tossed it to him.

“And what’s this?” Quinn asked, opening the file and-

“Something that Bailey doesn’t need to know about.”



“I’m never drinking coffee again,” Bailey mumbled hollowly as she lay there, unable to help but wonder when she’d started to hallucinate.

It was probably something that she should look into, Bailey thought as she watched Quinn Jackson, the man that she hadn’t seen since she’d been forced to take matters into her own hands, carry another bag into the bedroom that Nathan used on those nights when he was too tired to drive home. Not really sure why this was happening, Bailey moved to sit up only to realize that she was trapped.

Sighing heavily, she wiggled, grunted, and groaned until she was finally able to kick the blanket away and sit up and watch the man who really didn’t look happy to see her move his things into her guest room. There was probably a logical explanation for this, but at the moment, she couldn’t think of one.

For a moment, she considered asking him, but...

She would probably be better off asking Nathan instead, Bailey decided as she grabbed her cellphone off the coffee table and sent her best friend a text message.

Why is the angry man set on revenge moving into my apartment?

There was a heavy sigh, and then, “Why are you texting me? I’m sitting across from you.”

“I know, but I’m not talking to you at the moment,” Bailey said, sending another text.

I’m no longer speaking with you!

There was another sigh, and then, her phone was plucked from her hand and Nathan was sitting on the coffee table in front of her. “We need to talk.”

“I figured that out on my own,” Bailey mumbled absently as she found herself watching the very large man who looked a lot bigger than he had the last time that she saw him level a glare on her as he made his way back to the elevator to grab a box and-

Was that a gun? Bailey found herself wondering when he leaned over and she saw what looked like a holster.

“Look, I need a favor,” Nathan said, drawing her attention to find him sitting there, slowly exhaling as he watched her, looking as though he was trying to figure out how to proceed from here.

“Would you like to share with the rest of the class?” Bailey asked, blinking at him as she waited for a good reason why he thought moving the man who was most likely going to kill her one day into her apartment.

“I need a favor,” Nathan finally said, clearly trying to buy time.

“You said that already,” Bailey pointed out as her attention shifted to the stack of napkins on the coffee table next to him.

“I need you to give him a job,” Nathan said as she picked up the napkins she’d made notes on earlier.

“And why would I do that?” Bailey asked as she frowned down at her notes.

“Because he’s my cousin,” Nathan said with a heartfelt sigh that had her slowly looking up from the notes on the napkins to look at him, taking in everything from his black hair, dark tanned skin, dark brown, almost black eyes before she looked at Quinn and noted his black hair, golden tan, and grey eyes and said, “You’re Native American.”

“And?” Nathan demanded, not quite able to meet her eyes as he shifted nervously, something that he’d been doing since they were kids and he didn’t want to tell her something.

“He’s not,” Bailey pointed out, unable to help but wonder what he was trying to hide from her.

Frowning, Nathan said, “You don’t know that.”

“I really do,” Bailey assured him, not bothering to mention that she grew up with Quinn and knew his family since it would only distract the man that was lying to her.

Nodding, Nathan said, “He’s my cousin on my father’s side.”

“He’s Native American, too,” Bailey said, watching as he moved to rub the back of his neck before he realized what he was doing and immediately dropped his arm, knowing that it would give him away.

“You don’t know everyone in my family,” Nathan said evenly as he moved onto the glaring phase, no doubt hoping that she would let this go.

She wouldn’t, but then again, he already knew that.

“You’re my brother, dumbass. Your parents adopted me when I was fourteen,” Bailey pointed out, matching his glare because now she knew without a doubt that he was hiding something from her.

“Which is why you owe me,” Nathan said with a heartfelt sigh and a helpless shrug that had her rolling her eyes.

“You already used that today to get the last donut,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head as she returned her attention back to her notes, debating the best way to test this code.

“And it was delicious, but now, I’m using it again. I need you to give him a job.”

“We don’t have any openings right now,” she said, knowing that had never stopped her from hiring someone before, but she was more than willing to use that excuse if it saved her now.

More than willing.

“Security,” Nathan said, making her frown.

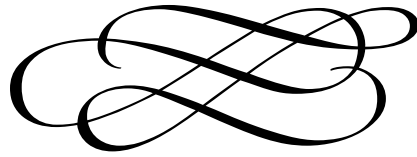
“We already have someone working in security,” Bailey pointed out, shoving the blankets aside as she stood up and moved to head to the elevator so that she could get back to work only to go still when Quinn, who hadn’t stopped glaring at her since she woke up, stopped what he was doing and moved to do the same.

Throwing Nathan a questioning look, her brother cleared his throat and said, “Pam’s not working out.”

Swallowing hard, she watched the way that Quinn’s cold eyes watched her and...

Decided that it was time to get answers.

CHAPTER 4



“You didn’t tell me that you were her brother,” Quinn said, really fucking wishing that he hadn’t seen that file.

“I hide my shame well,” Nathan said with a long-suffering sigh that earned a grumble from the other side of the locked bathroom door.

“I can understand that,” Quinn said while he kept his attention on the bathroom door, wondering what the little brat was up to. A few minutes ago, she’d gone eerily quiet as she’d watched her brother with a calculating look before she grabbed an iPad off the coffee table and walked into the bathroom without another word.

“This isn’t going the way that I’d hoped,” Nathan said, rubbing his hands roughly down his face as he dropped down on the couch with a heavy sigh.

“You need to tell her,” Quinn said, watching the bathroom door for another minute before he decided to have another look around.

“That’s not really an option,” Nathan said as Quinn double-checked the large windows overlooking the back parking lot, making a mental note to have the locks changed before he shifted his attention to the frame and looked for any signs of a security system. When he didn’t find one, he added that to the growing list of things that he needed to take care of and moved onto the rest of the apartment.

“I can’t protect someone that doesn’t know they’re in danger,” Quinn said, taking a look at the door to the far left of the elevator and quickly decided that it needed to be replaced. It was an old wood door with thin hinges and a basic chain lock that had absolutely no chance of keeping anyone out.

“How do you know my sister?” Nathan asked instead as Quinn opened the door and-

“He was obsessed with me,” came the absently murmured answer from the small woman standing in the stairwell, looking down at a file in her hands while Quinn stood there, trying to figure out how she’d managed to leave the apartment without him knowing.

“There’s a door in the bathroom that leads to my room and another set of stairs that lead downstairs,” Bailey said, answering the unspoken question as she looked up from the file to blink up at her brother. “Is there something that you’d like to tell me?”

“Besides the fact that you’re a pain in the ass,” Nathan bit out as he reached over and snatched the file out of her hand.

“Yes, besides that,” she said, waving it off.

“I was handling it,” Nathan said as Quinn’s attention flickered past Bailey and noted the stairs that led up to the roof.

“Who has access to this stairwell?” he asked as he shifted his attention back to Bailey to find her glaring at her brother.

“Everyone that works here. It doubles as a fire escape and a way to move between the floors without having to wait for the elevator,” Nathan explained, tossing the file on the table by the door before crossing his arms over his chest so that he could glare back down at Bailey.

“And the roof?” Quinn asked, already having a bad feeling what the answer was going to be.

“I’m the only one that uses it, but the employees have access to it if they need it,” Bailey said, her glare never leaving Nathan.

“We’re going to need to limit their access to this floor and the roof,” Quinn said, even as he debated moving her somewhere else until they figured out who was behind the attacks.

“And I’m going to need answers,” Bailey said, crossing her arms over her chest as she matched her brother’s glare with one of her own. “Start talking.”

“You’re a pain in the ass,” Nathan bit out evenly.

Nodding, Bailey said, “We already covered that. Start with explaining why you felt the need to keep the fact that someone cut the brakes on my car from me.”

“Because I took care of it,” Nathan said defensively.

“And the fact that you felt the need to hire a professional bodyguard whose military record is classified, is you taking care of it?” Bailey asked,

blinking up at her brother as movement behind Bailey drew Quinn's attention to find several women standing on the stairs, watching them.

"Told you she'd find out," one of them said with a sad shake of her head as another woman joined them with a large bowl of popcorn.

"What did I miss?" she asked, shoving a handful of popcorn in her mouth as she looked between Bailey and him.

"Well," the shorter one of the five said, helping herself to the popcorn, "from what I can tell, the incredibly sexy man that really seems to love to glare used to be obsessed with Bailey, which makes this situation really awkward because Nathan hired him to protect her from all those things that we've been keeping from her and she just found out about."

Frowning, the woman wearing an *Indiana Jones* tee-shirt asked, "She found out about the break-in?" making Bailey's eyes narrow dangerously on her brother.

"No, I don't think they got to that part yet," the woman said, shaking her head only to add, "That's shameful."

"Continue," a woman who looked vaguely familiar said as she gestured with a large handful of popcorn for them to get on with it.

Mumbling something about traitors, Bailey walked into the apartment and closed the door behind her as groans erupted behind her. "Oh, come on! Don't be like that!"

"Everyone knew?" she demanded.

"Well, I mean, not everyone," Nathan said, clearing his throat awkwardly.

"And by not everyone, you mean me, right?" Bailey asked.

"There's a good reason for that."

"And I can't wait to hear it," she said, only to sigh when one of the women on the other side of the door said, "Neither can we!"

"Because I knew that you wouldn't take it seriously," Nathan said, ramming his fingers through his hair.

"You didn't think that I would take someone trying to kill me seriously?" Bailey asked, shaking her head in disbelief, only to wince when Nathan narrowed his eyes on her as he bit out, "New Year's Eve."

Clearing her throat, Bailey reached up and rubbed the bridge of her nose as she tried to hide her wince. "That was an accident."

"You got shoved in front of a fucking bus!" Nathan snapped.

"Someone accidentally tripped me," Bailey said, shrugging it off only to turn a glare at the door when their audience said, "This is sad."

“And getting locked on the roof and then the fire escape giving out when you were forced to use it to get down?” Nathan drawled.

“Was poor maintenance?” Bailey said with a hopeful smile.

“It had just passed inspection,” Nathan said, sighing heavily.

“Don’t forget about the fire in her office!” one of the women said as Quinn started getting a better understanding of why Nathan decided not to tell her everything.

“That was faulty wiring?” Bailey said, sounding more like a question.

“And your office door just happened to get jammed, trapping you inside?” Nathan drawled.

Nodding solemnly, Bailey said, “That’s it, exactly.”

“And that’s exactly why I didn’t tell you anything.”

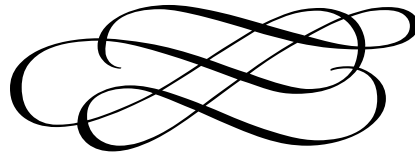
She opened her mouth to argue only to close it, clear her throat, and mumble, “Fair enough.”

“Which is why I hired him to keep you safe,” Nathan said, making her frown in confusion.

“But Pam is-”

“Fired.”

CHAPTER 5



“I ’m sorry. What did you just say?” Bailey asked, sure that she’d misheard the man that she hadn’t seen since she was fourteen years old.

“She’s fired,” Quinn said, folding his massive arms over an equally massive chest and glared down at her in a way that didn’t exactly inspire hope that she was going to be able to talk some sense into him. Then again, she’d never been able to do that.

God, why did Nathan have to hire him? Bailey wondered as she threw her brother a pleading look only to find the traitor pressing the elevator call button with a satisfied sigh and a murmured, “Well, I’ll just let you two catch up for now.”

“Where are you going?” Bailey demanded, watching as the man who had some explaining to do pushed the gate open and walked into the elevator.

“Home,” Nathan said, closing the gate shut as she stood there, helplessly glancing from him to the man who was still glaring down at her for some reason.

Okay, so she knew why he was glaring at her. Still...

“Shouldn’t you stay and handle this?” Bailey asked, sending Nathan a hopeful look that he ignored as the elevator slowly descended.

“I think you’ve got it covered,” her brother said, shooting her a wink that wasn’t exactly helpful before she glanced back at Quinn and-

“Who did you piss off?” he demanded, only to narrow his eyes and open the door when someone in the stairwell, most likely Jess, said, “That’s what we’d like to know!”

That quickly turned into a mumbled, “Oh, crap,” when they saw the

murderous glare on Quinn's face, which was, of course, promptly followed by the woman that really should have had her back scrambling to safety with a mumbled, "We should probably call it a night as well," leaving her to face the really large man alone.

She should probably be concerned by that, and she was, she really was, but at the moment, she had something else that they needed to clear up. "Pam isn't fired," Bailey said, and then, just to make sure that they were on the same page, she nodded firmly once.

"Yes, she is," Quinn said, clearly not understanding the concept of a firm nod.

"I'm sorry, but I think that there's been some confusion. You don't have a say in who stays or gets fired at my company," Bailey said, wondering why he thought that he could come in here and-

"Does your brother have the authority to sign contracts on behalf of Haven Technologies?" Quinn asked in a hard tone that told her that she was already getting on his nerves, which was another reason why he couldn't stay.

But they'd get to that in a minute...

"That depends on where this conversation is going," Bailey said, crossing her arms over her chest to mimic his stance, deciding that it was time to remind him that she was no longer the same little girl that he used to boss around.

Nodding slowly, Quinn leaned down until he was eye-level with her so that there was no mistaking just how much he hated being here as he bit out, "Your brother signed a contract with my employer giving me the authority to do whatever I need to do to keep you safe and that includes the hiring and firing of all security personal."

"I see..." Bailey said, letting her words trail off as she blindly reached over and opened the stairwell door, her glare never leaving him until the last second when she turned around and headed for the stairs that would take her up to the roof, knowing that he would follow her.

When she reached the second step, Bailey turned around, opened her mouth only to realize that he was still taller than her, quickly shut it, moved onto the third step with a satisfied sigh when the move made her an inch taller than him and said, "*You're fired,*" taking an obscene amount of satisfaction in saying the words that she normally hated, but it had to be done.

This wasn't going to work out.

She wasn't stupid.

She realized that there was a problem, sort of, and had no problems with hiring more security, buying a new lock or two, and looking into upgrading their security system, but he couldn't stay. He hated her, and honestly, she wasn't sure that she could handle him, not if he was anything like the annoying boy who had taken it upon himself to make her life a living hell when she was little and something, mostly that glare that was starting to unnerve her a bit, told her that he hadn't changed.

Deciding that they were done here, Bailey said, "I'm sorry that we wasted your time coming here. I'll make sure that you're compensated, of course," only to clear her throat awkwardly before adding, "It was nice seeing you again, Quinn," when he continued glaring at her.

She was definitely making the right decision, Bailey told herself, clearing her throat one more time as she moved to leave only to mumble, "Excuse me," and move as far to the right as the small stairwell would allow before squeezing past him and-

"Oh, come on!" Bailey said when the stairwell lights suddenly went out, leaving them in complete darkness and ruining what promised to be a memorable exit. Okay, so the throat clearing and awkward mumbling ruined it a bit at the end, but she'd been more than willing to go with it and hope for the best, Bailey thought, only to frown when she heard it.

She opened her mouth only to swallow hard when Quinn placed his hand over her mouth and softly whispered, "*Shhhh*," in her ear.

Deciding that was an excellent plan, Bailey nodded once. When Quinn dropped his hand away and took her hand in his so that he could slowly lead her back down the stairs, she didn't argue. She tightened her hold around his hand while she listened as the sounds of someone ransacking her apartment became louder and-

"Get down!"

-made everything worse.



Nathan opened his mouth only to close it, shake his head, and fucking sighed while Quinn stood there, staring down at the small woman currently curled up in the fetal position on the emergency room gurney and-

“Tell me how this happened again,” Nathan said as Quinn tried figuring that one out for himself.

One minute, he’d been glaring at the little brat, unable to help but notice just how fucking adorable she was, and the next...

“I got startled,” Bailey said only to wince, curl up more tightly into herself and press the icepack that the doctor gave her against her head after he’d finished stitching the deep gash on her temple while Quinn reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose as he felt a headache coming on from what had to be the biggest fucking understatement of the year.

“That doesn’t explain why you’re in the emergency room,” Nathan bit out angrily with a glare aimed at Quinn, only to curse under his breath when the small woman cowering in the corner mumbled, “I’m really sorry,” again.

“No one’s mad at you,” Nathan said, sending Pam a pitying look that had the small woman that had taken ten years off Quinn’s life, adding, “It...it was an accident.”

“If someone could knock me out again, I’d really appreciate it,” Bailey mumbled sadly, making him feel like the biggest fucking asshole alive as she reached over and grabbed hold of her brother’s hand.

“I-I thought that she was the delivery guy,” Pam said with a helpless gesture in Bailey’s direction, making everything in him go still.

“What delivery guy?” Quinn asked as he shared a look with Nathan.

“The one that was supposed to bring the package upstairs,” Pam said after a slight hesitation, making Nathan frown in confusion.

“Do you normally have the delivery guys bring up their packages?” Quinn asked as his gaze flickered between Nathan and Pam.

“Only for the first floor. No one is allowed on the second floor without approval, but that will be changing immediately,” Nathan answered for her as he stared helplessly down at his sister.

“That still doesn’t explain the baseball bat,” Bailey mumbled weakly, only to add, “I would like some more drugs,” as she buried her face against the thin hospital pillow.

“No, it doesn’t,” Quinn agreed as he glanced back at Pam to find her mouth working soundlessly before she managed to get out, “Leather loafers.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Nathan demanded, making Bailey

wince right around the time that Quinn decided that they'd waited long enough for the discharge papers.

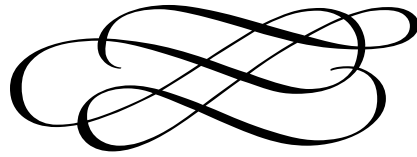
"Delivery guys don't wear leather loafers," Pam said, taking Quinn by surprise as he pushed Nathan out of the way and carefully scooped Bailey up in his arms.

"No, they don't," Quinn agreed, carrying Bailey towards the back exit.

"Could someone please tell me what the hell is going on?" Nathan snapped, cursing under his breath as he quickly moved to catch up with them.

"He's kidnapping me," Bailey mumbled against his chest, and since she was right, Quinn didn't bother denying it.

CHAPTER 6



“I don’t wanna be kidnapped,” came the heavily slurred words as the small woman who had taken ten years off his life buried her face against the couch cushion.

“She’s not going anywhere,” Nathan said, leaning down to kiss the back of Bailey’s head only to think better of it when the small woman mumbled, “Owie.”

“She can’t stay here. Not like this,” Quinn said, attaching the chains that he’d grabbed from his bag around the elevator gate.

“Then, she’ll stay with me,” Nathan said as Quinn shifted his focus to the door that he’d been forced to break down earlier and fucking sighed when he saw the telltale signs that it had been picked at some point.

“No,” Quinn simply said as he closed the door and made his way to Bailey’s room, absently noting her messy bed, the empty Coke cans on the nightstand, the stacks of tech magazines throughout the room and fucking sighed when he saw that the door didn’t have a lock.

As soon as he’d made sure that Bailey was okay, he tore through the apartment only to realize that he was too late. Whoever broke into her apartment managed to disappear without a trace within minutes, letting him know everything that he needed to know.

He wouldn’t be able to keep her safe here, not like this.

“Anything missing?” Quinn asked when he heard Nathan join him.

“I’m not sure yet,” Nathan said, sighing heavily as he took in the mess left behind. “I should have called Tristan sooner.”

“Do the other floors have access to this stairwell?” Quinn asked as he

stepped into the stairwell, noting that this one was smaller than the other one and didn't have access to the roof.

"Yes," Nathan said as Quinn nodded absently and stepped back into the room.

"And where does it lead?" Quinn asked as he shifted his attention to the door that led to a small hallway that ran behind the room that he was staying in and led to the bathroom.

"To a side door," Nathan said as Quinn stepped back into the bedroom.

"And where does that lead?" Quinn asked, beyond fucking pissed that he didn't already know the answers.

He'd never started a job without knowing absolutely fucking everything.

"To the back parking lot and a walkway that will take you to the sidewalk," Nathan said as Quinn made his way to Bailey's closet and grabbed a bag.

"And the security footage?" Quinn asked, already having a pretty good idea what the answer was going to be as he tossed the bag to the man who was in way over his head on this one.

"The cameras were down," came the hesitate answer.

"Unfucking believable," Quinn bit out as he made his way back to the room where he'd put his stuff, his gaze flickering to the small woman mumbling incoherently against the couch cushions and-

He should have fucking looked harder for her.

He should have kept calling her case worker, kept calling her foster parents, called in every fucking favor until he found her and-

He never should have left her alone on that train.

"Tell me what I need to do to keep her safe," Nathan said as he stepped into the room with her bag.

"I need to get her out of here so that my men can get to work," Quinn said as he grabbed his bags and carried them to the door.

"I'm a good girl," came the mumbled announcement that had him sighing as he watched Bailey blindly reach back for the blanket thrown over the back of the couch and-

Somehow ended up rolling onto the floor with a pained groan and a muttered, "Kidnapping's painful."

"Where are you taking her?" Nathan asked, looking resigned to letting his sister go.

"Somewhere that I can keep her safe," Quinn said as he took in the large

loft apartment and-

Fuck it.

“Grab the bags,” Quinn said, throwing his weapons bag over his shoulder and headed back to the couch.

“Where’s that?” Nathan asked, shifting Bailey’s bag over his shoulder before he grabbed the rest of the bags.

“Georgia,” Quinn said as he leaned down and scooped up the small woman who apparently didn’t handle pain meds very well either.

“Why am I being kidnapped again?” Bailey mumbled against his chest.

“Because this is how it’s done,” Quinn told her as he felt her small hand grab onto his shirt.

“Are you going to ransom me?” came the curious question as he forced himself to ignore just how fucking good it felt to hold her in his arms and headed for the stairs.

“I’m thinking about it,” Quinn murmured absently as his gaze flickered to the stairs that led to the roof before he headed downstairs, pausing at the landing to make sure that there weren’t any more surprises waiting for him before he moved his ass.

“What’s the plan?” Nathan asked as he followed him down the stairs.

“To keep her safe.”



Thorne, Georgia **The Next Day**

“Why are you doing this to me?” came the sadly mumbled words as Quinn stood there, pinching the bridge of his nose as he waited for the small woman that was driving him out of his fucking mind to realize that she wasn’t being buried alive.

“Bailey,” Quinn said, waiting for her to stop fighting the sheet and pass out so that he could figure out what the hell he was thinking. He was crossing a huge fucking line by bringing her here. They had plenty of safe houses that

he could have taken her to, but for whatever reason, he wanted her here.

“Why does my bottom hurt?” Bailey mumbled sadly as she gave up trying to fight her way free from the sheet and decided to wrap herself in it and-

“Because you keep rolling off the bed,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as he waited for the small woman driving him fucking crazy to stop wiggling before he leaned over and picked her up and placed her back on the bed.

“And my head?” she asked, sounding curious.

“You decided that it was a good idea to stand back up after I told you to stay down,” Quinn said, really wishing that he’d seen that one coming, but in his defense, whenever he told a client to get down, they stayed down until he told them to move.

“I heard running,” Bailey mumbled sadly.

“And?” Quinn absently asked as he glanced around the one-room cabin that his grandfather left him before focusing back on the small woman pulling a pillow over her head.

“When I hear someone running, I don’t ask questions. I just run,” she explained, making his lips twitch as he reached down and grabbed the comforter that she kicked off the bed during her first escape attempt and pulled it over her.

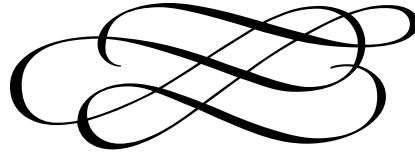
“It’s a solid plan,” Quinn said softly as he finished tucking her in.

“It’s never failed me before,” Bailey said as she grabbed hold of the comforter and pulled it over her head.

Deciding not to mention all those times that she’d managed to fall flat on her face whenever she tried to outrun Kelly and her band of bitches, Quinn made his way over to the small couch that he used to call home two weeks every summer when he was a kid. Grabbing his iPad, he sighed heavily as he settled in for the long night ahead. While the small woman that he honestly never expected to see again grumbled as she tossed and turned on the bed, he went through the files that Tristan sent him before moving on to the files that her brother sent.

She’d definitely been busy over the years, Quinn thought as he read through the articles written about her, the blog posts, and interviews before he focused on learning everything that he could about Haven Technologies. He took in the angry reviews, the list of her competitors that her games destroyed over the years, and the fucking nut jobs obsessed with her that had his jaw clenching and realized that he had no fucking idea where to start.

CHAPTER 7



Clearing her throat, Bailey said, “I’d like to take this opportunity to apologize,” hoping that it would be enough to appease the large man who somehow managed to look angrier by the minute, which she had to admit was starting to concern her.

When he didn’t say anything, mostly because he was busy glaring at her from across the room in the unknown location that he’d taken her to, Bailey decided to take this moment to take in her surroundings and-

That was some really good coffee, Bailey thought with a happy little sigh as the bed slowly rushed up to meet her. “This is a really nice bed,” she mumbled against the really comfortable mattress, only to groan when she slowly fell over onto her side.

“Start talking,” Quinn said as she reached back and grabbed hold of the large comforter and pulled it over her so that she could cocoon herself in its fluffiness.

“Do you think we should start a softball team?” Bailey asked, snuggling back into the comforter only to decide that wasn’t enough and decided that the most efficient way to go about this was to roll over until the comforter was securely wrapped around her and-

“This is better,” she murmured with a nod, deciding that the floor allowed her to curl up more efficiently in the comforter that she loved more than anything.

“God, you’re a pain in the ass,” came the heavily sighed words as she found herself scooped up off the floor and returned to the large bed that hadn’t been able to handle her needs.

“I know,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly as she moved to roll off the bed again, only to grumble when he picked her back up and placed her in the middle of the bed. The move caused the bandage taped to her forehead to pull at her stitches and reminded her that he hadn’t answered her question.

“I think we should do it,” she said with another nod as she watched the incredibly angry man who’d been glaring at her all morning check the front door again.

“Do what?” Quinn absently asked as he made his way back to the couch and went back to doing whatever it was that he was doing with those guns that he laid out on the coffee table earlier.

“Start a softball team,” Bailey said with a firm nod as the euphoric haze that was making her day better continued spreading over her body, making her wonder if she’d imagined the pain earlier.

“And why would you want to do that?” Quinn asked, throwing her a questioning look even as she couldn’t help but wonder if she should be concerned that the man who kidnapped her was heavily armed.

“Because Pam has a really good swing,” Bailey said with a dreamy sigh, imagining all the games that they could win with her on their team. Not that she wanted to play softball because she didn’t, but she felt that was something that they should do at the moment. She also wanted more of that delicious coffee that he’d given her after she’d refused to take any more pills.

“That she does,” Quinn murmured in agreement as she took in the large, one-room cabin and once again found herself wondering how he’d managed to get her here.

“Which is why I can’t fire her,” Bailey said with a forlorn sigh and a sad shake of her head that was somewhat impeded by the comforter encasing her.

“Because she can swing a bat?” Quinn asked as she took in the view of the woods surrounding them and couldn’t help but frown in confusion because those didn’t look like Florida trees.

“Ummmm, where are we exactly?” Bailey found herself asking even as she wondered why she was suddenly struggling to keep her eyes open.

“Georgia,” he said before adding, “I drugged you.”

“Oh,” Bailey mumbled, unable to help but frown as she went on to wonder why she didn’t care.

Probably the drugs, Bailey thought with a nod, only to realize that she couldn’t properly nod, which led her to realize something important.

She was trapped.



“You’re fine,” Quinn said, pinching the bridge of his nose as he stood there, wondering where he’d gone wrong.

There was a sniffle, and then, “I’ll talk!”

“Please, don’t,” he said, feeling a headache coming on as he prayed that she took pity on him and passed out again.

He never should have put those pills in her coffee, but at the time, it had been his only option, and now...

“W-Why is it so dark in here?” came the mumbled demand that had him dropping his hand away so that he could reach down and pull the comforter away, only to have Bailey gasp, pull the comforter back over her head and promptly curl up into a ball with a whispered, “*Shhhhh! They’ll see me!*”

“There’s no one else here,” Quinn reminded her, beyond fucking exhausted. Between taking care of her all night and finding out everything that he could about this job, he was ready to pass the fuck out.

“That’s what they want you to think!” came the paranoid announcement that had him realizing that this actually explained a lot.

When they were kids, she’d been banned from the vending machines at school, but he never understood why until this moment. Some days, she acted like a pain in the ass, and other days...

She was like the Energizer-fucking-Bunny.

“I need to know who broke into your apartment, Bailey,” Quinn said, taking the chance that she might say something that would help him figure this out quickly so that he could wash his hands of her and move on to the next job.

“They’ll be mad if I tell you,” came the softly mumbled announcement that had him damn near sighing with relief as Bailey pulled the comforter down just far enough so that she could peek up at him.

“You can tell me,” he said soothingly, trying for a reassuring smile, only to watch her eyes narrow as she slowly pulled the comforter back up.

“They said you’d say that,” she said, and god, was she a pain in the fucking ass.

“And who are they?” Quinn asked only to mutter, “Fucking hell,” when

Bailey said, "Leprechauns."

Deciding that he'd wasted enough time trying to get answers out of her, Quinn pulled his phone out and scrolled through his contacts to call her brother when she said something that had him going still.

"I'm really sorry about the train, but I couldn't keep letting them hit me," Bailey mumbled around a heavy sigh as she moved to turn over only to realize that she couldn't and settled for curling on her side with a grumble.

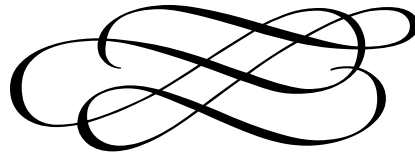
"Kelly?" Quinn asked, watching her closely.

Shaking her head, she said, "Jennifer and Steve."

"They hit you?" Quinn asked, swallowing hard as he thought about all those times that she showed up at school covered in bruises and assumed that Kelly and her group of bitches were making her life a living hell.

"I didn't move fast enough," Bailey mumbled sadly, only to add, "Can't tell Nathan. Don't want him to know," changing everything.

CHAPTER 8



“Did I mention that my head really hurts?” Bailey asked, deciding that the bathroom floor was her new best friend as she pressed her forehead against the cool tiles.

“Which is why the doctor prescribed painkillers,” Quinn, the man that had been looking at her funny since she woke up, said softly as he tried to place more pills in her hand, only to sigh heavily when she shook her head, squeezed her eyes shut on a pained gasp and turned her head as far away from those offending pills as the pain shooting through her skull would allow.

“Bailey...”

“No, I’m a good girl,” Bailey whispered weakly as she willed her aching head to stop pounding.

“This will help,” the man determined to keep her drugged said.

“I-I don’t want to play in traffic again,” she mumbled against the bathroom floor, really hoping that it was clean.

“You weren’t playing in traffic. You ran out of the house, tripped over your own two feet, mumbled something incoherently, and then threw yourself on the hood of my parked car, where you sobbed hysterically, begging me to slow down so that you could get off,” Quinn said, giving up trying to press the pills into her hand and-

“This is for your own good,” came the quietly murmured words as she found herself turned over onto her back, her nose pinched shut, and the pills that were guaranteed to make things more interesting shoved in her mouth. Before she had a chance to spit them back out, he was placing his large hand over her mouth, giving her no other choice but to swallow them. Eyes

narrowing on the man who'd just doomed them all, she finished swallowing the pills before accepting a bottle of water from the man who should have saved himself when he had the chance.

"Stop drugging me," Bailey bit out, glaring up at the large man only to wince, close her eyes, roll over onto her side and mumble sadly, "My glare."

"I'm sure that your glare is normally quite terrifying," Quinn murmured absently as she took a sip of water, grumbled, and handed the bottle back before she curled back into a ball, praying that he took pity on her and left her alone so that she could die in peace.

"It really is," Bailey said, not sure how much more of this she could take.

She just wanted to pass out until her head stopped hurting.

"I want to ask you something," Quinn said, making her wonder why the man who should be sitting back and enjoying the show as karma finally kicked in and made her pay for leaving him on that train platform years ago was helping her.

"Can it wait until I'm not dying?" Bailey asked as she blindly reached up and searched the shelves that she'd spotted earlier when she'd stumbled in here after the toaster incident until she felt something soft and pulled it down so that she could pull it over her head.

"You're not dying," Quinn said softly as he took the large towel that she pressed against her head and replaced it with a small, damp towel that felt really good at the moment.

"Please don't lie to me," Bailey mumbled sadly, placing her hand over the towel as she prayed that she didn't do anything stupid this time around.

"Why didn't you tell me about Jennifer and Steve?" he asked, making her really wish that she'd kept her big mouth shut.

"There was nothing to tell," Bailey said, hoping that he would just drop it.

"Didn't sound that way to me," Quinn said, shutting the bathroom light off before sitting down on the floor next to her.

"Just drop it," Bailey said, deciding that she'd rather wait for the pills to kick in from the comfort of wherever he wouldn't follow her, she moved to get up only to groan when more pain shot through the side of her head and had her moving to lay back down only to grumble when she found herself pulled onto Quinn's lap.

"What are you doing?" Bailey couldn't help but wonder as he pulled her closer until her head was tucked just beneath his chin and she couldn't help but notice just how comfortable he was.

“Taking care of you,” Quinn murmured softly as he wrapped his arms around her.

“I can take care of myself,” Bailey mumbled, burying her face against his chest as her hand found his shirt and held on.

“You don’t have to,” Quinn murmured softly as the familiar haze slowly took over and she found herself letting go.



He fucked up.

There was no other way to put it, Quinn realized as he thought about all those times that he’d dragged the little pain in the ass home and handed her over to Jennifer and Steve, thinking that he was doing the right thing. He didn’t have many regrets, but he definitely regretted-

“Can I have a Coke, please? It would really help settle my stomach,” the small woman who looked better than she had yesterday asked as she sat on the bed, looking pathetic.

“Sure,” Quinn said, more than happy to give her a Coke if it helped. Tossing the notebook that he’d been working on back on the coffee table, Quinn moved to go grab her a Coke when he saw the devious smile playing on her lips before she managed to pull it back and did her best to appear innocent.

His eyes narrowed on her as a thought occurred to him. “Can you drink Coke?”

“Why wouldn’t I be able to drink Coke?” Bailey asked, blinking innocently at him as he sat there, watching her as he thought over the last seventy-two hours and decided to double-check something. After sending Bailey one last questioning look, Quinn pulled his phone out and sent a text message to her brother.

Does your sister react to Coke the same way that she reacts to coffee?

Don’t fucking do it!

Came the immediate response that had him looking up to find Bailey watching him with a hopeful smile.

“According to your brother, that’s not really an option,” Quinn drawled as he moved to put his phone away only to look back down at it when a small chime drew his attention and-

Don’t trust her! The little addict will say whatever it takes to get caffeine. Keep her away from coffee, soda, tea, and whatever you do, don’t let her get within ten feet of a fucking energy drink!

“I have no idea what he’s talking about,” Bailey mumbled softly, drawing his attention back to the small woman blinking up at him.

“So, if I give you a Coke, you won’t go into another psychotic episode and try making friends with the squirrels in the backyard again?” Quinn asked, watching her carefully.

“Of course not,” Bailey murmured, not quite able to look him in the eye as she lied her adorable little ass off.

“I think we’ll stick with juice for now,” he drawled, going to the fridge and grabbed a small bottle of apple juice for her.

“Can I at least have my computer so that I can work?” Bailey asked as she accepted the small bottle from him.

“Not an option,” Quinn said, making his way back to the couch where he’d spent the past three days watching over her.

“Why not?” she asked, frowning as she sipped her juice.

“The doctor said no screentime for the next two weeks,” Quinn said as he watched her face drop.

“Please tell me that you’re joking,” Bailey mumbled weakly, looking like she was going to be sick.

“If it would help ease the pain,” Quinn drawled as he grabbed his iPad off the coffee table and returned his attention to the list of things that needed to be done at Haven Technologies before he could bring her back.

“I have to work.”

“No, what you need to do is rest. You just had a baseball bat knock you out,” he reminded her, looking over the notes that the security company emailed him last night.

“Three days ago,” Bailey pointed out, making his lips twitch.

“You’re not leaving that bed,” Quinn said, looking over the notes about the elevator before glancing back at Bailey.

“You really can’t stop me,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head as she moved to climb off the bed only to go still, swallow hard, and ease back against the pillows when he narrowed his eyes on her.

Clearing her throat, Bailey mumbled, “On second thought, I think I’ll stay where I am and enjoy this lovely bed.”

“Good idea,” Quinn mumbled, focusing his attention back on the notes he’d made about the options they had for securing the elevator.

“I don’t do well with downtime,” Bailey said on a wistful sigh.

“I remember,” he said, chuckling as he swiped to the next page and looked over the notes for the roof.

“You do?”

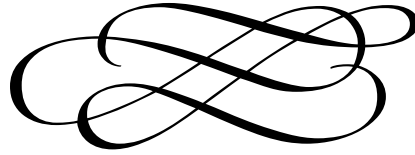
“It’s hard to forget being evacuated in the middle of a snowstorm while you’re changing for gym class because every alarm in the school, along with the sprinkler system, went off and you’re forced to evacuate and wait outside in your boxers,” Quinn drawled, glancing up to find her struggling not to wince.

“I believe I apologized for that during the following school assembly,” Bailey said with a solemn nod.

“Didn’t really feel like an apology when you kept pointing out that it wouldn’t have happened if the principal had picked a better password,” Quinn said, watching as her lips twitched.

“I still stand by that statement today,” Bailey said as she laid down and closed her eyes as she released a sleepy little sigh while he watched over her, determined to do whatever it took to keep her safe.

CHAPTER 9



“It’s just that,” Bailey began, only to pause so that she could release a heartfelt sigh as she lay there, staring up at the ceiling, “I wasn’t ready for what they did to Glenn.”

“It’s three in the morning,” came the firm reply from the man who didn’t understand her needs.

“Which is the perfect time to process my pain from *The Walking Dead*,” Bailey said, even as she couldn’t help but think about all the things that she could be doing right now if she had a computer.

God, the code that she would write...

“For the love of god, go to sleep,” Quinn bit out from the couch, where he was most likely still glaring at her.

Shrugging against the mattress, Bailey shook her head as she said, “I wish it was that easy.”

That was followed by Bailey rolling over onto her stomach, only to immediately regret that decision when the soft pillow brushed against her forehead, sending a fresh wave of pain through her head. Thankful that it was too dark for Quinn to see her biting her lip to hold back a well-earned “Owie,” she rolled back over onto her back and-

“Oh, no...”

-found herself wondering how Quinn managed to make it across the room without her hearing him. Swallowing hard, Bailey stared up at the man who was taking his job a little too seriously. Not knowing what else to do, Bailey went for a hopeful smile that he probably couldn’t see, she realized when he continued standing next to the bed.

Clearing her throat, Bailey said, "Please don't kill me."

"God, you really are a pain in the ass," Quinn said, sighing heavily as she watched his silhouette reach over and grab the bottle of painkillers off the nightstand.

"Wait! We can talk about this!" Bailey said as panic quickly took over, only to wince when fresh pain shot through her head.

Pressing her hands against her head, Bailey squeezed her eyes shut and tried to breathe through the pain. A moment later, she felt a pill pressed against her lips. For a moment, she considered pushing the pill away, only to part her lips and take the pill in her mouth when sharp pain made it difficult to remember how to breathe. When he pressed a bottle of water in her hand a few seconds later, she took a sip, swallowed the pill, and handed it back to him so that she could go back to wincing.

"That should kick in soon," Quinn murmured quietly.

"May the odds be in your favor," Bailey said, deciding that this would be a good time to burrow beneath the pillows when the soft moonlight spilling in through the windows started to make her eyes hurt.

"Get some sleep, Bailey," Quinn said softly as she felt the comforter pulled over her shoulders.

"I can't sleep," she mumbled sadly as she closed her eyes and slowly exhaled while she waited for the pain to go away.

"Try," Quinn said, clearly not understanding the problem here.

She normally worked until she dropped, but since she'd been stuck here...

She was bored out of her mind.

She needed to get her hands on a computer, an iPad, a phone, something. At this point, she'd settle for a calculator, but the large man watching her every move refused to see to her needs. Nathan would have folded by now, Bailey thought with a wistful sigh that made her head ache, but it wasn't as bad as it had been a few minutes ago.

Knowing that she really didn't have a choice, Bailey pulled the pillow off her head, shifted to get more comfortable as she hugged the pillow against her chest. Slowly exhaling, she counted back from a hundred and when that didn't work, she counted sheep, thought about everything that she needed to do for work, counted sheep again, and when nothing else worked, she opened her eyes so that she could squint in the direction of the couch.

There was a heavy sigh, and then...

“Why are you still awake?”

“Because I like to be difficult,” Bailey mumbled absently as she went back to staring up at the ceiling.

“The pill should kick in soon,” Quinn said, sounding really hopeful as she heard him shift on the couch to get more comfortable.

“You should probably mentally prepare yourself for what’s about to come,” Bailey said, wondering why he wasn’t making a run for it while he still had a chance.

“Believe me, I am,” he drawled as she lay there, bored out of her mind.

For a moment, she considered checking out the books that he had stacked on the nightstand, but the thought of trying to squint down at the tiny print made her head hurt, which left...

“Start talking,” Bailey said, and when he didn’t say anything, she raised her hand and gestured for him to get on with it.

“About?” came the hesitant reply.

“Everything.”



“It’s late,” Quinn said as he lay there, hoping that she took pity on him this time and passed out before the painkillers kicked in.

“And I’m wide awake,” Bailey murmured, sounding bored and-

“What do you want to know?” he asked as he rubbed his hands down his face, beyond fucking exhausted.

“What happened after I left you on that platform, utterly destroyed and struggling to hold back the tears?” came the question that had him dropping his hands away so that he could glare at the little brat.

“I had my first homicidal fantasy,” Quinn bit out, only to feel his lips twitch when she said, “That happened way before that.”

“I was late reporting to basic training,” he said, thinking about the moment that he showed up late at the base.

“That sounds ominous,” Bailey said as he watched her shift to get more comfortable on the bed.

“It certainly put things into perspective,” Quinn said, thinking about that first night when he got his first dose of reality.

“Meaning?”

“That I had no idea what I was really getting myself into,” he said as he watched Bailey move to sit up, only to mutter to herself, grumble, and then, finally, fell onto her side with another grumble.

“Do you regret going?” she asked as she reached over and grabbed a pillow and hugged it against her chest.

“Not even a little bit,” Quinn said as he folded an arm behind his head and shifted his focus back to the ceiling. “It was the best thing for me.”

“Why did you leave?”

“It was time to move on,” Quinn murmured absently.

He’d thought it was time for a change, but since he’d left the corps...

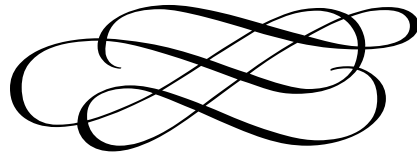
He’d been bored out of his fucking mind.

It was one job after another, protecting politicians, actors, tech giants, and CEOs that thought that his job was to keep a lookout for their wives while they bent their secretaries over their desks. He had no idea what he wanted, and until he did, he was going to keep taking jobs that bored him out of his fucking mind and-

“I love this pillow,” came the announcement seconds before Bailey rolled off the bed with a pained grunt and a sadly mumbled, “Why doesn’t the bed love me?”

-resigning himself to protecting the little pain in the ass from herself.

CHAPTER 10



“You’re being unreasonable,” Bailey said, tightening her grip around the iPad that she’d helped herself to from the coffee table, wondering why he couldn’t just take pity on her and let her use it.

“We talked about this,” the large man who hadn’t changed at all said, taking the only thing that was going to save her sanity away from her.

“Oh, God, no...” Bailey mumbled hollowly as she watched Quinn lock the iPad in the footlocker by the bathroom, slowly destroying her will to live as he sent her a warning glare that she had no choice but to ignore.

“No screen time,” he said absently as her gaze shifted back to that footlocker.

“But-”

“It’s for your own good,” Quinn said as she sat there, imagining just how good the iPad would feel in her hands.

God, the things she could do with that internet connection, Bailey thought with a heartfelt sigh as she looked up and found herself wondering why Quinn was taking off his shirt. That quickly led to the decision that Pam could swing a baseball bat at her head anytime she wanted as she watched the muscles in his abs do things that made it very difficult to think at the moment.

Definitely willing to take another hit, Bailey decided, following that up with a nod of agreement when she saw the Celtic tribal tattoo on the right side of his chest. That was definitely new, she thought as she slowly ran her gaze over him, taking in all the golden muscles that had changed over the years until she came to his navel and followed the dark trail of hair down that

led to his jeans and shifted her focus to the perfectly sculptured “V.”

“What was for my own good?” Bailey absently murmured as she grabbed her juice and took a sip, unable to help but notice that the years had been very good to him.

“No screen time,” Quinn said, tossing his shirt on the couch as he headed for the door, leaving her sitting there following his progress through the windows as he made his way around the house and headed for the pile of logs by the shed.

She watched as he grabbed the ax off the tree stump, placed a log on the stump and swung the ax, making all the muscles in his torso shift in very interesting ways. Pam was definitely getting a raise, Bailey decided, allowing herself to watch Quinn for another minute before she reluctantly put her juice down with a shuddering sigh and decided that it was time to find out what else they were keeping from her.

With that in mind, Bailey took one more sip, moved to climb off the bed, took a moment to appreciate the sight of Quinn bending over, and with a heavy sigh, she forced herself to look away and made her way to the coffee table and helped herself to the paperclips from the file that she read last night when Quinn took a shower and made her way to the footlocker.

After a quick glance at the door to make sure that it was still closed, Bailey put the skills that she’d picked up over the years from her time in foster care to good use and picked the lock. In a matter of seconds, she removed the padlock, opened the footlocker, and-

“God bless him,” Bailey mumbled with a snuffle when she saw the six-pack of Coke that he’d hidden in the footlocker, probably thinking that it would be enough to keep it out of her greedy little hands and grabbed the iPad along with a Coke to help her get through this ordeal before closing the lid and returning the lock.

Once that was done, Bailey raised her head just enough so that she could look out the window and make sure that Quinn was still outside before dropping back down and quickly making her way to the bathroom. When he didn’t barge in the house and demand his iPad back, she closed the bathroom door behind her with a satisfied sigh, grabbed a towel off the counter and settled in the tub. After she shoved the towel behind her head, Bailey cracked open a Coke, took a sip and then focused her attention on the iPad.

Ignoring the throbbing pain behind her right eye, Bailey took another sip, broke through Quinn’s password and decided to have a look at the emails and

text messages that her brother had been sending him over the past three days. Normally, she hated doing this sort of thing, but since he'd refused to tell her anything, she felt that she really didn't have any choice in the matter.

"Let's see..." Bailey mumbled absently to herself as she scrolled through her brother's text messages, only to pause to take another sip before continuing her search until she found what she was looking for.

While she read through her brother's dire warnings about keeping her away from anything with caffeine, Bailey sipped her Coke, made a mental note to get back at the traitor, and frowned when she found the text message with the link to a file named, "Don't Show Bailey," and sighed. God, he was such an amateur sometimes, she thought, taking another sip as she tapped the link and-

"Uh-oh," Bailey mumbled weakly when her brother's glaring face suddenly filled the screen.

"*You just couldn't resist, could you?*" Nathan asked, shaking his head with a disappointed sigh as she sat there trying to wrap her mind around what just happened.

"Did...did you really use one of my programs against me?" Bailey found herself asking, more than a little impressed that her brother managed to pull it off considering the fact that he locked himself out of his computer at least once a week.

"*I asked Jess for help,*" Nathan said, shrugging it off.

"And the reason why you felt the need to betray me was..."

"*Because I know you,*" Nathan murmured absently as he sat back in his office chair and focused his attention on the cellphone in his hands.

"That doesn't really explain why you're keeping something from me," Bailey said, taking a sip of Coke while she watched him type something into his phone.

"*Doesn't it, though?*" Nathan asked, not bothering to look up as he continued doing whatever it was that he was doing.

"Start talking," she said, wondering why he was being so damn stubborn about this.

Unless...

"What else don't I know?" Bailey asked, moving to take another sip when a large, tan hand plucked the Coke out of her hand and she found herself swallowing hard as she looked up and-

"Oh, God, I'm gonna die..." Bailey whispered as she watched the large

man that looked really pissed finish off her Coke before glancing at her brother to find him watching her with a gleam of unholy satisfaction in his eye.

“You left me with no choice,” Nathan said with a satisfied sigh that didn’t bode well for her.

“But-”

Shooting her a wink, Nathan hung up, leaving her sitting there, struggling to come up with a reason why she was sitting in the tub with Quinn’s iPad and sipping a Coke when she was supposed to be in bed resting. Deciding that she should probably just pretend that this never happened, Bailey cleared her throat, shifted, cleared her throat again and murmured, “Excuse me,” as she grabbed onto the side of the tub and pulled herself up. That was followed by wincing when sharp pain tore through her head, forcing her to grab hold of her head as her legs gave out and found herself in Quinn’s arms.

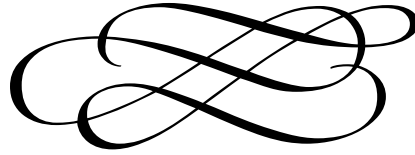
“You really are a pain in the ass,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as he carried her back into the main part of the cabin and-

Walked past the bed and kept going.

“Umm, where are we going?” Bailey asked, really hoping that he didn’t say to dig a grave as she was forced to squeeze her eyes shut when the pain became too much.

“To do something that I should have done a long time ago.”

CHAPTER 11



Haven Technologies Building Florida

“God, I’m going to spank her ass one day,” Nathan said, sighing heavily as he pushed his chair back and headed for the kitchen, needing caffeine to get through this bullshit.

He couldn’t fucking believe this was happening.

He’d had the security upgraded on the first floor, replaced the cameras and started crashing at Bailey’s place so that he could keep an eye on her, but it didn’t fucking help. He thought that he could protect her, but...

He’d fucked up.

“How’s Bailey?” Jess asked, waiting for him with a warm smile and a cup of coffee.

“She’s still a pain in the ass,” Nathan assured her, watching her lips twitch as she took a sip of her coffee.

“That’s probably never going to change,” Jess murmured with a sympathetic wince as he added sugar to his coffee and found himself watching as his sister’s latest pet project stepped off the elevator with a stack of mail in her hands.

He watched as the small, curvy woman swallowed nervously as she took in the busy office, shifted nervously, slowly exhaled, and after a firm nod to herself, made her way across the office. He watched her stare down at the floor as she did her best to avoid running into anyone as she made her way towards his desk and-

“What are you going to do about her?” Jess asked as they watched Pam trip over her own two feet and sent the envelopes in her hands, flying.

“I honestly have no idea,” Nathan said, sighing as he took a sip of coffee while he watched Pam drop to her hands and knees and rush to pick up all the envelopes.

“And if it was up to you?” Jess asked as they watched Pam mumble to herself as she finally managed to pick up all the envelopes and-

Somehow managed to drop them again when she moved to stand up.

“I’d fire her,” Nathan said, biting back a sigh as he took a sip of his coffee and watched as the woman who had absolutely no business working at Haven Technologies finally managed to drop the envelopes on his desk, only to manage to knock over the pens on his desk.

“But you can’t,” Jess said with a sympathetic look as she finished her coffee.

“But I can’t,” Nathan murmured in agreement as he watched Pam finally finish picking up the pens on his desk and shove them back in the cup before she slowly exhaled, nodded to herself and quickly made her way back to the elevator.

“So, what’s the plan?” Jess asked as they watched Pam struggle with the rope to pull the gate closed.

“Keep her out of the way and deal with her later,” Nathan said as he watched Pam finally manage to close the gate.

“I was talking about Bailey,” Jess said, throwing him a questioning look as she poured herself more coffee as he stood there, thinking about his sister and-

“I honestly have no fucking idea.”



Georgia

“Oh, God...” came the hollow whisper followed by, “They’re never going to find my body,” that had Quinn sighing heavily as he threw his grandfather’s

old truck into park.

“You really are a pain in the ass,” he said, turning off the truck and reached into the back and grabbed the backpack that he’d packed when he realized that she wouldn’t be able to go five minutes without getting in trouble.

“And I’m willing to change if that’s what it takes to leave these woods alive,” Bailey mumbled before adding, “Please don’t kill me, Quinn. I can change.”

Sighing, Quinn shoved his door open as he said, “No, you can’t,” only to feel his lips twitch when she sadly mumbled, “I really can’t.”

Wondering why the caffeine from the Coke that she’d helped herself to hadn’t kicked in yet, Quinn closed his door and made his way around the truck, pausing long enough to grab the sleeping bag that he threw in the back and made his way to her door only to fucking sigh when she locked it. Shifting the sleeping bag into his other hand, he gestured for her to unlock the door. Licking her lips nervously, Bailey slowly shook her head, her panicked gaze never leaving his as he reached over and opened the door.

“The lock hasn’t worked in years,” Quinn said as he reached for her.

“I really wish I had known that before I put all my hopes and dreams into that plan,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly only to stop with a wince and placed her hand against her forehead with a pained whimper as he grabbed her other hand.

“I bet you do,” he drawled as he gently pulled her out of the truck.

Once she was standing next to him, he debated throwing her over his shoulder to make sure that she didn’t try running off, but...

He remembered all those times that she tried to outrun Kelly and her band of bitches when they decided to go after her and she ended up tripping over her own two feet and taking herself out. So, unless things had changed dramatically over the years, and something told him that they hadn’t, he wasn’t all that worried about her running off. But just to be sure that she didn’t try anything, he took her hand in his after he shut the truck door and headed for the trail that his grandfather showed him when he was little.

“Did I mention that I was sorry for making you cry?” Bailey asked, sounding really fucking hopeful.

“I didn’t cry,” Quinn said, leading her through the woods until he came to the small hill blocked by several large boulders.

“Are you sure? Because I remember seeing your eyes glistening as the

train pulled out of the station,” she said as he led her around the first boulder and took the small trail over the hill and past the old oak tree that he fell out of when he was six and broke his arm.

“That was rage,” he said absently as he glanced back at her to make sure that she was okay to find her worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she followed him and noted the tension around her eyes and wondered why the damn woman refused to listen to reason and take it easy.

Because she was a stubborn pain in the-

“Are you planning on burying my body out here or abandon me as soon as you decide that I’m sufficiently lost enough to the point that I’ll never be able to find my way out and will be left at the mercy of whatever ravenous animal finds me?” Bailey asked, throwing a nervous glance over her shoulder.

“What makes you think there isn’t a third option?” Quinn drawled as he led her up a small path that wrapped around another set of boulders and finally came to the place where he used to go to clear his head.

“I’m trying to narrow it down since thinking hurts right now,” Bailey mumbled absently as she took in the old Spanish moss tree shadowing the alcove where he used to lose himself for hours, the small cliff above the lake, the wildflowers growing all around them, and the moss-covered boulders surrounding them. “It’s beautiful.”

“Yes, it is,” Quinn murmured in agreement as he tossed the bag on the ground along with the sleeping bag.

“You never answered my question,” Bailey pointed out as she made her way to the edge of the small cliff overlooking the lake and had a better look.

“Would it help if I told you that I was too tired to dig a grave?” Quinn asked, watching her.

“Probably,” Bailey murmured in agreement as she picked up a pebble and dropped it in the lake. “Then, what are we doing here?”

“Talking,” Quinn said as he reached down and unsnapped his jeans.



“And you need to strip naked to do that?” Bailey asked, watching Quinn shove his pants down, revealing a pair of gray boxer briefs and-

What were they talking about? Bailey couldn't help but wonder as she watched him toe off his boots and shove his pants off the rest of the way while she stood there, unable to look away as he stood up and...

She probably should look somewhere else, Bailey thought, nodding in agreement as she somehow managed to look up and met grey eyes lit up with humor. “I do for this,” Quinn said, walking to the edge of the cliff and stepped off, dropping into what appeared to be waist-high water and gestured for her to join him.

Once again thankful for Pam's batting abilities, she pointed to her head. “I'm not supposed to get the stitches wet.”

“You'll be fine,” he promised her as he held his arms up to help her down.

“Yeah, no, I'm good here,” Bailey said, nodding as she decided to have a better look at that sleeping bag.

Decision made, she walked over to the tree, unable to help but notice that this would make a lovely place to pass out from the pain and-

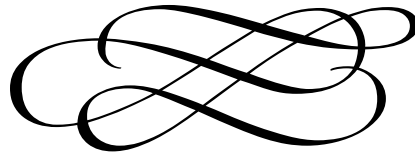
“I forgot that you didn't know how to swim,” came the quietly murmured words that had her frowning as she carefully laid down and nearly groaned when her head touched the soft sleeping bag.

“I *chose* not to learn how to swim,” she pointed out around a yawn as she curled up and got comfortable as a light wind raced over her body, bringing along the scent of wildflowers along with peaches.

“And by ‘chose,’ do you mean that you freaked out, screamed, ‘They're trying to kill me!’ and then left me with no choice but to jump in and pull you off the poor swimming instructor screaming for mercy?” Quinn drawled, making her lips twitch.

“Yes, yes, it is,” Bailey mumbled against the sleeping bag, more relaxed than she had been in years. She didn't know what magic this place held, but she knew that she never wanted to leave.

CHAPTER 12



“So, how does this work?” came the softly murmured question that drew Quinn’s attention to the sleeping bag and-

Had him sighing when he saw the iPad in Bailey’s hands.

“Oh, come on! Don’t be that way,” the little technology addict said with an adorable pout as he plucked the iPad out of her hands and shoved it into his backpack.

When he saw the calculating look on Bailey’s face, Quinn sighed heavily as he reached up and hung the bag off a branch, watching as the calculating look on her adorable face sharpened only to turn into a pout when she realized that she wouldn’t be able to reach it. With a grumble, she rolled over her stomach and sighed, just fucking sighed as she stared off into space.

“Well?” Bailey said, shifting to get more comfortable.

“Well, what?” Quinn asked, dropping down onto the ground with a soft groan and sat back against the old Spanish moss tree to enjoy the last few minutes of sun before it disappeared for the night.

God, he was fucking exhausted.

“How does this work?” came the question that had him cracking one eye open to find Bailey watching him curiously.

“How does what work?” Quinn asked as he closed his eyes again and went over everything that still needed to be done before he could take her back to Haven Technologies.

“This kidnapping,” Bailey said, sounding curious.

“You haven’t been kidnapped,” he said, but of course, she ignored him.

“How much do you think you’d get for me?”

“Your brother offered me a small fortune to keep you,” Quinn said, closing his eyes again only to feel his lips twitch when she said, “I can see that.”

“What about your parents?” he asked, more than a little curious about how that came about since the last time that he saw her, she’d been on her way to Boston with nothing more than a backpack.

“They adore me,” Bailey said with a satisfied sigh that had him opening his eyes and-

“I was just stretching,” she said with a hopeful smile that quickly died away and turned into a pout when he narrowed his eyes on her. With a grumble, the little brat threw the long stick that she’d been trying to knock his bag free with aside so that she could get her greedy little hands back on that iPad that she’d somehow managed to hide from him and sat back down on the sleeping bag.

“How did that happen?” Quinn asked, closing his eyes once again only to end up frowning when she climbed onto his lap a minute later and-

Ooomph!

-settled against him with a satisfied sigh as she pulled the sleeping bag over them.

“Comfy?” Quinn asked dryly as he sat there, never feeling more awkward in his life as he tried to figure out what he was supposed to do.

He wasn’t good at this sort of thing, never had been. When Jaxon used to come to him with a scraped knee after he fell off his bike, Quinn would patch him up, put him back on his bike, and glare at him until he started moving his ass again. The few times that he’d tried to pretend that he could handle a relationship always ended badly. He just wasn’t cut out for anything more than a fucked-up existence.

“Laying down was hurting my head,” Bailey said, snuggling closer while he sat there, biting back a sigh as he awkwardly wrapped his arms around her.

“Do you want to go back?” he asked, even as he felt himself beginning to relax.

“No,” Bailey murmured against his chest.

“Then, do you want to answer my question?” Quinn asked, closing his eyes while he felt all the tension in his body slowly disappear.

“About how I ended up being the adored daughter of Calian and Aylene Thompson?” she asked as he found himself absently running his fingertips

over her arm as he thought about everything that his men had been able to find out about the break-in, which admittedly wasn't much. The only thing that he knew was that whoever broke into her apartment had left empty-handed. He-

"I became a hardened criminal."



"A hardened criminal?" the man who made a really comfortable mattress asked, sounding amused for some reason.

"I was a threat to society," Bailey said, making him chuckle, which she had to admit pleased her since she didn't remember him smiling that much when they were kids.

"Were you, now?"

"I really was," she assured him with a nod.

"I'm sure that you had law enforcement everywhere quivering in fear," Quinn drawled, which, of course, earned another nod since he was finally accepting her skills as a criminal mastermind. "And how did you do this? Running guns over the border? Organizing drug mules? Running your own brothel? Perhaps you spent some time as a paid assassin?"

"Term papers," Bailey said with a firm nod that had him sighing heavily with a murmured, "Term papers?"

"Mmmhmm, you'd be surprised by how many college kids are willing to pay a small fortune to get out of writing a ten-page paper," she mumbled sleepily as the painkillers finally started to kick in.

"Somehow, I'm not surprised, but that's not the whole story," Quinn said, sounding completely relaxed as he ran his fingertips over her arm.

"Well, after I bought a ticket for the first train out of Boston to ensure that a certain someone wouldn't find me, I found myself in Orlando with twenty bucks to my name and absolutely no idea what I was supposed to do. After spending a night warming a lovely bench in the park, I woke up covered in red ants, staring into the eyes of a baby alligator that really didn't seem all that happy to see me, and decided that I needed a plan."

“So, after I was done freaking out about the ants, I bought a stale donut off a lovely coffee truck and contemplated my life’s choices. After that, I decided that I really didn’t have all that many and found the nearest library. I decided to put the library’s free resources to good use and was able to find an underserved demographic that needed my help. Spoiled rich college kids,” Bailey said, earning another chuckle.

“I’m sure that they really appreciated your help,” Quinn said, making her smile.

“They really did. Thanks to them, I was able to afford the best junk food that money could buy.”

“What every growing fourteen-year-old girl really needs,” he murmured in agreement.

“It was a priority,” she said, wondering if he had any idea how comfortable he really was. “During the day, I did my best not to piss off the librarians, and then at night, I had free reign of the library, which worked out well until the librarian decided to call social services and I was forced to find other accommodations. Since I was fourteen and kind of small for my age, that didn’t really leave me with many choices, so I decided to try my hand at living off the land.”

“Jesus Christ,” came the mumbled reply that had her nodding in agreement.

“Indeed.”

“How did that end?”

“With me getting lost, dehydrated, and covered in more ant bites in the woods off a small playground. That’s where Nathan found me, covered in dirt and beating the shit out of a large anthill with a stick and somewhat delusional. After he wrestled the stick away from me, he decided to interrogate me until he realized that he couldn’t break me. That led to him grabbing my hand and dragging me home, grumbling the entire way before he shoved me in the bathroom with a change of clothes and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.”

“Once I finished devouring the rather delicious sandwich, I took the longest shower of my life, helped myself to some ant bite ointment, and pulled on an oversized Dungeon and Dragons tee-shirt and gym shorts that hung off me. When I was done, that was followed by another glaring match, my refusal to talk, and Nathan calling me a pain in the ass before he shoved me under his bed to hide me from his parents. I barely lasted an hour before

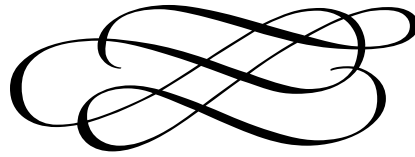
his dirty gym socks sent me fleeing for my life and straight into Calian, who took one look at me and decided to let me have a good night's sleep on the pullout couch before calling social services in the morning. By breakfast, I had him wrapped around my little finger and Aylene refusing to let me leave, and the rest is history," Bailey finished with a heartfelt sigh, only to realize that at some point, Quinn had fallen asleep.

Poor guy, Bailey thought as she reached up and ran her fingertips along his jaw, unable to help but notice how handsome he was as she dropped her hand away and decided that she should probably take this opportunity to see what else she could find out on that iPad. Decision made, she gently pushed his arms away and-

"Don't make me tie you up."

-decided that a nap sounded lovely right now.

CHAPTER 13



“**B**ut what if I-”

“No,” Quinn said, not bothering to look up as he finished dicing up the onions.

“It would just be for a minute!” Bailey said, no doubt sending him a hopeful smile.

“What happened the last time that you managed to get your hands on my laptop?” Quinn asked as he finished dicing the onions and dumped them into the frying pan on the stove.

“You commenced with the glaring.”

“And?” he asked as his gaze flickered in her direction to find Bailey sitting in the middle of the bed with that hopeful smile that he couldn’t help but find really fucking adorable.

“You seemed angry for some reason,” Bailey said, clearing her throat as her gaze shifted just to the side, not quite able to meet his gaze.

“Do you think that might have something to do with the fact that you ended up curled up in the fetal position, squeezing your eyes shut and holding your head as you begged me to get Pam and have her finish the job?” Quinn drawled as he watched Bailey open her mouth, seemed to rethink that decision, closed it, shifted, and then, finally...

“Probably,” she mumbled sadly as her shoulders dropped in defeat.

“And...” Quinn prompted.

“I promised not to touch another device until my head was healed,” Bailey reluctantly admitted with a pout.

“And has it healed?” he asked, returning his attention to the steaks he’d

prepared earlier.

“I mean, technically yes since the stitches came out this morning,” she pointed out.

“And when the doctor pointed the light in your eyes?” Quinn asked, dropping the steaks in the pan as his gaze flickered back to the woman struggling to come up with an answer that was going to end with her getting her greedy little hands on his computer again.

She cleared her throat before she said, “I may have cried a little.”

“And...”

“I no longer wish to discuss this matter,” Bailey grumbled as she allowed herself to fall over onto her side with a heartfelt sigh.

“Are you sure? Because I’d be more than happy to discuss the soft little sniffles that you released the entire drive home,” Quinn said, only to chuckle when she sadly mumbled, “I was traumatized.”

“And now?” he asked, watching her reach back and grab a pillow so that she could hug it against her chest.

“I’d like to pick up where we left off,” Bailey said with a firm nod as she released her hold on the pillow so that she could gesture for him to get on with it.

“And where would that be?” Quinn asked as he double-checked the potatoes in the oven.

“Where you were telling me how you ended up here,” Bailey said as she returned to hugging her pillow.

“When was I doing this?” Quinn asked as he flipped the steaks.

“The other night when we were exploring my pain from what they did to Glenn,” she said, reminding him of the long night he’d spent trying to convince her to come out from underneath the bed after she somehow managed to crawl beneath it, convinced that the shadows were out to get her.

“I told you the whole story. Don’t you remember?” he said, hoping that would be enough to get her to drop the subject.

“I’m pretty sure that I would have remembered that,” Bailey said, once again gesturing for him to get on with it.

“Do you remember realizing that you were surrounded by shadows after you crawled under the bed and begged me to remember you fondly after you decided that there was no escape?” Quinn asked, pulling the roasted potatoes out of the oven and set them on the counter in time to watch as Bailey moved to climb off the bed to help, but one look from him had her returning to the

bed with a grumble.

“They accepted me as one of their own,” she said, nodding as she settled back on the bed, shifted to get comfortable, and then sighed heavily as she went back to pouting.

“There’s nothing to tell,” Quinn reminded her as he made quick work of plating their food.

“There really is, though,” Bailey said as he grabbed silverware and brought her plate over to her. “Thank you.”

“I did my time in the Marines, took a job in private security, and now, I’m here dealing with a pain in the ass that refuses to listen to her doctor,” Quinn said as he headed back into the kitchen and grabbed his plate.

“For some reason, I feel like there’s more to that story,” Bailey said as he made his way into the living room with his plate and settled on the couch.

“You’d be disappointed,” Quinn said as he watched her put her plate down before climbing off the bed and made her way into the kitchen, where she grabbed two Cokes out of the fridge and-

“Don’t even think about it.”

-grumbled as she reluctantly placed one of the Cokes back in the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water.

“Then, tell me how your grandmother is doing,” Bailey said as she made her way over to the couch and handed him the Coke.

“She passed away a few years ago,” Quinn said as he watched her make her way back to the bed.

“I’m sorry, Quinn. She was a wonderful woman,” she said with a sympathetic smile.

“Yes, she was,” Quinn said as he watched her grab her plate and-

“And Jaxon?” Bailey asked as she dropped down on the couch next to him.

“Is a bigger pain in the ass than you,” Quinn said, digging into his food.

Blinking, Bailey said, “Somehow, I doubt that.”

He made a show of thinking that over before nodding as he said, “You’re probably right about that.”

“I am,” Bailey assured him as she shifted to get more comfortable, careful of the plate on her lap. “What happened to him?”

“He drove Grandma crazy, got a scholarship to a college in Texas, graduated at the top of his class and decided to go to law school where he is currently driving his professors crazy,” Quinn said, watching as Bailey’s lips

pulled up into a warm smile.

“That’s wonderful,” Bailey said as he cut a piece of steak and went to take a bite, hoping that would be enough to move on, only to end up biting back a groan when she once again gestured for him to get on with it.

“What do you want to know, you little pain in the ass?” Quinn asked, knowing that she wouldn’t give up, not when she was this bored. It was either answer her questions or deal with her trying to get her hands on his computer.

“Why didn’t you live with your grandfather?” Bailey asked as she took a bite of potato.

“Here, you mean?” Quinn asked as he leaned over and grabbed the Coke off the coffee table.

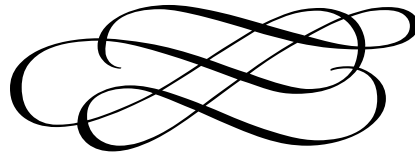
“Mmmhmm,” she murmured around a bite of steak while she watched him take a sip and grumbled when he was forced to glare at her when she moved to pluck the Coke out of his hand after he finished taking a sip.

“It wasn’t really an option,” he said as he placed the Coke back on the table and thought about that moment when the social worker broke the news that his mother was dead. Before he had a chance to wrap his mind around what she was saying, she was telling him that his grandfather was coming to get him and bring him down to Georgia to live with him as his gaze locked on his grandmother the moment that the realization that her only daughter had died hit.

“I was fine where I was,” Quinn said quietly as he thought about the way that his grandmother tried to hold it together for him and-

“You’re a good man, Quinn.”

CHAPTER 14



“Jesus Christ,” Quinn muttered as she watched him rub his hands roughly down his face as she sat there, considering him for a moment before she shifted her attention back to the movie that was proving to be very informative.

She watched as Kevin Costner’s character raced across the stage in slow motion and pushed Whitney Houston’s character out of the way seconds before everything went to hell. For several minutes, Bailey sat there, enjoying the lovely bowl of popcorn that Quinn was kind enough to make for her as she finished watching *The Bodyguard*, which she’d chosen for research purposes, and when it was done...

“So, I have questions,” Bailey said as she shifted her attention back to the man who’d been glaring at her since she’d announced her movie selection.

“Don’t,” Quinn bit out as he leveled a look of warning that she chose to ignore.

Nodding as though the warning worked for her, Bailey pointed to the television as she said, “Start talking.”

“It’s a movie,” the man who’d moved on to rubbing his temples with his fingertips bit out.

“And yet, I still have questions,” Bailey said, watching him as she popped another piece of popcorn in her mouth while she waited for him to get on with it.

When he only glared at her, she decided to take pity on him and make this easier for him. “He was paid three thousand dollars a week in that movie. How much is my brother paying you to protect me?”

“More to make sure that they never find your body,” Quinn said as he dropped his hands away.

“Understandable,” Bailey murmured as she moved on with her interrogation. “How are your knife-throwing skills?”

“As much as I’d love to finish this conversation, I need to check the perimeter,” Quinn said with a heavy sigh as he stood up and-

Narrowed his eyes when she got to her feet with a murmured, “I love checking the perimeter.”

That was followed by sending him a hopeful smile as she moved to place the bowl of popcorn on the coffee table, only to rethink the move when his eyes narrowed dangerously on her. Clearing her throat, Bailey murmured, “I’ll just go put this on the kitchen counter and get my shoes on.”

“You’re not going,” Quinn said firmly with a pointed look back at the couch.

“I see,” Bailey murmured as she followed his gaze as she debated the best way to handle this.

She could point out that he was supposed to be protecting her, but since they both knew that she really didn’t think that she really needed protection, he wouldn’t buy it. He had the house wired with an alarm system, security cameras in the house and around it, as well as sensors on the driveway and around the house and would know the second that anyone set foot on the property. That, and he could be back here in under two minutes, something that she found out the other day when he was doing a perimeter check and she’d decided to enjoy a lovely cup of coffee while he was gone.

Before she’d managed to take a sip, Quinn was there, plucking the cup that was giving off a delicious aroma out of her hand and taking a sip while he considered her. He didn’t say anything, but then again, he didn’t need to, not when she knew what that look in his eye meant. That had been followed by her clearing her throat, murmuring, “Excuse me,” and returning to the bed where she went with a hopeful look that quickly died away and had her grumbling as she flopped down onto her side and resigned herself to spending the rest of the day in bed.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes,” Quinn said as he moved to grab his phone off the coffee table, only to go still at her next words.

“If you think that’s a good idea...” Bailey said, letting her words trail off as she let her gaze shift to that locked footlocker by the wall and-

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Quinn said, reaching up to pinch the

ridge of his nose.

“I’ll just go grab my shoes,” Bailey said with a satisfied sigh as she made her way to the closet where she kept her things even as she debated whether she should change out of her plaid pajama pants only to decide against it since it would only give the man that was glaring at her again a chance to ditch her.

Since that wouldn’t work for her, Bailey made quick work of pulling off the comfy socks that she’d helped herself to from his bag, pulled on a pair of her socks, followed by her sneakers, and once she was done, she turned around and debated her next question. Deciding that she’d start with his knife-throwing skills, she opened her mouth and-

“No talking,” Quinn said with a look of warning as he double-checked his gun before placing it back in its holster. She opened her mouth to argue, only to close it when gray eyes narrowed on her, deciding that she probably shouldn’t push her luck.



“It’s just that,” the small woman that had pouted until he let her climb onto his back so that he could carry her began with a heartfelt sigh while Quinn cut through the woods, resigned to his fate, “I really can’t help but wonder about those knife throwing abilities of yours.”

“What did I tell you that I would do if you started interrogating me again?” Quinn asked as he adjusted his hold around her legs while he made his way down a small incline.

“That you would tie me to a tree and leave me as an offering to the first ravenous bear that came by,” Bailey said, not really sounding all that concerned as she propped her chin onto his shoulder and released another heartfelt sigh. “I’m afraid that I’m really going to need an answer.”

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Quinn bit out as he carried her over a small stream and back up an incline.

“A pain in the ass that’s going to need an answer,” Bailey pointed out.

He should dump her in that stream, Quinn thought as he glanced back

over his shoulder and-

“I still can’t swim,” Bailey murmured, correctly guessing where his thoughts had gone as he felt her shrug against his back.

“Believe it or not, I already figured that out,” Quinn drawled as he carried her through the woods.

“And those knife-throwing skills that might come in handy?”

“I thought you didn’t need a bodyguard,” Quinn reminded her as he made his way back to the old trail that led back to the house.

“I don’t, but I still like knowing my safety options,” Bailey murmured while he checked the woods and trail, looking for any signs that they had company.

“Fine. I can throw a knife,” he admitted, hoping that it would be enough to get her to-

“Have you ever had to save one of your clients before?” came the immediate question that let him know that she wasn’t planning on dropping this anytime soon.

Sighing heavily, Quinn said, “Yes.”

“Have you ever lost a client before?”

“No.”

“Why aren’t you wearing a bulletproof vest?” Bailey asked as he felt her pull her hand back and-

Forced him to bite back a groan when she ran her hand over his chest to make sure, leaving him to wonder if he’d lost his fucking mind.

“Because you’d only take that as a challenge,” he drawled, only to feel his lips twitch when she murmured, “I really would.”

“Ever been shot?” came the question that he should have seen coming.

“Yes,” he said, sighing heavily as he headed back towards the house.

“Where?”

“Right shoulder, abdomen, and thigh,” Quinn said, hoping it would be enough to-

“Is that why you left the Marines?”

-make him fucking sigh.

“No, it was time to move on,” Quinn said as he spotted the small cabin through the woods.

“That answer’s vague,” Bailey pointed out.

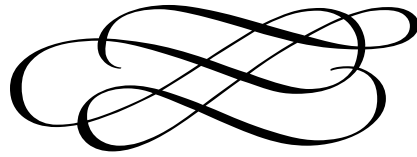
“It’s the only answer that you’re going to get,” Quinn said, deciding to cut across the woods instead since it would get them to the cabin faster.

Bailey was quiet for a moment and he could honestly say that he'd never been more thankful for anything in his life. He adjusted his hold around her legs and-

“You have no idea why you left, do you?”

No, he didn't and that was the problem.

CHAPTER 15



He was going to kill her, but at the moment, Bailey simply didn't care. She needed to make sure that everything was running smoothly back at Haven Technologies. With that in mind, she slowly counted to a hundred as she watched the bathroom door while she listened to make sure that the shower was still running, and once she heard it...

She decided that it was time to make her move.

Never taking her eyes off the bathroom door, Bailey slowly pushed the covers off as she released a shaky breath and shifted closer to the edge of the bed. That was followed by carefully lowering herself to the floor and onto her hands and knees. After once again making sure that the shower was still running, she slowly, ever so slowly, made her way to the coffee table.

In a matter of seconds, she was kneeling by the coffee table and reaching for the laptop that she'd had her eye on for the past two weeks. Her gaze flickered to the bathroom door as her fingers itched with the need to feel the comforting weight in her hands, and once she finally had it in her hands, she couldn't hold back the satisfied sigh that she felt deep down to her soul. She moved to quickly make her escape when she saw it, Quinn's iPad. Telling herself that she shouldn't get greedy, Bailey moved to leave, but...

"Damn it!" Bailey mouthed as she grabbed the iPad and hugged it against her chest along with the laptop and quickly made her way back to the bed, where she dove beneath the covers.

Once she was there, Bailey shifted to get comfortable on her stomach as she opened Quinn's laptop and felt herself relax for the first time since this all started. God, she'd missed this, Bailey thought as she quickly made her way

past the password and...and...

“Oh, no,” she mumbled weakly as the sheet covering her was slowly pulled away.

Clearing her throat, Bailey closed the laptop, murmured, “Excuse me,” and moved to climb off the bed, only to release a pathetic whimper when she felt the large hand wrap around her ankle and-

“Why must you manhandle me?” Bailey asked as she found herself thrown over Quinn’s shoulder.

“Because you’re a pain in my ass,” Quinn said, which, sadly, she couldn’t really argue.

“Are you taking me to another secondary location?” she asked conversationally as Quinn carried her towards the door.

“If I drop you back on the bed, will you finally take it easy?” he countered as he paused by the door.

“Probably not,” Bailey admitted with a grumble and a heartfelt sigh as she was carried outside and straight to the old pickup truck.

“Stay here,” Quinn said as he opened the passenger side door and set her down on the bench seat.

Knowing that she really didn’t have a choice, Bailey settled more comfortably on the bench while she watched Quinn, whom she’d like to point out was only wearing a pair of grey gym shorts, head back inside. A moment later, he was walking back to the truck with a backpack over his shoulder and climbing into the driver’s side and tossing the bag in the back to join the sleeping bag and the rest of the stuff that he had stuffed behind the bench seat before climbing in.

“Where are we going?” Bailey asked as she pulled on her seatbelt.

“Somewhere that will help you relax,” Quinn said as he put the truck in drive and headed towards the dirt road that she’d been curious about for a few days now.

Blinking slowly at him, Bailey gestured weakly back towards the cabin as she pointed out, “But the computer was helping me relax.”

“I’m sure that it was,” Quinn murmured absently as he navigated the long, winding dirt road through the woods.

“It really was,” Bailey said, pulling her knees against her chest as she wrapped her arms around her bare legs so that she could rest her chin on her knees while she released a heartfelt sigh.

“When’s the last time that you went without a computer?” Quinn asked as

she watched several deer race across the dirt road in front of them.

“You mean willingly?” Bailey asked, turning her head so that she could watch his lips twitch.

“Christ, you’re worse than me,” Quinn said as she sat there, unable to help but notice just how incredibly handsome he was, but that wasn’t what she liked best about him.

She loved his eyes, always had, even when he used to piss her off and god, did he piss her off, Bailey thought with a fond smile for the boy that had taken it upon himself to look after her. Anytime she got in trouble, he was always there, ready to protect her even when she didn’t think that she needed it.

“Meaning?” Bailey asked as she watched him.

“Nothing,” Quinn murmured absently, looking lost in thought as he absently tapped his thumb against the steering wheel while he drove. For several minutes, she didn’t say anything, content to watch the man who always made her feel safe before she reluctantly turned her head when she felt the truck come to a stop to see where they were and-

“Oh, god, not again...”



Quinn threw another log on the fire before turning his attention back to the truck and-

“It’s not happening, you sick bastard!” the small woman refusing to climb out of the truck said.

“Bailey-”

“No!” came the immediate reply that had Quinn sighing as he glanced from the truck that he’d backed up to the small clearing in front of the lake behind him as he debated his options.

He could take her back to the cabin and spend the rest of the night trying to keep an eye on her or...

“I want to live!” Bailey yelled from the safety of his truck as he leaned down and picked up his backpack.

Quinn didn't bother saying anything as he reached into the bag, but then again, he didn't need to as he grabbed one of the cans of Coke that he'd packed before placing the bag back on the ground and popped the top. He watched as the small woman that had dropped to the floor and curled up into a ball when she saw where he took her climb back onto the bench seat so that she could watch him through the back window.

"Is that..." Bailey said, anxiously licking her lips as her gaze locked on the can in his hand, "Coke?"

"Mmmhmm," Quinn murmured as he took a sip.

"Did you bring one for me?" she asked, sounding really fucking hopeful.

"That depends," he said, taking another sip.

"On?" Bailey asked, never taking her eyes off him as she reached over and blindly shoved the door open.

That was followed by quickly shifting so that she was peeking at him from behind the door. She really was too fucking adorable for her own good, Quinn thought, taking another sip of Coke as he reached back down and grabbed the other items that he'd grabbed on his way out of the cabin and waited. He watched as Bailey's gaze flickered between the Coke in his hand to the bag of marshmallows and chocolate candy bars in the other hand and back again.

"On how you like your s'mores," Quinn said, taking another sip as he tossed the marshmallows and chocolate bars on the sleeping bag facing the truck and focused on finding a stick.

"Toasty," Bailey mumbled absently as she slowly exhaled before pushing the truck door open more and-

"Nope, not happening," she said, shaking her head frantically as she closed the truck door when something rustling in the woods nearby caught her attention.

"I didn't know that you were a little coward," Quinn drawled as he watched a bunny make its way out of the woods.

"Yes, you did!" came the immediate reply that had his lips twitching as he grabbed a stick off the ground and sat down on the old log that he'd helped his grandfather drag out of the woods when he was fifteen.

"Are you planning on spending the night in there?" Quinn asked as he pulled his pocket knife out and sharpened the tip.

"That really went without saying," Bailey said as his gaze flickered back to the truck to see her watching him through the back window again.

“That’s a damn shame,” Quinn said with a sad shake of his head as he took another sip of his Coke before placing it back down on the ground next to him and grabbed a marshmallow.

“Are you going to make one of those for me?” Bailey asked with a hopeful look as she pressed her forehead against the window.

“Maybe,” Quinn murmured as he took another sip of his Coke as he shifted his focus back to toasting the marshmallow. A few minutes later, he was carefully placing the toasted marshmallow between two graham crackers along with a piece of chocolate and-

Watched as the small woman afraid of her own shadow settle on the log across from him and took a bite of her ill-gotten s’more as she pulled the sleeping bag over her head, all while glaring at him. God, she was fucking adorable, he thought as he watched her nibble on the s’more and-

Fucking sighed when she went to wash it down with his Coke.

“Why are you toying with my emotions?” Bailey murmured when he reached over the fire and plucked the Coke out of her hand.

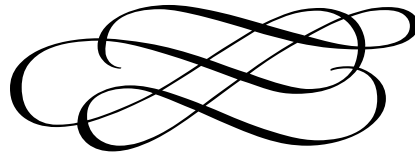
“Because I can,” Quinn said, shooting her a wink as he finished off his Coke.

“Are you sure that you want to do that?” she drawled, watching him curiously as she continued nibbling on the s’more.

“What exactly am I doing?” Quinn asked as he reached into his bag for the other Coke and-

“Falling in love with me.”

CHAPTER 16



“Is that what I’m doing?” the incredibly handsome man sitting across from her murmured.

With a heartfelt sigh, Bailey said, “I’m afraid it is.”

“How do you figure?” Quinn asked as he opened the other can of Coke and took a sip.

“Because I’ve seen it before,” she said with a solemn nod, only to pause mid-nod, grumble, and reach up and shove the sleeping bag back when it began sliding down over her face.

“Have you now?” Quinn asked, sounding really amused for some reason.

“I really have,” Bailey assured him.

“Care to share?” he asked, moving to put his Coke down only to rethink that decision when he noticed that she was watching the move closely.

“I would, but I’m going to need another s’more,” Bailey said, gesturing for him to get on with it as she popped the last bite in her mouth.

“Fair enough,” Quinn murmured as he took another sip and set the Coke down, making sure to send her a look of warning as he did, and grabbed another marshmallow. “Start talking.”

Nodding, Bailey said, “Just as soon as I know that you’ve mentally braced yourself for what’s to come.”

“I’ll do my best,” he drawled, gesturing for her to get on with it.

Knowing that there was no point in putting this off, Bailey said, “I’m irresistible,” with a nod and another grumble when the sleeping bag began sliding down again.

“Clearly,” Quinn said as he finished making her s’more and handed it to

her. “Anything else?”

“You have to know how this ends,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head as she was forced to reach up and grab hold of the sleeping bag to stop it from getting in the way of tormenting the large man that had this coming.

He never should have come between her and her technology needs.

“How’s that?” Quinn asked, sliding another marshmallow on the stick as he watched her.

“Not good,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head. “Not good at all.”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” he said, nodding as he took his time toasting the marshmallow that was going to taste delicious in her next s’more. “And you’re basing this on what exactly?”

“My research,” she said, watching as he made quick work of making another s’more before she held her hand out for more.

“And by ‘research,’ do you mean watching that overrated movie that you kept pausing so that you could stare at me?” Quinn asked as he placed the s’more in her hand and-

Left her swallowing hard when his fingertips brushed against her skin when he pulled his hand back. She watched as his normally cold gaze became heated as it locked on her and...just as quickly turned cold again as he dropped his hand away. Wondering what was wrong with her, Bailey focused on the s’more in her hand as she cleared her throat and said, “That’s exactly it.”

“Are you going to leave me in suspense?” Quinn drawled, picking up the Coke that should rightfully be hers.

“Are you going to share that Coke?” she countered.

“Start talking,” he said, gesturing for her to get on with it.

“If you must know,” Bailey began, only to feel her lips twitch when he said, “I must.”

Clearing her throat, she said, “I’ve broken this down for you.”

“That will make this easier,” Quinn murmured, gesturing for her to get on with it with the Coke.

“First, and remember, this is based on my extensive research, you got talked into taking a job that you didn’t want,” Bailey began as she held up one finger and took a bite of the delicious treat that was helping her focus. “That, of course, was followed by dealing with a client who didn’t believe that she needed help, a vicious attack that left me clinging to life and-”

“You startled Pam when you stood up and ran towards the wall as she

swung the bat,” Quinn pointed out as he reached down and tossed another log on the fire.

Sniffling, Bailey said, “It was still a vicious attack.”

“Of course, it was,” Quinn said, once again gesturing for her to continue.

“After the vicious attack,” Bailey once again began, only to release a heartfelt sigh and a sad shake of her head when he added, “That you barely survived.”

“It was a close call,” she murmured in agreement before continuing. “That was followed by realizing that you couldn’t keep me safe and taking me away to an undisclosed location where you have fond memories, leaving you struggling to stay away from me, but realize that you can’t.”

“It’s a one-room cabin,” he reminded her.

“Which will just speed this up and leave you struggling to resist me,” Bailey said with a helpless shrug.

“Jesus Christ,” Quinn said, rubbing his hands roughly down his face.

“I know,” she said, nodding solemnly. “This is going to be a struggle for you.”

“What else?” he asked as he dropped his hands away.

“Did I mention the lingering touches and wistful looks from across the room?” Bailey asked.

“That really went without saying,” Quinn said, gesturing for her to continue as he reached into his bag and pulled out a bottle of water and handed it to her.

“Thank you,” Bailey said as she tossed the last bite of s’more in her mouth and accepted the bottle. “Now, where was I?”

“Lingering touches,” he said with a resigned sigh.

“That just leaves you with no choice but to fall madly in love with me,” Bailey said with a pitying look.

Nodding slowly, Quinn said, “And you have experience with this?”

“With incredibly handsome men falling madly in love with me?” Bailey asked, noting the way that he went still as she continued. “It happens all the time,” she said with a heartfelt sigh.

“Didn’t the bodyguard get shot saving her?” he pointed out.

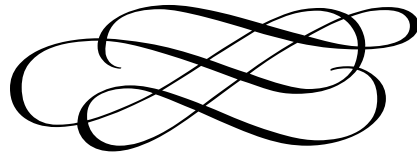
“I’ve decided that we’re going to skip that part,” Bailey murmured absently as she took in their surroundings now that she was finished with her snack and really wished that she’d stayed in the truck when she saw the pitch-black woods surrounding them.

She hated camping, which, unfortunately for her parents, she didn't discover until after they took her camping for the first time. That was quickly followed by her brother deciding that hiding in the woods at two in the morning to scare the hell out of her was a bad idea.

"That's very generous of you," Quinn said dryly.

"It's the least that I can do for making you fall in love with me."

CHAPTER 17



“So, I’ve been thinking,” came the announcement as Bailey dropped down on his back with a satisfied sigh that left him groaning. God, she was a mean little thing, Quinn thought as he turned his head, determined to ignore the woman who had been driving him crazy over the past week.

She never fucking slept for more than two hours at a time. She was like the Energizer-fucking-Bunny. He’d honestly never seen anything like it. He was used to going without sleep and grabbing ten minutes here and there just to get by, but Bailey...

She just...

God, the longer that she stayed awake, the more energized she became. He honestly wasn’t sure how much more of this he could take, morning, noon, and night, she kept fucking going, talking his ear off one minute, and the next, she was sitting in the corner, staring down at the computer that he’d been forced to hand over to save his sanity, her fingertips flying over the keyboard, leaving him praying that she didn’t stop because when she did...

“I think I’m ready to learn how to kill a man,” Bailey said as he lay there, frowning in confusion right around the time that the bitter aroma of the only thing that was going to save his sanity reached him, immediately sending terror through him as he carefully, yet really fucking quickly, turned over onto his back and snatched the cup of coffee out of her hands before she could make this day even more memorable.

“I didn’t offer to teach you how to kill a man,” Quinn bit out with a glare as the little pain in the ass carefully shifted down the couch until she was sitting on his legs, “I offered to teach you self-defense.”

Frowning adorably, Bailey asked, “Isn’t that the same thing?” making him swallow hard as he stared helplessly at her as a thought occurred to him, one that had him praying that he was wrong, but he already knew that he wasn’t.

“You already Googled how to kill a man with your bare hands, didn’t you?” he asked, taking a sip of coffee before moving to place it down on the coffee table, only to narrow his eyes on the little pain in the ass when she moved to grab it.

With a pathetic little mumble, Bailey sat back with a disappointed sigh and a nod as she said, “Yes, yes, I did.”

“Jesus Christ,” Quinn said, rubbing his hands down his face, once again wondering how much more of this he was going to be able to take.

“I have questions,” Bailey said, sounding thoughtful.

“Of course you do,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as he pulled his legs free and sat up next to the woman who was quickly destroying his will to live.

“How many ways can I kill a man with my thumb?” she asked as he grabbed the coffee and downed it in one gulp, needing the hot, bitter liquid to make it through this conversation.

“None.”

“How many ways can you kill a man with your thumb?” came the follow-up question that had him placing the empty coffee cup back on the coffee table so that he could drop his head in his hands, already feeling a migraine coming on.

“Eleven,” Quinn said, rubbing his hands roughly down his face.

“I’m going to need you to show me at least half of them,” she said in an awed whisper that had him dropping his hands away so that he could glare at her.

“No,” he bit out, praying that would be the end of it, but he knew better by now.

“It would make things easier if I turned into a killing machine,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly.

Refusing to be sucked into this conversation after she’d fucked with his head yesterday because she was bored, Quinn shoved the blanket off his lap and headed to the bathroom. Five minutes later, he was enjoying a hot shower when he heard it. Telling himself that it was just his imagination fucking with his head, he closed his eyes and-

“You know what would make this easier?” came the question that had

him dropping his head in defeat.

“No,” Quinn said, hoping that she took pity on him and left him alone for the day.

“Going home,” came the sadly mumbled words as though it pained her to make the suggestion.

“Not happening,” Quinn said, absolutely refusing to bring her back until the building was secure and he had a few more answers.

Until then, they were staying right where they were.



“This is fun. Isn’t this fun?” the small woman that was driving him fucking crazy asked with a satisfied sigh as he stood there, tightening his hold on the armrests of his chair to stop himself from spanking her and-

“Let’s see,” Bailey said, making a show of looking over the selection of nail polish that she’d somehow convinced him to buy for her when they made a quick run into town to grab food while he sat there, *seething*. “I think the pink compliments your skin, but I have to admit that I’m partial to the emerald.”

“I’m going to spank your ass,” Quinn bit out, hoping that the warning would be enough to put a stop to this.

Nodding, Bailey said, “Green it is,” with a nod and a murmured, “This is going to look really good on you.”

“Bailey,” he said evenly, only to swallow nervously while he was forced to sit there watching her as she took her time shaking the small bottle as she shifted on the floor to get more comfortable.

“We should have done this sooner,” Bailey said as he watched her unscrew the small bottle and made a show of pulling the small brush covered in green nail polish out and-

“I have to chop more wood!” Quinn said, not even fucking caring that he was panicking as he got out of that chair and rushed to the door, praying like hell that she just let him go and-

“I should probably help you with that. Let me just grab my sneakers and

you can show me how to use that ax,” came the announcement that fucking terrified him.



“I know what you’re doing,” Quinn muttered against the pillow that he’d managed to steal from the little brat determined to make his life a living hell.

“And what’s that?” came the absently murmured question as the sounds of her fingertips tapping against the keys on his laptop filled the small cabin.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Quinn bit out evenly, letting her know that her fucked-up games weren’t going to work.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Bailey said, earning a glare because they both fucking knew what she was doing.

“You’re evil,” Quinn bit out as he turned his head so that he could glare at the little brat that decided that sitting on the floor next to the couch was the best place for her to work instead of on the bed.

“Because I’m making it easier for you to protect me?” she asked, continuing to type away while he lay there, glaring at the back of her head.

“By annoying the hell out of me?” Quinn demanded, deciding that he’d had enough for one night and turned his head, refusing to play this game.

“Is that what I’m doing?” Bailey asked, trying to sound innocent.

“You know damn well what you’re doing,” he bit out as he lay there, thinking about that moment when Bailey got her hand on the ax and-

He decided to think about something else.

“Do I?” Bailey asked as the little brat gave up her spot on the floor and decided to climb onto his back.

“Comfortable?” Quinn drawled as she shifted to get comfortable on his back.

“This will do,” Bailey murmured with a snuffle and another wiggle.

“God, you’re fucking evil,” he said, burying his face in his pillow as he waited for her to grow bored and move on.

“Which is why you should bring me home to save yourself,” Bailey said with a forlorn sigh as though making his life a living hell somehow pained

her.

“Not fucking happening,” Quinn said firmly.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Absolutely.”



“Is something wrong?” came the pleasantly murmured question that had Quinn’s hands pausing mid-rub down his face so that he could glare at the little brat that kept him up all night by explaining in minute-fucking-detail all the ways season eight of *Game of Thrones* had let her down.

He just...

God, he couldn’t fucking take it anymore.

When she wasn’t talking his ear off, she was fucking with his head, watching him from across the room, taking in his every move as she sat there quietly, looking thoughtful and it was fucking disturbing. He’d been through some of the most difficult military training in the world run by men who took a great deal of pleasure in breaking men and women until they fucking begged for mercy, but none of them, not one fucking one of them, had ever left him feeling this unnerved before.

She just...

There were no words to describe the small woman that was fucking with his head. He honestly didn’t know how her brother put up with her, but he had a feeling that Nathan struggled not to spank her ass. She-

“So, I was thinking,” Bailey said with a heartfelt sigh that had his eyes narrowing on her as he watched her climb off the bed and forced himself to stay where he was as she made her way towards him.

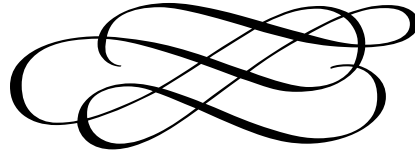
“That you were evil?” Quinn bit out, only to end up biting back a grunt of pain when the little brat dropped down on his lap like it was the most natural thing in the world, something that she’d been doing more and more lately.

“I honestly don’t know why you’re so cranky,” Bailey said with a satisfied sigh as she settled more comfortably on his lap.

“You’ve kept me up for two nights straight,” Quinn bit out even as he

wrapped his arm around her, and Christ, it felt so fucking good to hold her. It was something that he could easily see himself becoming addicted to her, which was a problem because she was the last goddamn woman that he should need this fucking much.

CHAPTER 18



Haven Technologies' Building Florida Two Days Later

“It’s good to be back,” Bailey said with a satisfied sigh as she stepped through the front doors of Haven Technologies and couldn’t help but notice that Quinn was still glaring at her.

She should be concerned about that, mostly because he’d been doing it for two days straight, but in her defense, he really hadn’t left her with much of a choice. She needed to work and as much as she appreciated the fact that he’d finally let her get her greedy little hands on some technology a few days ago, it just wasn’t the same. She needed access to her files and since he’d absolutely refused to let her so much as check her email, she hadn’t been left with any other choice but to break him.

Granted, it had taken longer than she’d expected, but that was fine because they were here now. God, she couldn’t wait to get her hands back on her computer. Her fingers twitched with the need to start working, she-

Found herself wondering when Pam had turned into an insanely large man packed with muscle. Swallowing hard, Bailey looked up into cold gray eyes and found herself swallowing hard as she mumbled, “Please don’t bury me alive.”

“This is Jakob. He’s in charge of Haven Technologies’ security,” Quinn said as the large man in question handed him a folder.

“I thought that was your job,” Bailey mumbled softly, forcing a warm

smile as she did her best not to startle the rather angry-looking man glaring down at her.

“My job is to protect you,” Quinn said as he frowned down at whatever it was that he was reading. Normally, she’d be curious about that, but she decided that it would be for the best if she focused on one problem at a time, like not making any sudden movements.

“I come in peace,” she said, nodding solemnly, only to stop doing that when Jakob narrowed his eyes on her.

Oh, God, she was going to die...

“I’d like to point out that you’re not doing a very good job,” Bailey pointed out, only to frown when Jakob bit out, “Why did you make it difficult to get past the castle on level ten?”

“That was his idea,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly as the man who’d betrayed her stepped out of the elevator only to immediately swallow hard and throw her a panicked look when Jakob swung that glare on him.

“I told him not to do it, but he wouldn’t listen to me,” Bailey said with a shuddering sigh that had her brother muttering, “Oh, this isn’t going to end well,” when Jakob continued to glare.

Assured that she was safe for the moment, Bailey shifted her attention back to Quinn and asked, “Where’s Pam?”

“Fired,” he mumbled absently as she stood there, sure that she’d misheard him.

“I didn’t approve that,” Bailey pointed out.

“I didn’t need your approval,” Quinn said right around the time that she decided that it was time that they got a few things straight.



“What the hell are you doing?” Quinn found himself asking as he looked down at the small tan hand clamped down around his wrist in what she probably thought was a death grip, to the woman in question as she continued pressing random numbers into the elevator keypad that he had installed while they were gone.

“Being considerate by taking you somewhere private so that you don’t have to worry about crying in front of your friend,” Bailey grumbled, only to glare accusingly down at the keypad.

“That’s very considerate of you,” Quinn said, feeling his lips twitch as he reached over and gently brushed her hand away so that he could type in his security code.

That was met with another grumble, a glare, and something muttered about “stupid keypads” before the elevator doors unlocked and she was able to shove them open. That was followed by her sending him a warning glare as he was dragged, well, more like awkwardly jostled and glared at until he took pity on the woman determined to drive him crazy and joined her in the elevator. Once she had him where she wanted him, Bailey released her hold on him, sent him one last glare, and then focused all of her attention on the security keypad stopping her from going to the third floor.

After Bailey accepted the fact that she wouldn’t be able to access the third floor without a code, and she seemed really fucking determined not to ask him for that code, she settled on pressing the button for the second floor only to remember that she needed to shut the gate first. With an angry grumble, Bailey shoved the gate closed, hit the button for the second floor, and-

“Start talking,” Bailey demanded as she turned around to level the cutest fucking glare on him as she folded her arms over her chest in a move that she probably thought would intimidate him.

“I suppose now is a good time to go over the rules,” Quinn said, folding his arms over his chest and just for the hell of it, flexed his biceps. He noted the way that her eyes narrowed on the move, the insanely adorable grumble that followed, and just barely managed to bite back a smile that he knew that she wouldn’t appreciate at the moment.

“There was no mention of rules,” Bailey bit out between clenched teeth as she narrowed her eyes on him.

“Which is why I’m mentioning them now,” Quinn drawled as he reached over and pushed the gate open. He’d planned on waiting until she had a chance to settle in for the night, hoping that being home would be enough to help the woman who’d spent the last three weeks driving him crazy to settle down, only to decide that it would probably be better for everyone involved if they got this over with now.

“And what are these rules that you believe I’ll follow?” Bailey demanded as he headed towards her office, knowing the stubborn woman would follow.

“There’s not that many. First rule-” Quinn began, only to curse and quickly turn around when he heard the magical words that would most likely haunt him for the rest of his life.

“Ooooh, coffee!”

Shit!

“Oh, come on!” came the grumble a minute later after he finally managed to wrestle the cup of coffee that someone left on the kitchen counter from her hands and threw her over his shoulder.

“First rule,” Quinn picked up right where he left off as he continued heading towards her office, “you don’t go anywhere without me.”

“And if I don’t agree to that rule?” Bailey demanded as he carried her into her office and closed the door behind them.

“It’s not up for discussion,” Quinn said as he set her down on her desk and shifted his attention to the report that his men left for him.

“We’ll come back to that later,” Bailey said, shifting to get more comfortable on the desk. “What else?”

“No one enters the building without approval,” he murmured absently as he ran through the report, noting everything that had been completed while they’d been gone and what still needed attention.

“And whose approval would that be?” Bailey asked, sounding more curious than anything.

“Mine,” Quinn said, not bothering to look up as he made several notes of his own and added another work order for a second camera in the stairwell outside her door.

“I see…” came the softly murmured response. “Anything else?”

“That should be enough,” he said, making one last note before shifting his focus to the small woman watching him with a determined look in her eye that had him biting back a sigh, knowing what was about to come.

“Then, I guess it’s time that we went over my rules,” Bailey said with a firm nod as she climbed off the desk and made her way around it, where she dropped down in her chair with a satisfied sigh.

“And what would those be?” Quinn asked as he sat down on the leather couch that took up most of the small office.

“First off, I don’t need a bodyguard, so I see no reason why I can’t come and go as I please. Secondly, I have the final say in who gets access to my building,” Bailey began, punctuating every rule with a firm nod.

“I’m assuming that there’s a third rule,” he drawled, waiting for her to

finish so that they could finally come to an understanding. It was his job to protect her and he wasn't going to allow anyone to get in the way of doing his job.

Not even her.

"Yes, yes, there is," Bailey said, clearing her throat with a firm nod as she folded her hands on the desk and did her best to stare him down.

"And that is..."

"Pam isn't fired," she said, following that up with another firm nod.

"She has no business working in security," Quinn said, watching as she reached up to rub the bridge of her nose as she did her best to hide her wince.

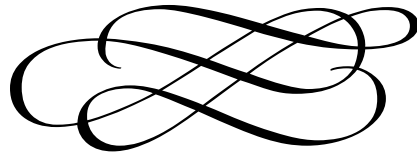
"I had no complaints," Bailey managed to get out with a straight face.

"And your head?" he asked with a pointed look at the small cut on her forehead that was probably going to leave a scar.

"Will teach me to duck faster?"

"True," Quinn murmured, getting up and headed for the door, deciding to make sure that his team didn't miss anything as he added, "Which is why I hired her back as your personal assistant."

CHAPTER 19



“I would once again like to thank you for this opportunity,” Pam said with a hopeful smile while Bailey sat there, trying to figure out how this happened.

One minute, she was ensuring that Quinn understood that she would not be intimidated, and the next...

“I’d also like to take this opportunity to apologize for your head,” Pam said with a nod as she shifted in her seat while she continued to hug the notebook and pen that she’d showed up with ten minutes ago against her chest as she sat there waiting for Bailey to say something.

“Did Quinn happen to tell you what your new duties were?” Bailey asked, deciding that was the best place to start since she had no idea what a personal assistant did.

She’d never had one before, never really needed one and...

She really wasn’t sure that this was a good idea.

Clearing her throat, Pam said, “I’m not supposed to get coffee,” with a firm nod, making Bailey frown.

“But-”

“I’m not supposed to get you coffee, soda, energy drinks, or anything with caffeine listed as an ingredient,” Pam said, making Bailey narrow her eyes as she considered the woman sitting across from her as she quickly tried to find a loophole in the orders that Quinn apparently drilled into her new assistant’s head.

“What if-” Bailey began only to grumble when Pam cut her off with, “I’m immediately to inform Quinn.”

“I see,” Bailey murmured as she found herself watching the man who had

gone too far as he made his way around the floor, checking cameras, locks, and whatever else he did while she sat there, realizing that he'd won this round.

Or had he...

She opened her mouth only to close it with a grumble when Pam added, "I'm also supposed to tell him when you leave the building."

"What if I go upstairs?" Bailey asked, deciding to find out just how tight he had her leash.

"He'll know," Pam said with another nod.

"And if I go downstairs?"

"He'll know that, too," Pam said, making Bailey frown as she shifted her attention to the trio standing in her doorway, enjoying what appeared to be extra-large iced coffees that she would give anything to get her hands on.

"He really seems to be obsessed with you," Jill pointed out.

"He really does," Jamie said, nodding in agreement while Kelly stood there, shaking her head sadly before adding, "I've always suspected that."

"Did you get me an iced coffee?" Bailey asked, sounding really hopeful even to her own ears.

"We did," Jill said, nodding. "We really did, but that man," and this is where she paused to take another sip and point a damning finger in Quinn's direction, "confiscated it."

"Of course, he did," Bailey murmured, rubbing her temples as she felt another headache coming on, only to stop when Pam said, "I'm also supposed to tell him if your head starts hurting again."

"It's fine," Bailey lied, only to narrow her eyes on her new assistant when she said, "He said you'd say that," as she pulled her phone out of her pocket and typed something.

Frowning, Bailey's gaze flickered from the woman who really seemed to take her job seriously to the man who was really starting to stress her out to find him stopping whatever he was doing to pull his phone out and-

"He looks really pissed," Jamie said conversationally.

"This probably isn't going to end well for you," Kelly pointed out, not really sounding all that concerned while Bailey sat there struggling not to panic, but it was kind of difficult with the large man that was making her life difficult coming her way.

Damn it!

Swallowing hard, Bailey held her hand out to Pam. "Give me your

phone.”

“But I’m not supposed to-”

“Don’t worry. He’ll never know,” Bailey said as she quickly climbed onto her desk, reached over and snatched the phone out of Pam’s hand and quickly sent Quinn a text message telling him that it was just a false alarm as she watched him, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she waited for him to read it.

“I can’t believe he gave up that easily,” Jill said, shaking her head in disgust as they watched Quinn slide his phone back into his pocket as he returned to whatever it was that he was doing.

“It’s shameful, really,” Jamie murmured while Bailey climbed off her desk and handed Pam her phone back.

“You deserve better,” Kelly said, shaking her head in disgust as Jill murmured in agreement, all three of them sending hopeful looks Quinn’s way as Bailey decided that she’d had enough for one day.



“Don’t,” Nathan said, pinching the bridge of his nose while Quinn stood there, wondering what the hell she was doing.

“She’s been in there for two hours,” Quinn pointed out, hating the way that she made him feel.

Fucking helpless.

He’d never felt like this before and he fucking hated it. She was just a job, another paycheck that he needed to protect, but no matter how many times he told himself that...

She was just a job.

“What is she doing in there?” Quinn asked, clenching his jaw as he stood there, waiting for the supply closet door to finally open so that he could see with his own goddamn eyes that she was fine.

“Honestly?” Nathan said, sighing heavily as he dropped his hand away. “I have no fucking clue. The only thing that I know is that she wants to be left alone.”

“I figured that one out on my own,” Quinn drawled.

“She used to hide in the pantry. At first, we didn’t know what to make of it. Mom would tell us to just leave her be, but Dad would lose his fucking mind until one day, he couldn’t take it anymore and decided to go into the pantry and find out what was wrong. Whatever she said to him had him quietly stepping out of the pantry, closing the door behind him and telling us that she was fine. We probably would have believed him if he hadn’t installed a lock on the pantry door the next day so that she could lock herself inside,” Nathan explained with a shrug.

Well, that explained why there was a lock on the other side of that door, Quinn thought, only to frown when the woman that he still couldn’t place said, “She used to sleep in the closet.”

At Quinn’s questioning look, the incredibly beautiful redhead released a long-suffering sigh as she said, “I can’t believe that you don’t remember me.”

“Should I?” Quinn asked, his gaze returning to that locked door as he considered breaking it down, needing to make sure that she was okay and- God, he was fucking pathetic.

Any other job and he would shrug it off, thankful for the small reprieve, but with Bailey...

She was driving him crazy.

“You used to glare at me whenever I came within twenty feet of Bailey,” came the softly murmured words that had him going still.

Sure that he’d misheard her, Quinn glanced back at the woman that looked so fucking familiar and-

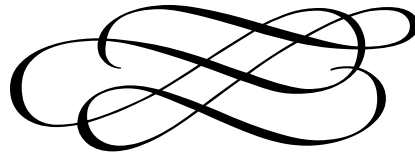
“Kelly,” he said, taking in the red hair that looked darker now, the bright blue eyes that used to watch Bailey’s every move, the perfect lips that used to torment Bailey and-

“I would really appreciate it if you didn’t kill me,” the woman who used to make Bailey’s life a living hell said, nodding solemnly.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Quinn demanded, knowing that there was no way in hell that Bailey would willingly hire the woman clearing her throat awkwardly, her panicked gaze never leaving his as she reached over and grabbed Nathan by the arm and yanked him in front of her with a weakly mumbled, “Really hoping that you don’t kill me.”

Deciding that he’d had enough for one day, Quinn headed for the door, deciding that it was time to get some answers.

CHAPTER 20



“I ’m fine,” Bailey said, slowly exhaling as she continued staring down at her laptop when she heard the telltale click of the storage door lock opening.

When she didn’t hear anything else, she looked up from her computer and-

Wow, did he look pissed, Bailey thought, swallowing hard as she glanced from the large man taking a knee in front of her to the closed storage door behind him and couldn’t help but wonder if this was going to end with Nathan being forced to identify her body later. Swallowing hard, she shifted her attention back to Quinn and was actually impressed by his ability to take that terrifying glare to the next level.

“Are you out of your fucking mind?” Quinn bit out between clenched teeth as she sat there, wondering how she should answer that.

“Possibly?” Bailey asked with a hopeful smile that she really hoped would appease the clearly pissed-off man in front of her.

“Tell me that you really didn’t hire the woman that made your life a living hell,” Quinn said evenly while she sat there, frowning in confusion.

“Kelly,” he said when it became clear that she had no idea what he was talking about.

“What about her?” Bailey asked, frowning as she watched Quinn reach over and slowly closed her laptop, his glare never leaving hers as he took it off her lap and set it aside.

“Tell me that you really didn’t hire her,” he bit out.

Blinking at the very large and clearly very angry man in front of her, she said, “Okay?”

Closing his eyes with a heavy sigh, Quinn reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose as he said, “What the hell were you thinking?”

“That everyone deserves a second chance?” Bailey said, hoping that would be enough to save her.

Dropping his hand away, he said, “She made your life a living hell, Bailey.”

“She was a kid,” Bailey said with a helpless shrug, having no idea how else to explain it.

“It doesn’t take away from the fact that she made your life a living hell,” Quinn said as he reached over and cupped her face in his hand, startling her. “God, you’re too fucking kind,” he said softly as he caressed her cheek.

Before she could respond, he was dropping his hand away and rubbing the back of his neck as he stood up and paced the small room. For a moment, all she could do was sit there and watch him as she found herself thinking about just how much she liked the way he touched her and-

She was clearly losing her mind.

“You don’t know what it was like in that house, Quinn,” Bailey said as she pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around her legs.

“I know that she made it worse,” he said, sighing heavily as he finally stopped pacing and leaned back against the door.

“Yes, she did,” she admitted because there was no denying that Kelly and her friends had made her life a living hell, but...

“She deserved a second chance,” Bailey said, not sure that she would ever be able to explain this.

“When I was coming down here, I wrote a letter to my social worker’s boss, letting him know what was happening in that house. I kept that letter in my bag for a year because I was terrified that they’d be able to track me down if I sent it. That was an entire year that she was stuck in that house with no one to help her, Quinn. It wasn’t until after my adoption was finalized that I felt safe sending that letter.”

“You were a child, Bailey,” Quinn pointed out with a sympathetic look that had her nodding.

“So was she,” Bailey said, sighing heavily as she propped her chin on her knees. “I had plenty of chances to say something. When my parents contacted social services to get answers and start the process, everyone from my new case manager to the police asked me why I ran away and the only thing that I could tell them was that I didn’t want to go back. I should have told them

what was going on in that house and protected her, but I was too afraid to say anything, and because of me, they didn't have a reason to take a closer look."

"She could have done the same thing, Bailey. She was sixteen years old. She should have been looking out for you instead of making your life a living hell," Quinn said, sighing as he dropped his head back against the door.

"Yes, she could have, you're right, but she would have been risking being placed in a house that was even worse," Bailey said, knowing that he would never understand. She grew up in foster care and while most of the parents were really good people trying to help, some of them weren't.

"I wish you had told me, Bailey," Quinn said quietly.

"There's nothing that you could have done," she said, shrugging it off, knowing how useless it was to wonder about all the "what ifs." She'd spent a long time being angry, wishing that things had been different, but in the end, she knew that it was pointless. She-

"I could have saved you."



"Always trying to save me," Bailey murmured with a fond smile.

"Always," Quinn promised as he watched her for another moment, wondering if she had any idea how strong she was. He'd seen full-grown men break under less and here she was, little Bailey coming out on top.

Christ, she floored him.

"How did Kelly come to work for you?" he asked, deciding that a change in topic was needed before he let himself think about all those things that he wished he knew, only to narrow his eyes on the little pain in the ass when she went still.

"I would rather not tell you that," she said, clearing her throat uncomfortably as she shifted, cleared her throat again, and gave him a hopeful smile.

Closing his eyes, Quinn said, "You're going to drive me to drink."

"I've heard that before," came the response that had him opening his eyes to find her still giving him that hopeful smile.

“Start talking.”

Nodding, Bailey said, “I suppose I can do that.” Clearing her throat, she opened her mouth and-

“She broke into our office!” Nathan supplied, making his sister grumble as she pushed to her feet, stormed over to the door, and after she gestured for him to move out of the way, she threw the door open and-

“I was being helpful!” came the outraged response as Quinn watched Bailey try to take her brother down with a headlock.

God, this was just fucking sad, Quinn thought as he reached over and plucked the small woman that couldn’t seem to get the basics of a headlock down off her brother and threw her over his shoulder. Ignoring her squirms and demands to be released so that she could finish kicking her brother’s ass, Quinn looked at Nathan for answers.

“You were saying?” Quinn asked, wondering why she was making his life difficult.

“In my defense, it was two o’clock in the morning and there was a thunderstorm going on,” Kelly said, only to follow that up with a wince as she added, “I don’t think that helped.”

“Probably not,” Quinn murmured in agreement as he glanced back at Nathan expectantly.

“She saw my picture in a magazine and came to apologize,” Bailey said, sighing heavily only to add, “I’m ready to get down now.”

“Are you going to try to kick your brother’s ass again?”

“Maybe,” came the answer that had his lips twitching.

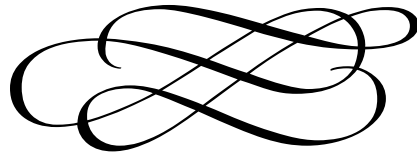
“I’m gonna need you to just go ahead and throw her back in the storage room,” Nathan said, nodding.

“So that you can keep running your big mouth?” Bailey snapped.

“Yes!” her brother snapped back.

“Snitches get stitches,” Bailey bit out, making Quinn sigh heavily because this honestly couldn’t get any sadder.

CHAPTER 21



“**Y**ou brought this on yourself,” Bailey said with a firm nod and a glare that the large man who kept manhandling her had absolutely no chance of seeing with her being thrown over his shoulder and all.

“Start talking,” Quinn said, not really sounding all that concerned that she was using her good glare as he carried her into the elevator. He kept his hold around her legs as he closed the gate and typed in the code for the third floor, which reminded her...

“I’m going to be needing that code,” she said, clearing her throat as she shifted over his shoulder and went back to glaring at his back.

“And I’m going to need you to tell me why you didn’t tell me about Kelly,” Quinn drawled as she found herself wincing.

“Because it wasn’t relevant?” Bailey said, really hoping that he would drop this so that they could move on.

She heard the gate slide open seconds before he was carrying her into her apartment. “You didn’t think that it was relevant that the woman that used to make your life a living hell was working for you?”

Sighing heavily against his back, Bailey said, “It’s not her.”

“And you know this how?” Quinn asked as he dropped her down on the couch.

“Because I’m psychic?” Bailey said as Quinn sat down on the coffee table so that he could glare at her.

Seeming to think that over, he nodded slowly as he watched her closely. “And the reason that her last name was changed in the employee file?”

“Because she changed her name after she ran away from foster care,”

Bailey said as she slowly exhaled, nodded, and managed to pull off the glare that no doubt had him regretting all that manhandling.

There was a heavy sigh, and then Quinn said, “You really can’t pull that off.”

“And yet, you’re sitting there struggling to stop trembling in fear,” Bailey said with a firm nod as she folded her arms over her chest, careful not to do anything that would cause her glare to weaken.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m doing,” Quinn said dryly, only to sigh heavily as he rubbed his hands roughly down his face while she doubled down on that glare.

Once he dropped his hands away, Bailey decided that this was a good time to revisit their earlier discussion. With that in mind, she said, “I don’t need an assistant,” deciding that was the best place to start.

“You’re probably right,” Quinn murmured in agreement as she slowly nodded only to go still when he added, “And Pam?”

“Can go back into security?” Bailey asked with a hopeful smile as she tried to figure out what she was going to do about Pam.

“Never going to happen,” he bit out as she found herself wondering if Pam would be a good fit at the receptionist desk.

Probably not, mostly because Andrea didn’t like anyone else going near her desk. That left...

“Fine. She can work as my assistant, but she follows my rules, not yours,” Bailey mumbled reluctantly, hoping that she could at least make this work in her favor.

Slowly nodding and giving her hope, Quinn said, “That’s never going to happen.”

“Why is that exactly?” Bailey asked as that dull pain that she’d been trying to ignore all afternoon took it up a notch and left her struggling to bite back a wince as pain shot through her temple.

“Because I won’t be able to protect you if you get your hands on caffeine again and decide to go play in traffic,” Quinn said, only to curse as he stood up and made his way to the kitchen.

“It was one time,” Bailey pointed out as she began rubbing her temples, hoping that it would be enough to make it stop.

“It was enough,” Quinn murmured quietly as he sat back down on the coffee table with the bottle of water and her painkillers that left her grumbling pathetically as she allowed herself to slump over onto her side

while she did her best to look pathetic, hoping beyond hope that it would be enough to get him to take pity on her.

“I’m fine,” Bailey said as she turned her head so that she could bury her face in the throw pillow as she tried to breathe through the pain.

“Yeah, you look it,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as she heard him place the pills on the coffee table before he was rolling her onto her back.

“We can talk about this,” Bailey mumbled weakly as she watched Quinn reach for the pills.

“Which part?” Quinn murmured, sounding thoughtful as he opened the bottle and dumped a pill in his hand.

“All of it?” Bailey said, going for a hopeful smile, only to decide against it when the move sent a fresh wave of pain through her head.

“Why don’t we talk about it later after you wake up?” Quinn suggested as he placed the pill against her lips.

She opened her mouth to argue, only to end up taking the pill into her mouth and swallowing it dry when the pain shooting through her head intensified, leaving her with no choice but to close her eyes and hope for the best.



“Want to tell me why you thought hiring Kelly was a good idea?” Quinn asked as he stood there, pinching the bridge of his nose and wondered where he went wrong.

“It wasn’t my idea,” Nathan said as Quinn dropped his hand away with a heavy sigh when the little pain in the ass asked, “Why won’t anyone save me?” with a sniffle.

“We did,” Nathan assured the small woman sprawled out on her stomach beneath the kitchen table where she ended up after she’d escaped from the couch where she’d claimed the blanket that she’d curled up with after the pill hit, kidnapped her.

“Why are you lying to me?” came the sadly mumbled words that was quickly followed by a whispered, “Oh, no,” as Quinn reached down and

grabbed hold of her ankles and pulled the little pain in the ass that managed to get her hands on a Coke when he made the mistake of believing that she'd fallen asleep, out from beneath the table.

"Let's get you back to bed," Quinn said as he released her ankles and picked her up so that he could throw her over his shoulder.

"I don't wanna," Bailey mumbled sadly against his back as he carried her to her room and laid her down on her bed.

"Did she tell you that Kelly and her friends used to make her life a living hell?" Quinn asked as he stood up and leveled a glare on the man who should have done a better job keeping his sister safe.

"I have a feeling that she left a lot of it out," Nathan said, sighing heavily as he reached up to rub the back of his neck only to narrow his eyes on the little brat when she muttered, "I really did," against the mattress.

"I don't think Kelly's behind this," Nathan said as they watched Bailey burrow beneath the blankets.

"Why's that?" Quinn drawled as he was forced to pull the covers aside and grab hold of Bailey before she managed to roll off the bed.

"I just don't see her doing it," Nathan said, shrugging it off as he reached across the bed, grabbed hold of his sister, and helped pull her back to the middle of the bed.

"Are you willing to bet your sister's life on that?" Quinn asked as his gaze flickered to Nathan before returning to the small woman curling up into the fetal position.

"No, I'm not," Nathan said, sighing heavily.

"I had my men start running background checks on every employee here while I was gone," Quinn said, curious to see what his men were going to be able to find out about Kelly.

"When will you hear back?" Nathan asked as he reached down and tucked Bailey in.

"They're already starting to come back in," Quinn said as he thought about everything that his men had found out so far.

"Anything I need to know?" Nathan asked as Bailey grabbed hold of the blankets and yanked them over her head.

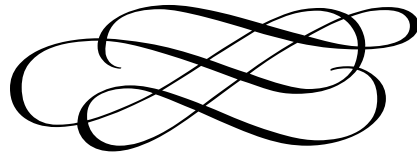
"Nothing so far," Quinn said as they watched Bailey roll over onto her stomach and-

"We can see you," Nathan said, sighing heavily as he reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose while Quinn watched Bailey suddenly go still mid-

wiggle at the bottom of the bed where she was currently trying to make her escape.

That was followed by a mumbled, “No, you can’t,” and Quinn resigning himself to the long night ahead.

CHAPTER 22



“He seems unreasonably mad,” Kelly pointed out and Bailey couldn’t help but agree as they sat there, enjoying a selection of potato chips and popcorn while they watched Quinn reach up and grab hold of the bar that he’d installed in his doorway and pulled himself up, all those tanned muscles in his chest and arms moving in unison as his glare, which was starting to concern her at this point, never wavered.

“He really does,” Jess murmured in agreement as she stole the bowl of Doritos from Nathan.

“I still don’t understand why we’re sitting here staring at him?” Nathan asked, stealing the bowl back as he propped his feet up on the coffee table with a sigh.

“We’re here for emotional support,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly as she reached over to steal Nathan’s Coke only to grumble and pull her hand back when Quinn narrowed his eyes on the move.

“You’re supposed to be at a meeting right now,” Pam mumbled absently around a handful of popcorn while she continued to familiarize herself with Bailey’s schedule.

“We’re at it right now,” Bailey said, gesturing with a chip in Quinn’s direction.

“You scheduled a meeting to watch your bodyguard workout?” Nathan asked, throwing her a questioning look.

“How else was I supposed to ensure that I was there to give him the emotional support that he needs?” Bailey asked, blinking at her brother, deciding not to mention that she’d scheduled this meeting every day when

she realized a few days ago that Quinn always worked out at this time with his shirt off.

Frowning, Nathan asked, "Then, why did you add me to this meeting?"

"Because I wanted to ensure that you knew that I still wasn't talking to you. This way," Bailey said, gesturing absently here, there, and everywhere, "I can do both."

"You're talking to me now," Nathan pointed out.

"Am I, though?" Bailey asked with a pitying look that had him grumbling something unintelligible as he shoved a chip in his mouth and joined Quinn in glaring at her.

Now that, that was settled, Bailey settled more comfortably on her couch and-

"Should I remind you now about your date tomorrow night or wait until tomorrow morning?" came the question that had Bailey frowning as she glanced over at Pam to find the other woman worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she stared down at the iPad in her hand.

"I don't have a date tomorrow night," Bailey said, biting back a sigh as she reached for the iPad so that she could go over her schedule with Pam again when Jess's next words stopped her.

"Yes, you do."

"I really don't, though," she said, frowning because she was pretty sure that she'd remember something like that.

"Jonathan Parkins," Kelly said with relish only to mumble, "Please don't kill me," when Quinn shifted that glare back to her, something that Bailey would have appreciated if she wasn't currently panicking.

"Wait. No, I canceled that," Bailey said, reaching over to snatch the iPad out of Pam's hands and cancel it before it was too late.

"Oh, no, you don't," Nathan said, grabbing hold of her before she made it off the couch. "You made a deal!"

"I lied!" she said, trying to squirm out of his arms, but the large bastard kept a firm hold on her.

Swallowing hard, Bailey shifted her focus to Pam and yelled, "Cancel it! For the love of God, cancel it!"

Nodding, Pam focused back on the iPad only to sigh when Jess climbed over them and plucked the iPad out of Pam's hands. "You made a deal," Jess said, shoving one last handful of popcorn in her mouth as she climbed back over them, grabbed her backpack, and headed for the elevator before Bailey

could stop her.

And she really wanted to stop her.

“You don’t understand,” Bailey said, licking her lips nervously as she watched Jess close the gate with a satisfied sigh. “Please don’t do this to me!”

“It’s for your own good,” Nathan said, keeping his hold around her as Jess made her escape with an absently murmured, “Don’t worry. I’ll confirm your date for you.”

“Does my safety mean nothing to you? Someone is out to get me, damn it!” Bailey reminded him, not that she really believed it, but...

God, she’d say anything at this point if it saved her from spending an evening with Jonathan Parkins. Absolutely anything, Bailey thought, struggling not to panic as she glanced at her only hope to find Quinn still doing chin-ups as he glared straight ahead, a muscle in his jaw ticking as she resigned herself to doing the unthinkable.

“Ow! You little brat!” Nathan snapped, but he didn’t let go.

Damn it!

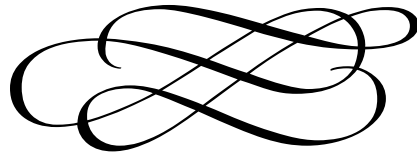
For a moment, she considered pinching him again, but...

“I’ll give you a raise if you go get that baseball bat,” Bailey said, shifting her focus back to Pam to find her personal assistant worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she pointed towards Quinn.

“H-He confiscated my bat.”

Of course he did, Bailey thought, closing her eyes in defeat as she resigned herself to going out with the jerk that broke her heart.

CHAPTER 23



It was none of his fucking business, Quinn told himself as he stood there, watching Bailey from across the large room as she slumped over onto the couch with a forlorn sigh and-

“You don’t have to watch over me all the time,” Bailey mumbled sadly as she continued staring at the wall.

“Yes, I do,” Quinn murmured quietly as he leaned back against the wall, his gaze quickly flickering around the loft to make sure that everything was as it should be before focusing back on the woman who looked absolutely fucking miserable.

“I’m fine,” she said, shifting to get more comfortable while Quinn stood there, wishing like hell that he could see her as just another job.

He should do one last check to make sure that everything was secure before calling it a night, but...

“Who is Jonathan Parkins?” he found himself asking, crossing yet another line.

“The jerk-face that used to be my best friend,” Bailey mumbled.

“What happened?” Quinn asked, pushing away from the wall and made his way around the large loft apartment, checking to make sure that everything was secure before turning in for the night and-

“He stole my baby,” she said, making him go still, that is, until she followed that up with a sadly mumbled, “That was my video game.”

“Of course, he did,” Quinn murmured quietly, feeling his lips twitch as he checked the windows while he made his way to the couch and dropped down on the oversized chair where he waited for the small woman releasing

heartfelt sighs to continue. When she didn't say anything else, he asked, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Will you let me have a Coke if I do?" Bailey countered with a hopeful look that had him narrowing his eyes on her.

"It's easier to share my pain when I have caffeine," she mumbled sadly, making sure to add a sniffle at the end there.

"That depends," Quinn murmured, shifting to get more comfortable.

"On what?" Bailey asked, looking really fucking hopeful as she sat up.

"On whether or not your story moves me to tears," he said dryly as he gestured for her to get on with it.

Her eyes narrowed on him as she thought it over. After a moment, Bailey said, "Don't play with my emotions, Quinn."

"You don't trust me?" he asked, biting back a smile when she folded her arms over her chest and continued glaring at him.

"Not after you banned me from the office and stole the remote so that I couldn't binge-watch serial killer documentaries so that I could pout," Bailey said with a sniffle.

"You really didn't leave me with much of a choice," Quinn murmured as his gaze shifted back to her beautiful blue eyes and noted the strain still there. "Is your head still hurting?" he asked, already getting up to grab the pills off the kitchen island and a bottle of water from the fridge.

"It's fine," she said, lying her adorable ass off.

"Here," he said, handing her the pills and a bottle of water before reclaiming his seat.

"Thank you," Bailey grumbled with another sniffle as she reluctantly took the pills. "Now," she said, clearing her throat when she was done, "where were we?"

"You were entralling me with your tale of woe," he reminded her, leaning back in his chair as he watched her.

Shifting, Bailey said, "Right," with a firm nod as her pout turned determined. "Get ready to grab that box of tissues."

"I'm ready," Quinn assured her with a solemn nod that had her lips twitching.

"Once upon a time," she began only to smile when he murmured, "Now, I know that this will be heartbreaking."

"It will be," Bailey assured him before adding, "Brace yourself."

"Consider me braced," Quinn murmured.

“Once upon a time, back when I was sixteen, I met this boy in detention and-”

“Why am I not surprised?” he said dryly at the mention of detention.

“I was a miscreant,” Bailey admitted with a solemn nod.

“I’m sure that you were a terror,” Quinn drawled, already having a pretty good idea of how she landed in detention.

“I really was,” she said with a sad shake of her head and a heartfelt sigh.

“You were reading in class, weren’t you?” he asked, remembering all those times he’d spotted her sitting in the principal’s office, trying to appear innocent as she kept sneaking peeks at the book she had hidden in her backpack.

“I might have glanced at a book to pass the time,” Bailey hedged, clearing her throat before moving on. “Anyway, so there I was one day, enjoying a lovely stint in detention when this boy decided to hack into the school’s computer system and was having a difficult time getting through their firewall. So, being the helpful and considerate person that I am, I helped him break through while we bonded over our love of hacking.”

“That, of course, led to us discovering that we also loved video games. We started hanging out and playing video games, and one thing led to another, and we started working on a video game together. It took us three years, but finally, it was ready. We got a very lovely offer for the game and we decided to accept it, only to find out that he’d accepted another offer, one that set him up with a very lucrative position.”

“And I’m guessing that he forgot to mention your name,” Quinn murmured, wondering why her brother was pushing her to go out on a date with the asshole.

“He really did. He offered me an unpaid internship with the company, one that would allow me the privilege of working on his team and fetching him coffee,” she finished with a helpless shrug.

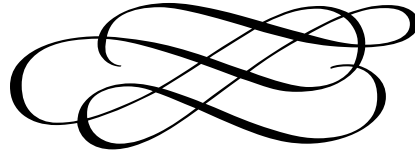
“What did you do?” Quinn asked, watching her as he absently drummed his fingertips against the armrest of his chair while he thought about all the things that he would have done to the asshole if he’d been there.

“Hacked into his computer and destroyed the game,” Bailey said, shrugging it off like it was no big deal.

“How did he take it?” Quinn asked, only to go still at her next words.

“He made my life a living hell.”

CHAPTER 24



“We had a deal,” Bailey felt obligated to point out to the large man who didn’t understand her caffeine needs as he picked her up.

“Your story didn’t move me,” Quinn said dryly as he carried her towards her room.

“Why are you lying to me? I saw the tears in your eyes,” she said, loving the way that his lips twitched.

“As sad as your tale of woe was,” Quinn began.

“And it was sad,” she readily agreed.

“It just didn’t move me into giving you something that would turn my life into a living hell,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as though it truly pained him to deny her a Coke and dropped her on her bed before shifting his focus on making sure that her windows and the backdoor were secured.

“It would be worth it,” Bailey murmured absently as she took in the freshly made bed that she was currently lying on and decided that perhaps having a personal assistant wasn’t a bad idea after all.

“You also didn’t tell me why he was hell-bent on taking you out after you destroyed the game,” Quinn pointed out, double-checking the door before he set the alarm that had been installed while they were away.

“In my defense, I didn’t get a chance to before you started manhandling me again,” Bailey said with a heartfelt sigh as she crawled the rest of the way up the bed and settled on the rather comfortable bed that she had to admit, she didn’t use a lot.

Most nights, she crashed on the small couch in her office, and on those nights that she actually made it to her apartment, she usually didn’t make it

past her living room. She normally put in twenty-hour days, taking naps as needed, grabbing food when she remembered to eat, and ensuring that she took showers first thing in the morning to avoid a repeat of that unfortunate incident after she forgot to take a shower for a week and Nathan decided to take matters into his own hands.

“That probably had something to do with the fact that you fell asleep as soon as you delivered your earth-shattering cliffhanger,” Quinn said dryly, making her frown.

“I didn’t fall asleep,” Bailey said, wondering why he was making things up instead of just admitting that her story moved him deeply.

“And the light snores and grumbles you made when you fell over onto your side?” Quinn asked, throwing her a questioning look as he did one last sweep of her bedroom.

“Those were sound effects to play on your heartstrings before I continued with my tale of woe,” she said, nodding.

“And your demands that I carry you to bed?” he asked, chuckling as he glanced beneath her bed and-

Uh-oh...

Sighed heavily as he pulled the box that she’d put together earlier while he took his shower out from beneath her bed, only to follow that up with another sigh that had her doing her best to appear innocent. She watched as Quinn, who simply looked resigned to his fate in life, glanced from the box that she’d filled with Cokes, energy drinks, and enough junk food to give her the sugar high that would get her through the night, to her.

When he simply picked up the box and carried it out of her room a moment later, she decided to take that as a win even as she lay there, listening intently for anything that would clue her into where he was about to hide it only to grumble a moment later when he walked back into her a room. Resigning herself to an early morning search, Bailey watched as Quinn finished his search before finally walking over to the bed and-

“What are you doing?” she couldn’t help but wonder as she watched him pull off his shirt and toss it on the chair before removing his gun and placing it on the nightstand.

“I don’t trust you,” Quinn said with a firm shake of his head and a resigned sigh as he dropped down on the bed next to her and closed his eyes.

When she could only stare at him, he raised his hand, made a lazy gesture and said, “Finish your story.”

“I will just as soon as you explain why you feel the need to hog my bed over a simple misunderstanding,” Bailey explained, even as she had to admit that this would actually work in her favor. As soon as he fell asleep, she was going to go find that box and if she couldn’t, then she would sneak down to the second floor and help herself to the unlimited supply of junk food that they kept on hand to ensure that they had the energy they needed to work. Then, she would-

“You’ll never make it to the door,” came the announcement that had her pouting.

“You don’t understand, Quinn. I need it to survive,” Bailey said, wondering why he was being so difficult about this.

There was a heavy sigh, and then, “There has to be a support group out there for caffeine addicts.”

“There is, but they kicked me out,” Bailey mumbled absently as she rolled over onto her back, resigned to spending the night without her much-needed caffeine fix.

“Of course they did,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as he shifted on the bed next to her. “Are you going to answer my question?”

“Because I’m irresistible,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head, wondering why she even had to explain it.

“I can see that,” he murmured dryly before asking, “And why is your brother and every Haven employee determined to make you go out with him?”

“Because the jerk-face has a program that would help us with this game that we’re creating. We could probably figure it out, but it will take time, time that we don’t have because we’re set to release the game in less than a year,” Bailey said as she stared up at the ceiling, wishing that they never came up with this idea in the first place.

“How did he find out that you needed it?” Quinn asked as she rolled back over onto her side to face him.

“Because we realized that we were stuck, so Nathan tried to negotiate a trade with him, only the bastard didn’t want the program that we offered in exchange, he wanted a date with me instead,” Bailey said with a shrug.

“I’m assuming that there’s another reason besides you being irresistible, of course,” Quinn said, making her lips twitch.

“It should be enough,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly.

“It really should,” he murmured in agreement, making her smile.

“I’m sure groveling and humiliation will be part of it,” she said, really wishing that she could get out of it, but...

They really needed that program.

“That sounds like a fun night.”

“Doesn’t it?” Bailey asked with a sleepy mumble as she closed her eyes, only to feel her breath catch a moment later when she felt Quinn’s fingertips gently trace her jaw.

“There’s another possibility,” he murmured as she felt his fingertips trace a path down her throat.

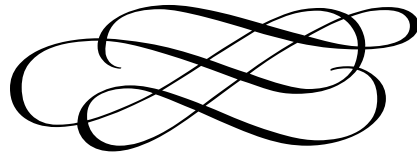
“What’s that?” Bailey asked, swallowing hard as she opened her eyes to find him watching her as he traced a path back up to her jaw and turned his hand so that he was cupping her face.

“He wants you,” Quinn said softly as his thumb caressed her cheek while she watched him lean in as his gaze flickered to her lips and-

Kissed her forehead.

“Goodnight, Bailey,” Quinn murmured against her skin before he dropped his hand away and climbed off her bed, grabbing his gun off the nightstand and made his way to her bedroom door, leaving her lying there, wondering why it was so hard watching him go.

CHAPTER 25



“I think I’m dying,” came the mumbled response to Nathan’s demands to open the door, followed by the saddest fucking snuffle that Quinn had ever heard while he stood there, pinching the bridge of his nose, wondering what the hell he was doing here.

“Open. The. Door,” Nathan, who’d been trying unsuccessfully to convince his sister to open the door for the past hour, bit out as he continued to glare at the locked bathroom door in a way that didn’t bode well for his sister’s ass.

“I would, I really would, but with the dying and all, I don’t believe that I’ll be able to find the strength to cross the room and do that. I think it would be for the best if I conserved my strength,” Bailey said as Quinn stood there, telling himself that he should just let Jakob go with her tonight, but...

He didn’t trust anyone else to look after her.

“And I think it would be for the best if you opened the door before I was forced to break it down and spank your ass,” Nathan bit out.

There was a slight pause, and then, “Do what you must.”

Taking a deep breath, Nathan said, “You made a deal, Bailey.”

“Are you seriously okay with whoring out your favorite sister for a program?” came the reply that had Quinn slowly exhaling as he reminded himself that this was just a job.

“When it was your idea, yes!”

There was a gasp of outrage, and then, the bathroom door was thrown open and the small woman who was making his job more difficult than it needed to be was there, glaring up at her brother as she said, “It was my idea

to kidnap and beat the shit out of him until he gave us what we wanted. It was *your* idea to negotiate with him.”

“Because we need that program,” Nathan bit out. “If we don’t get it, we will lose a shit load of money, violate our contracts, and have to lay off most of our staff, which is why you said yes in the first place, you little pain in the ass!”

Narrowing her eyes up at her brother, Bailey asked, “And if he wants sex?”

“First off, as far as I’m concerned, you’re a virgin and haven’t even so much as held a man’s hand for the sake of my sanity,” Nathan said, glaring right back down at his sister, “And second, the deal only covers you going out with him tonight. He has already been told to keep his fucking hands off you. He just wants a chance to make your life a living hell. That’s it.”

Nodding slowly, Bailey said, “Okay, I’m good with that,” with a satisfied sigh as she made her way to the elevator, only pausing long enough to grab her backpack while Quinn stood there, watching her and-

“God, she really is a pain in the ass,” Nathan said as Quinn reluctantly followed the little brat absently humming to herself, onto the elevator.

“This should be quick,” she murmured absently as she pulled her phone out and-

Started playing online Scrabble, Quinn realized, deciding that he really needed a fucking drink.

“The deal was for four hours,” Nathan said as he joined them, making the little brat frown.

“But-”

“Four hours,” Nathan stressed, only to glare when Bailey opened her mouth to argue.

Clearing her throat, Bailey said, “Four hours is acceptable.”

“Please try not to piss him off,” Nathan said, plucking the phone out of his sister’s hands and changed out the word that she was trying to add.

“Why are you trying to mess with my triple-word score?” she asked, blinking up at her brother.

“Because you suck at this,” Nathan murmured with a sad shake of his head that was quickly followed by a grumble when she saw his score.

“Cheater,” Bailey muttered sadly, only to sigh heavily as she placed her phone back in her pocket just as the elevator came to a stop.

Quinn waited for her to step off the elevator before he moved to follow

her and-

“Keep my sister safe,” Nathan said, stopping him with a look that told him everything that he needed to know.

He didn’t like this any more than Quinn did.



“How much longer are you planning on ignoring me?” Bailey asked the large man standing against the wall behind her as she found herself glancing around the small bar that she’d been waiting at for the past three hours and wondered why she hadn’t considered being stood up as an option.

It made sense in a disturbingly sad way, Bailey thought as she bit back a sigh and popped a fry in her mouth even as she resigned herself to spending another hour waiting here before she could leave. The deal was for four hours, so she was going to stick it out no matter how bored she was, and God, was she bored. He better hand over the program after this, Bailey decided as she glanced over her shoulder to find Quinn standing behind her, that intense gaze of his taking in everything around them and-

He still wasn’t talking to her.

Great, Bailey thought, taking a sip of the watery fruit punch that she’d been forced to order after Nathan made her promise that she would stay away from anything with caffeine tonight to ensure that she didn’t do anything that would risk this deal. Then again, since it didn’t appear as though Jonathan was actually planning on showing up anytime soon...

“Excuse me. Can I get a Coke, please?” Bailey asked a passing waitress.

“Of course,” came the warm reply as the really nice waitress who was about to make this night better made her way back to the bar just as the heavy sigh came from behind her.

A few seconds later, the chair next to her was pulled out and the man who’d been avoiding her as much as any man who watched her every move could, sat down. “Please don’t make me kill you, Bailey.”

“I’m pretty sure that would defeat the purpose of protecting me,” Bailey pointed out as she once again scanned the room and...nothing.

All that worry over nothing, Bailey thought as she murmured, “Thank you,” when the really nice waitress placed a large glass of Coke in front of her, which, of course, was followed by a grumble, a pout, and a glare when Quinn reached over and helped himself to the only thing that was going to make this next hour tolerable.

“Not happening,” Quinn said, taking a sip of her Coke before placing it back down on the table, only to sigh, and move it out of her reach as her greedy eyes followed the move.

“Will you at least tell me why you’ve been ignoring me,” Bailey said as she gestured for their waitress, only to frown when a shirley temple with a bright red umbrella and extra cherries was placed on the table in front of her.

At her questioning look, the waitress said, “With Mr. Parkins’ compliments,” confirming her suspicions that Jonathan was playing with her and making her bite back a sigh as she murmured, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” the waitress said as she quickly made her way back to the bar while Bailey took a sip of the surprisingly delicious drink.

“Looks like he’s not coming,” Quinn murmured, sounding thoughtful.

“Looks like,” Bailey said in agreement before adding, “And it also looks like you’re not going to answer me.”

“There’s nothing to say,” Quinn said, drumming his fingertips against the tabletop as he took in the rest of the bar, looking anywhere but at her. “This is a job and I keep forgetting that.”

“So, we can’t be friends,” Bailey guessed correctly, judging by the way that muscle in his jaw clenched.

“It’s not a good idea,” he said, still not looking at her.

“I see,” she said, taking another sip as she told herself that was fine.

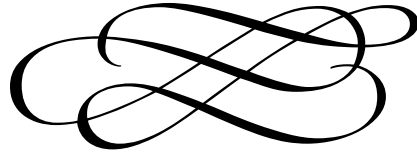
They weren’t friends. Never had been and never would be, and that was fine, more than fine, because she had plenty of friends. She was just a job, one that he’d taken as a favor for one of Nathan’s oldest friends and as soon as he realized that there was no reason for him to be here, he’d move on to the next job, and that was...

Fine.

“Excuse me,” Bailey said, deciding that this was a good time to use the bathroom as she stood up, ignoring Quinn when he said her name and took a step towards the bathroom, only to mumble another, “Excuse me,” when she nearly ran into their waitress. She moved to step out of the way as a large man made his way past them and-

Felt her stomach drop when she saw the knife in his hand.

CHAPTER 26



“Let me see your hands, Bailey,” Quinn said, trying to keep it together as he placed her on the kitchen island and-

Oh, fuck...

There was so much blood, Quinn thought as he took her hands in his and turned them over, looking for the source as he struggled to keep it together, only to feel his stomach drop when he couldn't find it. He ran his trembling hands over her arms, pushing the sleeves out of the way as terror tore through him when he still couldn't find anything.

“Baby, I need to know where you're hurt,” Quinn said, moving his trembling hands over her, pushing blood-stained clothes out of the way, barely aware that she was saying his name or that she was trying to stop him.

He needed to make sure that she was okay.

He needed-

Oh, Christ, he never should have let her leave that fucking table. One minute, he was telling himself that it was time to put a stop to this before it was too late and the next...

He couldn't move fast enough.

“Baby, please, just tell me where you're hurt,” Quinn said, running his hands over her shoulders and-

“It's not mine,” Bailey said, reaching up to cup his face in her hands. “It's not mine, Quinn. I'm fine.”

Swallowing hard, Quinn met beautiful blue eyes that he thought he'd never see again as he said, “Be sure.”

“It's not mine, Quinn,” she promised him as she gently caressed his face.

“He didn’t hurt me.”

Licking her lips, Bailey said, “He didn’t hurt me,” again as she dropped her hands away and gently pushed him back so that she could climb off the kitchen counter and take his trembling hand in hers.

“I’m fine,” Bailey promised him again and gave his hand a gentle squeeze as she turned and took a step back, her beautiful blue eyes never leaving his as she moved. He clenched his jaw tightly shut as he allowed her to lead him into the bathroom as he thought about that knife and-

“I’m fine, Quinn,” Bailey promised him again as she pulled him into the bathroom.

She kept telling him that she was fine as she reached for his shirt, quickly unbuttoning it and pulling it free before pushing the blood-stained item off as he stood there, unable to look away from her as he thought about just how quickly he’d been cut off from her, the flash of silver, the screams, and-

“Tell me again,” Quinn said hollowly as she carefully pulled his holster free and placed it down on the bathroom counter.

“I’m fine,” Bailey said, reaching for his belt.

“Again,” he said as she quickly undid his pants while he toed off his shoes.

Slowly exhaling, she said, “I’m fine,” as she pushed his pants down.

Nodding, Quinn said, “Again,” as he reached down and pulled his socks off, tossing them aside, his focus never leaving her face as she quickly discarded her shoes and socks and pulled off her blood-stained shirt.

“I’m fine,” Bailey said, dropping her shirt on the floor before she pushed her pants off, taking her panties down with them as he spotted the blood staining her neck and stomach and-

“I’m fine,” she promised him as she reached back and released her bra, dropping it to the floor before she was reaching for him again.

“Say it again,” Quinn said as she took his hand in hers and stepped back into the large shower.

“I’m fine,” Bailey said as she blindly reached back and turned on the shower.

Swallowing hard, Quinn stepped inside as he thought about the moment that knife moved and-

She was fine.



“Is this okay?” Bailey asked, even as she couldn’t help but wonder when her hands were going to stop trembling.

It happened so fast.

One minute, she was trying to get out of the way, and the next, she was watching helplessly as the knife moved towards her, and then Quinn was there, stopping it before it could touch her. That didn’t stop her attacker. He kept coming after her, kept trying to reach her, but Quinn kept stopping him, blocking him, and knocking him back until he was finally able to get the knife and then-

“I’m fine,” Bailey found herself saying, releasing a shaky breath as she grabbed a bottle of body wash from the small shelf so that she could wash the blood off Quinn to make sure that he was really okay only to have the bottle taken from her.

She watched Quinn squeeze body wash in his hands, his gaze locking with hers as he reached over and washed her face, taking his time to gently wash away the blood. When she moved to grab the bottle to do the same for him, he shook his head and kept going, carefully washing every inch of her body as he made sure that she wasn’t hurt, slowly running his hands over her with gentle caresses that had her biting back a groan as he slowly worked the tension out of her muscles.

When he had her turn around so that he could wash her back, Bailey closed her eyes and stood there, thinking about everything that happened tonight. The way that he moved, the way that he protected her, doing whatever it took to keep her safe, only to lose it when things took an unexpected turn and the waitress pulled that gun out.

If Tommy hadn’t been there...

She’d never seen so much blood before or heard that many curse words before, but Tommy made sure that he said every single one at least a hundred times while they waited for the ambulance. He was supposed to be keeping an eye on the parking lot, but once customers and employees started fleeing the bar screaming, he came in to help. One second, he was grabbing the guy that Quinn was beating the hell out of before he ended up killing him, and the

next, he was pinning down the woman who shot him, the sounds of the gunshot still tearing through her head as she struggled to make sense out of what happened.

He'd been shot because of her and-

"Shhhhh, it's okay," Quinn said, turning her around so that he could pull her into his arms. "He's fine."

"They shot him," Bailey mumbled weakly as she wrapped her arms around him.

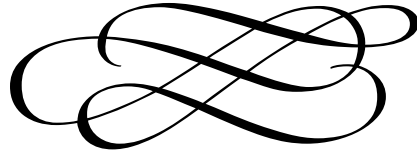
"He's fine," Quinn promised her as he held her close.

She released a snuffle as she mumbled, "He deserves a raise."

"I'm sure that he's telling Tristan that right now," Quinn said, making her lips twitch despite the fact that she couldn't stop thinking about what would have happened if Tommy hadn't been there and-

"I don't want to be alone tonight."

CHAPTER 27



“This isn’t exactly what I had in mind when I said that I didn’t want to be alone tonight,” came the grumbled complaint that had Quinn dropping his head in his hands as he sat there, trying to figure out how he’d fucked this up so quickly.

“Go to sleep, Bailey,” Quinn said as he dropped his hands away and leaned back against the chair he’d placed outside her door so that he could keep an eye on her as he tried to figure out his next move.

One thing was certain, he couldn’t protect her. Not like this. This was a really bad fucking idea. If she’d been any other client, this never would have happened. He never would have sat at that table, never would have let his guard down, and he never would have let her leave that fucking table. He sure as hell wouldn’t have lost his fucking mind when he saw her covered in blood.

God, it had been so fucking close there for a moment. He’d barely had a chance to move when that fucking knife sailed through the air and-

Quinn was forced to think about something else or risk losing his fucking mind. He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t keep her safe, not like this. He needed to get her out of here if he was going to have any chance of doing his fucking job.

“Bailey, we need to talk,” Quinn said, which was a fucking understatement.

“I’m listening,” came the absently murmured reply from the woman that had no fucking idea what she was doing to him.

“I can’t keep you safe here,” he said, already knowing that the cabin

wasn't an option. He didn't think that anyone would be able to trace him to it, but he wasn't taking any fucking chances after what happened tonight.

"I can't leave," Bailey said, making him slowly exhale as he struggled to keep it together.

"Bailey, you can't stay here. It's not safe," Quinn bit out slowly, emphasizing every fucking syllable, praying that she understood how close he was to losing his fucking mind.

"I can't leave, Quinn. There's too much riding on this," Bailey said as he dropped his head back against the wall.

"Bailey-"

"Look, I know that I'm in danger. I get that now. I do, but I can't leave, not when we're this close to losing everything. We needed that program. Without it, we're going to struggle just to make the deadline," she murmured absently while he sat there, slowly exhaling as he shook his head, wondering why he wasn't letting Tristian know that he'd been compromised so that he could pull him off this job and assign someone else.

Because he didn't trust anyone else to keep her safe, which was pretty fucked up considering just how badly he'd screwed up tonight. There were so many things that he shouldn't have done tonight, but he knew without a doubt that his biggest fuck up was getting into that shower with her. He'd needed to make sure that she was safe and he-

Couldn't even fucking lie to himself, Quinn thought as he glanced around the large loft apartment he thought about just how much he liked touching her, how good it felt to run his hands over her, the way that she'd arched her back when he ran his hands over her shoulders, and-

He wanted her.

God, did he fucking want her, Quinn thought as he struggled to stay where he was when all he wanted to do was walk into that bedroom and pull her back into his arms. He-

"Look," Bailey said, taking him by surprise as she placed her hands on his shoulders and climbed onto his lap so that she was facing him, "I'm not an idiot, Quinn. I know this is bad, and I honestly have no idea why anyone is trying to hurt me, but I also know that if we don't finish this game in time that more than half my team will lose everything and I can't do that to them. I just can't."

"Bailey-" he began, but she wasn't done.

"How about this?" Bailey suggested, shifting to get comfortable on his

lap as he found himself placing his hands on her hips. “What if you give me thirty days to pull this off?”

“No,” Quinn said firmly. “You can work on this online. You don’t need to be here.”

“I can’t. We keep everything in-house to make sure that no one is able to break into our system and steal our work.”

“Bailey, this isn’t a good idea.”

“Just hear me out. Just give me thirty days, and then, if the police haven’t figured out who’s behind this, I’ll happily go wherever you want and I won’t complain. I just need time to fix this, Quinn.”

When he opened his mouth to argue, she said the one word that he never thought would break him.

“Please.”



“You don’t have to be here,” Bailey said loud enough for the man standing guard outside her office door to hear.

“Yes, I do,” came the reply that had her biting back a sigh as she forced herself to focus, but it was kind of difficult to do with the man that she couldn’t stop thinking about standing outside her office door, especially since he went from holding her like she was the most precious thing in the world to him to *this*.

He’d barely said a word to her since he’d reluctantly agreed to her plan, telling her that she had one month to handle this as he looked anywhere but at her as he used his hold on her hips to pick her up and set her down on the floor. That had been followed by Quinn standing guard outside the bathroom at two in the morning as she got ready for work.

Once she was done, Quinn followed her downstairs to her office and waited for her to get settled before he walked out of her office without a word and took up his position in front of her office. That was followed by running perimeter checks every half-hour before returning to his spot and-

It was driving her crazy.

She considered telling him that this wasn't going to work for her, but that wasn't an option. While she was here, everyone that worked for her was in danger and she would do whatever it took to keep them safe, which is why she'd texted her brother earlier and requested more security around the building. It was also the reason why she was working when all she wanted to do was go upstairs and crawl back into bed.

God, she was exhausted, Bailey thought as she watched Quinn step away from his spot by her door and begin another perimeter check while she sat there waiting for him to step into the stairwell before she pushed her chair back and headed for the kitchen. If she was going to pull this off, and she really didn't have a choice, she was going to need caffeine.

Knowing that she only had five minutes before he came back, she made her way to the cabinet marked "Diet," where all the healthy snacks were kept. Biting back a sigh, Bailey shoved aside boxes labeled organic, healthy, and fat-free until she found what she was looking for.

Once she had the can of Coke that they didn't think that she knew about, Bailey quickly grabbed a cup, filled it with ice, and-

"We talked about this," came the softly murmured words as the Coke that she really needed to help get her through this was plucked out of her hand.

Swallowing hard, Bailey watched as Quinn took a sip of her precious caffeine fix while she was forced to stand there and watch it happen.

"I really needed that," Bailey mumbled sadly as she felt her shoulders slump in defeat.

Maybe she could order delivery and have them disguise the coffee as hot chocolate? Bailey found herself wondering as she watched Quinn finish off the Coke that should have rightfully been hers before tossing the cup in the sink. As long as no one checked, she should be able to pull this off, Bailey decided as she turned around and headed back to her office so that she could test this theory out when Quinn took her hand in his, stopping her.

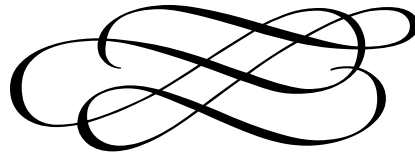
"Tell me that you're really okay, Bailey," he said quietly as he used his hold to gently turn her around and face him.

"I'm fine, Quinn," Bailey promised him, forcing a smile that had him sighing heavily as he dropped her hand so that he could reach up and gently cup her face.

"No, you're not," Quinn murmured softly as his gaze dropped to her lips and-

She had to admit that she was anything but fine at the moment.

CHAPTER 28



“I’d be better if you stopped coming between me and caffeine,” Bailey pointed out with a long-suffering sigh that had his lips twitching despite the fact that he was losing his fucking mind.

“Not happening,” Quinn said, wondering what the hell was wrong with him as he found himself once again staring at her lips and-

“I need to get back to work,” Bailey said, blinking up at him.

“Yes, you do,” Quinn murmured as he forced himself to focus back on the reason that he was here.

“Which means that I don’t have a lot of time to waste, so if you’re going to kiss me, now would probably be the best time to do that,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly as she gestured for him to get on with it.

“That’s not really an option,” he said, but God, did he want it to be.

“Who says?” Bailey asked, watching him curiously.

“You’ve only got thirty days to pull this off, Bailey,” Quinn said, giving them both the reminder that they needed that they had a job to do.

“And I’m wasting time,” Bailey said, sighing heavily as she turned around and headed back towards her office.

After one last glance around the quiet office, Quinn followed her as he thought about just how fucking much he wanted to kiss her. God, what the fuck was he doing, he wondered as he watched Bailey walk into her office and sat down, only to get right back up again when she looked down at her phone. At his questioning look, she said, “I’m needed downstairs,” as she walked past him and headed for the elevator.

Nodding, Quinn followed her to the elevator only to glare when she said,

“You don’t have to come with me,” as he reached past her and pushed the gate open.

“You’re not going anywhere without me,” Quinn reminded her as he waited for her to step into the elevator.

With a shrug, Bailey said, “Okay, but you should probably be prepared to be bored out of your mind,” as she stepped inside and found a spot against the back wall and focused on her cellphone.

“What’s going on?” Quinn asked, closing the gate behind him as he joined her.

“There’s a glitch in the code and it’s locking out members from one of the levels,” Bailey said absently as she frowned down at her phone. “This doesn’t make any sense.”

“What doesn’t?” Quinn asked as he watched her push away from the wall, her attention never leaving her phone as she reached past him and pushed the button for her loft along with the new code that he gave her.

“I need to get my laptop,” Bailey mumbled as she read through her texts again.

“You want to tell me what’s going on?” Quinn asked, watching her frown deepen as she quickly sent a text and-

“I think something bad is about to happen,” Bailey said as she looked up from her phone and met his gaze just as the elevator came to an abrupt halt and the lights began flickering.

“Why would you say that?” Quinn asked, pulling out his gun and pushed her back against the wall as he stepped in front of her and shifted his attention between the escape hatch above them and the gate separating them from her apartment.

“A couple of reasons,” Bailey said, shifting behind him.

“Mind telling me what those reasons are?” Quinn said, keeping his eyes on that gate as he pulled his phone out and-

Shit!

“For one, my cellphone signal just completely disappeared, but that’s not what tipped me off,” Bailey mumbled softly.

“Then, what did?”

“Well, besides the fact that level one-ninety hasn’t been released yet, I have no idea who sent this to me,” Bailey said as Quinn shoved his phone back in his pocket and reached back.

Without a word, Bailey slipped her cellphone in his hand. After running

his gaze over her dimly lit apartment as the lights continued to flicker, Quinn shifted his attention down to her cellphone and felt his stomach drop when he saw the message waiting for her just as the lights finally went out.

Game Over.



“Well, this is fun,” Bailey said, shifting to get comfortable on the hard, unforgiving elevator floor as she tried for a hopeful smile only to bite it back, clear her throat, and nod. “I’ll just sit here quietly,” when she *felt* Quinn’s glare lock on her through the pitch-black that enveloped them.

When several more minutes went by and he didn’t say anything, Bailey tried to get comfortable again. That led to her realizing that wasn’t going to happen and moved to stand up only to have the man kneeling down protectively in front of her reach back and gently grab her arm and push her back down.

Knowing that she really didn’t have much of a choice in the matter, Bailey bit back a sigh, shifted, tried to focus her attention on something other than the fact that her bottom was really starting to hurt. When she couldn’t do that, she bit her lip, shifted again, and nearly sighed in relief when Quinn released a heavy sigh as she felt him move seconds before he was picking her up and shifting her around a bit before she found herself sitting on his lap.

“Better?” Quinn asked as she shifted on his lap with a satisfied sigh.

“Yes,” Bailey said, leaning back against him as he wrapped an arm around her.

“What do you think is going on?” Bailey whispered as she stared through the elevator gate at her dark apartment.

“I’m not sure,” Quinn murmured quietly in her ear as they sat there, doing their best not to make any noise.

“Can we use the flashlight apps on our phones yet?” Bailey asked, shifting again when she realized that this new position had only given her temporary relief.

“No,” came the softly whispered word in her ear that had her biting back

a grumble as she gently pushed his arm away, sat up, shifted, released that grumble, and then, with a satisfied sigh, turned around so that she was straddling his lap.

There was a slight pause, and then, “What the hell are you doing?”

“Getting more comfortable to help pass the time,” Bailey said with a solemn nod that he had no chance of seeing.

“We won’t be in here for much longer,” Quinn said, placing his hand on her thigh as she felt him shift, most likely so that he could keep an eye on the gate behind her.

“You said that two hours ago,” she pointed out.

“You really are a pain in the ass,” came the mumbled response that had her lips twitching despite the fact that she was scared out of her mind that something bad happened and-

“Everyone’s fine,” Quinn said softly as he reached up and gently cupped her face in his hand.

“You don’t know that,” Bailey mumbled, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she found herself reaching over and toying with a button on his shirt, needing to do something before the panic that she’d been fighting since this started could take over.

Something was wrong and it was her fault. They never should have come back here, Bailey thought, feeling sick to her stomach. She-

“What’s going on?”

-felt herself relax when Quinn’s phone rang. She sat there for a moment, listening as Quinn spoke. He kept his questions short as he dropped his hand and placed it back on her thigh. Bailey covered his hand with hers while she waited for answers. Thankfully, he didn’t make her wait long.

As soon as he hung up the phone, Quinn was putting it down so that he could reach back up and cup her face in his hands. “Everyone’s fine. There was an attempt to break into the building, but my team locked everything down and did a sweep of the building.”

“But no one came up here,” Bailey said, unable to help but frown in confusion.

“Yes, they did. A few minutes after the lights went out and then again ten minutes ago,” Quinn said, gently caressing her cheek.

“I didn’t hear anything,” she said, wondering how she’d missed it.

“My men are good, Bailey,” he promised her as she felt his lips press against her forehead.

“Then, why are we still in here?” Bailey couldn’t help but wonder.

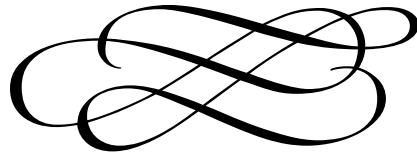
“Because they directed the power from the generator to the second floor so that your team could protect your system. They’ve been dealing with a barrage of cyber-attacks since the main power went out. They managed to protect the files, but it took time,” Quinn explained.

“And everyone’s safe?” Bailey asked, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

“Everyone’s safe,” Quinn promised her as she felt his forehead press against hers and-

Felt his lips slowly brush against hers.

CHAPTER 29



Just one kiss.

That was all he wanted, Quinn told himself as he slowly moved his lips, unable to help but moan when the incredibly soft lips that he'd found himself thinking about more than he should, moved against his. For several minutes, they sat there as he took his time brushing his lips against hers as he told himself that this was enough.

It had to be.

She was a job and he was a fucking idiot, Quinn thought as he allowed himself one last brush of her lips before he moved back and-

Groaned when she followed the move and took over the kiss, leaving him with no choice but to deepen the kiss as his hold around her tightened. She felt so fucking good in his arms, Quinn thought, only to groan when he felt her hands slide up his chest. A moment later, she was moving her hands over his shoulders and sliding her fingers through his hair as she shifted on his lap and tore a moan from both of them when the move caused her to brush against his cock as it strained against his fly to get to her.

It was never going to happen, Quinn tried to tell himself even as he released his hold on her so that he could slide his hands down her back and cup that generous ass that felt so fucking good in his hands and pulled her closer. When Bailey's lips parted on a small gasp, he found himself getting his first real taste of her and groaned.

So fucking sweet, Quinn thought as his tongue slowly moved over hers, tempting it into giving him more and damn near making him lose his fucking mind when he felt her give in. The first hesitant stroke of her tongue had him

moaning, the second had his hands gripping her ass and bringing her tightly against him, and the third...

Had him losing control.

One minute, the kiss was slow and sweet, and the next, he couldn't seem to get enough of her. The kiss turned hungry as she began moving on him, slow at first with tentative rolls of her hips until that wasn't enough and she was rolling her hips in a sensual move against him, rubbing the underside of his cock through his pants with teasing caresses as he used his hold on her ass to encourage her.

He'd never felt anything better in his life, Quinn thought as he felt her reach for his tie and pull it loose. They shouldn't be doing this, he tried to tell himself, but at the moment, none of the reasons why this was a bad idea mattered. The only thing that he cared about was the small woman in his arms driving him out of his fucking mind.

With a groan, Quinn broke off the kiss so that he could kiss a path down her neck, loving the way that she moaned with every brush of his lips as he gave her ass one last squeeze before he slid one hand beneath her shirt. He gently sucked, kissed, and licked her neck as he ran his hand over smooth, soft skin until his hand was moving over the soft material of her bra.

"Don't stop," Bailey whispered as he felt her working the buttons on his shirt loose, he hooked his fingers in her bra and pulled it down, freeing one large breast, and tearing a groan from both of them when the move caused her nipple to harden beneath his touch.

He pressed one last kiss against her throat before he turned his head and found her lips again. He gently kneaded her breast as he used his hold on her ass to move her against him. She felt so good, Quinn thought as she pushed his shirt open before he felt her reach for his belt with trembling hands.

So fucking good...

Giving her breast one last squeeze, Quinn pulled his hand free so that he could grab the hem of her shirt and pull it free. Seconds later, he was unsnapping her bra and pushing it off her arms, forcing her to stop what she was doing so that he could free her breasts. She moaned his name a moment later when her nipples brushed against his chest as he wrapped his arm around her and laid her down on the elevator floor, barely aware that the early morning sunlight had made its way into her apartment.

The only thing that he cared about was the woman moaning his name as he broke off the kiss and sat back, his hungry gaze never leaving her as he

reached for her pants. As he unsnapped her jeans, Quinn ran his eyes over her, taking in the way that she watched him, the way that she licked her lips hungrily as her hands found his thighs and caressed them, encouraging him to keep going. After a moment, his gaze moved down to take in lightly tanned breasts tipped with pink nipples as he slowly pulled her zipper down, revealing a pair of white cotton panties.

Licking his lips, Quinn grabbed hold of the waistband of her jeans and pulled them down, watching as she shifted to make it easier for him. As soon as he had her jeans off, Quinn was reaching for her panties, pausing only long enough so that he could trace the soft lips between her legs with his thumb. For several minutes, he knelt there, slowly rubbing his thumb over her and tore a moan from the woman that he needed more than his next breath. When he couldn't take anymore, he pulled her panties down and-

Saw just how fucking wet she was.

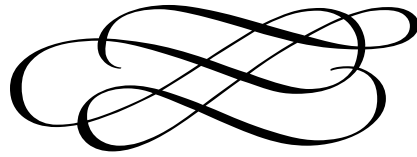
"Please," Bailey moaned, shifting her hips as Quinn pulled her panties off and shoved his pants down along with his boxers, too fucking desperate for her to do this right. He needed her, Quinn thought as he leaned back down and took her mouth in another hungry kiss as he settled between her legs, groaning when his cock pressed against her wet slit.

He'd never been this desperate for a woman before, never thought he'd lose his fucking mind if he didn't fuck her. He'd never lost control like this before, Quinn thought as Bailey shifted beneath him as he pulled back until the tip of his cock was at her entrance and slowly pushed forward, tearing a groan from both of them as his cock slid into an incredibly fucking tight hold. She was so fucking wet, so fucking hot, and so-

"Now, that's full service."

-going to fucking kill her staff.

CHAPTER 30



“Here’s a list of the bugs that we were able to fix this morning,” Jess said as Bailey sat there, swallowing hard as she kept her gaze locked on her desk because she absolutely refused to look up.

Once she finished working on this program, she was going to have to quit. She really didn’t have a choice. It didn’t matter that she owned the company or that the majority of her programs couldn’t be run without her, she was going to have to quit and embrace her life as a recluse somewhere far, far away where she wouldn’t have to worry about being forced to make eye contact with any of the people who’d caught her having sex in the elevator with the man currently watching her every move. She-

Was going to need a lot of caffeine to get through this, Bailey decided, swallowing hard as she watched a file land on her desk along with another pack of condoms, this one ribbed for her pleasure. She really hated her friends, Bailey thought, biting back a sigh as she grabbed the box of condoms, turned in her seat, opened her bottom desk drawer, and dropped the box of condoms to join the others that had found their way onto her desk this morning.

Once she was done, Bailey turned back around and-

Found herself staring at a small bottle of strawberry-flavored personal lube. Sighing, she looked from the bottle of lube up to the woman watching her with an unholy gleam in her eye. “I really hate you,” Bailey found herself admitting with a solemn nod as she grabbed the small bottle of lube and tossed it in the bottom drawer.

“I sense that,” Jess murmured, matching her nod as she cleared her throat

and glanced over her shoulder, giving Bailey no other choice but to follow her gaze, only to feel her shoulders drop when she spotted the line of employees standing outside her door, holding files that she didn't need along with an assortment of condoms and each and every one of them looking happier than she'd ever seen them before.

For a moment, Bailey debated grabbing her laptop and locking herself in the supply closet for the rest of the day, but that wasn't really an option at the moment. So, instead, she settled for pushing away from her desk and sighing heavily as she made her way around the desk, grabbing hold of the woman who was taking immense pleasure in her downfall and-

“Wrap it before you tap it!”

-shoved the traitor out of her office, slammed her door shut, and when that wasn't enough, Bailey closed her blinds, only to feel her shoulders slump in defeat when the action was met with loud cheers.

“I really hate them,” Bailey mumbled sadly as she turned around and found herself facing the man who'd felt incredible inside her about ten seconds before everything got really awkward.

“I can see why,” Quinn murmured, pushing away from the wall and made his way over to the desk and leaned back against it as he took her hand in his and said the five words that she'd been waiting for all day. “We need to talk, Bailey.”

“I know,” she muttered, biting back a disappointed sigh as he gave her hand a gentle pull that had her reluctantly coming closer, knowing that they couldn't put this off any longer.

As she forced herself to take those last few steps, Bailey did her best to mentally prepare herself for the “We made a mistake” talk that she knew was coming. She was just a job and-

She didn't want to be just a job.

She liked him so much and wasn't ready for this to end. She definitely wasn't ready for him to walk away and something told her that was about to happen. She didn't want him to leave, wasn't ready to watch him walk away, and couldn't help but wonder why this hurt so much.

She just...

She had no idea what she wanted, Bailey thought, but she knew that she didn't want to see him hurt and if leaving kept him safe, then she needed to let him go. Whatever was going on, she knew one thing, it wasn't safe right now to be around her. She needed to finish her program, make sure that

Haven Technologies had what it needed to run without her and get out of here before someone got hurt so that they could figure out who was after her before it was too late. She just needed-

Quinn to keep kissing her, Bailey thought as he leaned down and took her lips in a kiss that had her moaning as he released her hand so that she could wrap her arms around him. Admittedly confused, Bailey ran her fingers through his hair as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer. He took her mouth in a slow, tender kiss that had her forgetting everything else, the stress, all of the things that needed her attention, and the fact that her life was slowly spiraling out of control and focused on the only thing that was making everything okay.

Quinn.



He was done playing this game.

He was done caring that he shouldn't be doing this.

He was done pretending that his life was exactly the way that he wanted it.

And he was done pretending that he could fight this.

He wanted her. Christ, did he want her, and that was the problem because he couldn't have her. Not like this. Which meant that it was time to do something that he never thought he would have to do.

"I can't protect you anymore, Bailey," Quinn murmured against her lips even as he tightened his hold around her.

"What are you trying to say, Quinn?" Bailey asked, only to mumble, "More kissing," when he moved to stop, making his lips twitch.

So fucking demanding, he thought, brushing his lips against hers one last time before he pulled away so that he could press a kiss against her forehead. Sighing heavily, Quinn pressed his forehead against hers and said, "I quit, Bailey."

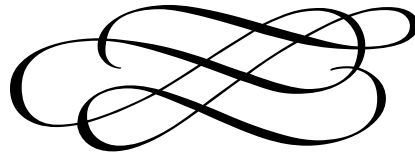
"In that case, it's a good thing that I'm here," came the heavily sighed announcement that had Quinn breaking off the kiss and-

“You son of a bitch!”

-sighing as he grabbed hold of Bailey mid-launch as she tried to throw herself at the man that his team had spent half the night looking for.

Jonathan Parkins.

CHAPTER 31



“He...He kicked me out of my own office,” Bailey mumbled weakly, still trying to figure out what happened.

One minute, she was prepared to finally make the bastard pay for all the crap he’d put her through over the years, and the next, she was standing there, watching helplessly as her office door was closed in her face. She should have bitch-slapped Jonathan when she had the chance, Bailey thought with a firm nod as she watched Quinn turn around and-

“Oh, that’s definitely going to leave a mark,” Jess murmured, sounding thoughtful as she hopped up onto Pam’s new desk with a satisfied sigh and helped herself to the bag of chocolate chip cookies on the desk while Bailey stood there, wincing as Quinn pulled his hand back and-

Bailey didn’t wait to see what happened when his fist connected this time. She grabbed the doorknob and frantically tried opening the door to stop him from living out one of the many fantasies that she’d had over the years. If anyone was going to kick Jonathan’s ass, it was going to be her, Bailey decided, trying not to wince when she heard the pained grunt and the shouted demand to stop.

“Umm, should we call security?” Pam asked, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she shifted nervously.

“He is security,” Jess pointed out, gesturing towards Bailey’s office with a cookie.

“What’s going on?” Kelly asked as she hopped up onto the desk next to Jess and helped herself to a cookie.

“Quinn is explaining to the asshole in minute detail what happens when

you screw with our little Bailey,” Jess said with a satisfied sigh as Bailey gave up trying to break into her office and quickly rushed over to Pam’s desk, shoving Jess’s legs out of the way and began frantically searching for a key to open the damn door before it was too late.

“He seems to be really good at his job,” Kelly murmured in agreement as Bailey did her best not to panic, but it was a quickly losing battle when she heard her office door rattle on its hinges.

“This probably isn’t going to end well,” Jess said, not really sounding all that concerned. Not that Bailey could blame her since she wasn’t the only one that Jonathan screwed over. Still, she couldn’t let Quinn go to jail for something that she really wanted to do herself.

“What’s going on?” Nathan asked, frowning as he followed their gazes and-

“Shit!” Nathan snapped as he rushed over to the door, and after realizing that it was locked, he frantically searched through his pockets for his keys and when he found them, Bailey was there, shoving him out of the way and quickly opening her office door.

As soon as the door was open, she was racing inside and doing what she had to do to stop Quinn from doing something that he would regret. She ignored Jonathan’s pained grunt as she stepped onto his back and launched herself at Quinn, giving him no choice but to catch her.

Sighing in relief, Bailey tightened her hold around Quinn and-

“Oh, come on!” she said, sighing heavily as she found herself carefully dropped on the couch so that Quinn could reach down and grab hold of Jonathan, who’d been reduced to stuttering as panic took over, leaving her with no choice but to get back up and launch herself at Quinn and-

“That’s definitely going to leave a mark,” Bailey mumbled sadly against the carpet, absently noting that the cleaning lady had been cutting corners before she found herself picked up and placed back on the couch, where she immediately flopped over onto her side with a pained grunt.

“I told you that I had nothing to do with it!” Jonathan snapped, wiping blood off his lip with the back of his hand.

“What’s he talking about?” Bailey asked, struggling against the urge to rub her poor boobs.

Stupid floor.

“I had nothing to do with it,” Jonathan said with a helpless shrug. “You’ve gotta believe me, Bailey, I had no idea what happened until this

morning and as soon as I found out, I came here to make sure that you were okay.”

“Someone got hurt because of you, Jonathan,” Bailey pointed out as she moved to get up, only to decide that she was good where she was when she realized just how exhausted she was.

She was getting too old for this, Bailey decided, biting back a yawn as she shifted to get more comfortable while she thought of everything that she still needed to do today before she could call it a night and grumbled pathetically when she realized that she wasn’t going to be able to do that. Not tonight. And definitely not if she wanted to get this program done in time.

It looked like she wasn’t going to bed tonight, Bailey thought as she forced herself to sit up and-

“Son of a bitch!”

-made her way to her desk after stomping down on Jonathan’s instep. Once she was there, she dropped down at her desk, bit back another yawn, and said, “Get the hell out.”

“Bailey, I-”

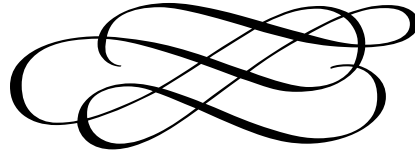
“I’ve got nothing to say to you, Jonathan,” Bailey said, only to rethink that and ask, “How did you get past security?” as she looked up to find herself looking at Quinn’s back.

“I let him up,” Nathan said as he dropped down on the couch with a heavy sigh, but since Quinn’s large back was currently blocking her view, she had to assume that’s what he did.

“And is there a reason that you felt compelled to let the asshole inside?” Bailey asked, forcing herself to get up and walk around her desk, knowing that the stubborn man who was really confusing her wasn’t going to move, not while Jonathan was in the room. She was-

“It wasn’t him.”

CHAPTER 32



“What the hell are you talking about?” Bailey demanded, frowning as she glanced from her brother to the man glaring at him.

“It wasn’t him,” Nathan said, ramming his fingers through his hair before dropping his hand away with a sigh.

“And you know this how?” Bailey asked while Quinn stood there watching Jonathan, noting the way that his gaze kept shifting back to Bailey as though he couldn’t help himself.

“Because I went there first thing this morning to confront him,” Nathan said, sighing heavily as he sat down on the edge of Bailey’s desk.

“Are you crazy?” Bailey demanded, giving up on glaring at Jonathan so that she could glare at her brother. “You could have been hurt!”

“My men are looking into it,” Quinn said, watching the way that Jonathan’s jaw clenched as he shifted his glare back to him.

“There’s nothing to look into,” Jonathan said, “I didn’t know anything about the meeting or this deal. The program doesn’t work. There was nothing to offer.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Bailey asked, frowning in confusion. “We’ve been texting and emailing you for months about this program.”

“Next time, try a phone call because it wasn’t me,” Jonathan said, looking pissed. “I never agreed to any of this bullshit because the program doesn’t work. It’s garbage.”

“But in the interview you gave last year, you were talking about it as though it was a done deal,” Bailey said, frowning in confusion.

“Because it was at the time, but as soon as we applied the application to the program that we built it for, we quickly realized that it wasn’t going to work. All it did was cause more problems, so we shelved the program and moved on,” Jonathan explained as Quinn stood there, watching the other man for any signs that he was lying.

“And the text messages and emails?” Bailey asked, sharing a look with her brother.

“Never saw them,” Jonathan said, reaching up to wipe blood off his lip as his glare shifted back to Quinn.

“No, wait,” Bailey said, shaking her head, “Nathan talked to your office several times over the past year.”

Shaking his head, Jonathan said, “It wasn’t my office.”

Sighing heavily, Bailey looked at Nathan and asked, “Are you really buying this?”

“Not at first,” Nathan said, shaking his head, “I had Jess run the IP addresses and did a trace on the phone number.”

“And?”

“And she traced them to Georgia,” Nathan said, making Bailey frown.

“That’s not exactly difficult to set up,” Bailey pointed out, only to begin worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she climbed onto the desk and sat down next to her brother.

“Which is why I told your brother that you can have the damn program. You could have had it a year ago. It’s garbage,” Jonathan said, looking pissed. “I didn’t know anything about this deal, Bailey, and honestly, it would have been a huge waste of my time to make it in the first place.”

Bailey didn’t say anything as she sat there. She simply watched Jonathan as she thought everything over. Her brother, on the other hand, slowly exhaled as he said, “Considering what’s been going on and the attacks on our servers last night, I think it’s safe to say that whoever’s behind this is more than capable of setting him up to take the fall.”

“But...he’s an asshole,” Bailey said with a helpless shrug that had Nathan’s lips twitching.

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Jonathan said, sighing heavily as he pulled a thumb drive out of his pocket and placed it on the desk next to Bailey. “It’s all yours. I’ll have my lawyers send over the paperwork and turn it over to you later today.”

Frowning, Bailey picked up the thumb drive. “You’re really going to give

me your program?”

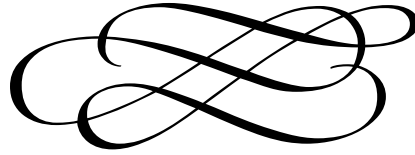
“It’s really a piece of shit,” Jonathan said, shaking his head in disgust before shifting his glare back to Quinn. “Are we done here?”

“Yeah, we’re done here,” Nathan murmured quietly as his gaze shifted to Quinn.

They were far from done, but Quinn knew better than to tip his hand. He’d have his men look into everything today. They were already scouring the bar for information, talking to the police, and trying to-

“You’re fired.”

CHAPTER 33



“You’re fired,” Nathan said, making Bailey bite back a sigh because she honestly didn’t have the energy for this today, not after everything that happened in the last twenty-four hours.

“No, he’s not,” Bailey said, pushing past her brother and headed back to her desk so that she could drop down in her chair and stare aimlessly at her computer as she tried to make sense of everything, but...

They needed this program to work.

“Oh, but he really is,” Nathan drawled with a glare aimed at Quinn as he made his way over to the couch as Jonathan showed himself out.

“The bar wasn’t his fault,” Bailey pointed out, rubbing her hands down her face before dropping them with a sigh and grabbed the small laptop that she kept for moments like this out of her bottom drawer.

“No, it wasn’t,” Nathan murmured in agreement as Bailey looked for the charging wire and-

“I contacted Tristan this morning and told him that I needed to be replaced,” Quinn said, making her frown as she looked up to find him watching her.

“Was this before or after the incident in the elevator?” Nathan drawled, making her wince.

“That’s a good question,” Jess murmured from the doorway with a nod and a gesture for them to continue as she took a bite of her donut and-

“Oh, come on!”

-proceeded to watch through the glass with a pout that Bailey forced herself to ignore at the moment.

“You’re quitting?” Bailey asked, swallowing hard as she glanced at her brother to find him watching her as well.

“It’s for the best,” Quinn said, looking at her with an expression that she couldn’t quite read.

“When are you leaving?” Bailey asked, somehow managing to get the words out as she forced herself to focus on finding that power cord.

“Within the hour,” came the softly murmured answer that had her swallowing hard as she went through the motions of searching through the wires and-

She was going to be sick.

“That soon?” Bailey asked, swallowing hard as she closed the drawer and turned her attention to her top drawer as she told herself that was fine.

More than fine.

She had a job to do, and after what happened in the elevator, and God, she really needed to stop thinking about that, this was probably for the best, Bailey told herself as she absently pushed around the cords, knowing that if he was around that she would be tempted to pick up where they left off and with everything that was going on, she really didn’t have time for-

“We need to get going if we want to avoid rush hour traffic,” Quinn said, making her frown as she glanced up to find him gesturing for her to come with him.

“What?” Bailey asked as her gaze flickered to Nathan to find her brother glaring as he stood up.

“She’s not going anywhere with you,” Nathan bit out.

“She can’t stay here. It’s not safe,” Quinn said before shifting his focus back on her. “You’ve got thirty minutes to pack before I drag you out of here.”

“But the program...” Bailey mumbled weakly as she gestured absently to her laptop.

“You’ll have to find a way to work remotely because you’re not staying here,” Quinn said as Bailey worried her bottom lip between her teeth and-

“Not happening,” Nathan said firmly, which had her reluctantly nodding in agreement because this was a bad idea.

“He’s right. This is definitely a bad idea,” Bailey said, releasing a heartfelt sigh as she shoved the thumb drive in her pocket and grabbed her backpack off the floor and placed it on her desk so that she could place her laptop in it. She followed that up by placing her iPad in it along with her

cellphone before moving to close it only to clear her throat as she discreetly opened the bottom drawer that she normally used to hide her caffeine stash and-

“Jesus Christ,” Nathan said, pinching the bridge of his nose as she grabbed the large box of condoms on top and shoved it in her bag only to rethink that decision and grabbed a few more, making Quinn’s lips twitch.

Once she shoved them in her bag and kicked the drawer closed, Bailey cleared her throat and asked, “Where are we going?” as Quinn grabbed her bag and headed for the door.

“She’s not going anywhere with you,” Nathan said, following him out.

“Back up to Massachusetts until this blows over, so pack warm,” Quinn said, heading for the elevator.

“Really?” Bailey asked, unable to help but smile. She hadn’t been back to Massachusetts since she ran away. She’d always planned on going back, but she’d never had time.

“You’re leaving us?” Jess mumbled sadly as Bailey followed Quinn to the elevator.

“Yes,” Bailey said, the same time that Nathan said, “No.”

“Wait. You’re going back to Massachusetts?” Kelly asked, not looking any happier about it than Nathan did.

“We’re going to stay at my grandmother’s old house,” Quinn said as he reached back and took her hand in his and led her onto the elevator.

“How long will you be gone?” Jess asked as Quinn released her hand so that he could pull the gate closed.

“Until this is over,” he said, taking Bailey by surprise, but...

That was probably for the best, Bailey thought, even as excitement began to build. She missed Massachusetts, missed the seasons, the food, and the snow. As they made their way upstairs, she couldn’t help but wonder if it would snow while they were up there. That led her to deciding that she should definitely pack warm just in case, only to remember that her winter wardrobe consisted of jeans and tee-shirts.

Resigned to going shopping when they reached Massachusetts, Bailey quickly made her way to her bedroom as soon as Quinn pushed the gate open. Ten minutes later, she was standing in front of the elevator with her bag packed and her laptop charging wire in hand, doing her best to stop smiling.

“You have everything you need?” Quinn asked a minute later, walking out of his room with his bag slung over his shoulder.

“Yes,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly.

“Good,” he murmured, leaning down to steal a quick kiss before he pushed the gate back open and grabbed their bags.

“Are we flying or driving?” Bailey asked, more excited than she thought she would be at the prospect of going back to Massachusetts.

“Flying,” Quinn said a moment later as he pushed the gate open before grabbing their bags and headed towards the front door.

As they made their way to his car, Bailey found herself sighing with relief when she didn’t spot Nathan waiting downstairs for her. She didn’t want to argue with her brother, not about this. Something was going on and she couldn’t stay here, not when it meant putting everyone in danger.

She still wasn’t sure how she was going to do this yet, but she was going to make this work, Bailey decided as she climbed into Quinn’s car while he put the bags in the back. First thing that she needed to do was check Jonathan’s program and see if she could make it work. If not, then she would have to start from the beginning and hope for the best.

She’d figure out a way to get the file to Nathan securely, but with everything going on, Bailey knew one thing, she was going to have to be sneaky about it. That was okay, she decided as Quinn climbed into the car and drove towards the highway.

“Why are we-” Bailey began to ask when Quinn suddenly pulled into the parking lot of what appeared to be a rundown motel, only to have him place his hand over her mouth to stop her from saying anything else.

When she closed her mouth and didn’t move to say anything else, Quinn dropped his hand away and turned on the radio, blasting the music as he gestured for her to get out of the car. Frowning in confusion, Bailey climbed out of the car and watched as her brother’s car pulled up beside them.

She watched as her brother climbed out of the car and grabbed his laptop from the backseat. Bailey opened her mouth to ask what was going on when Quinn leaned down and quickly kissed her as she felt his fingers slide into her pocket and grabbed the thumb drive.

She watched in confusion as he tossed the thumb drive to Nathan, who caught it and placed it in an external reader while Quinn made his way to the back of his car and grabbed what looked like a large cellphone out of his bag. She watched as he pulled her bag out of the trunk and laid it on the ground. He followed that up by running the phone over her bag before opening it and running it over her things inside.

When he was done, Quinn made his way to the passenger side, grabbed her backpack and placed the phone on it and-

Beep!

-had Bailey swallowing hard as she watched him tear through her backpack and placed all of her things on the hood of his car and-

Beep!

He quickly placed the phone down on the hood and grabbed her iPad. Seconds later, he had the cover pulled off and Bailey watched with dread as he pulled a thin metallic disc off the back of her iPad. She watched the muscle in his jaw clench as he set it aside and-

Beep!

Found another one hidden behind her phone case and then-

Beep!

One hidden behind the battery of her laptop. She watched as Quinn grabbed the discs and her devices and placed them aside as he shifted his focus back on her backpack and-

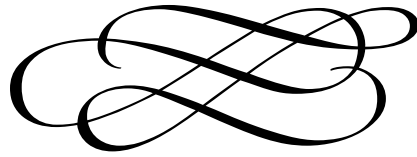
Beep!

Found two more metal discs hidden in her backpack. After double-checking that there weren't any more discs, he handed her bag back to her as an SUV pulled into the parking lot. She watched as Jakob jumped out of the SUV and grabbed a large metal bin from the back and quickly joined them. Without a word, Jakob grabbed everything off the car and placed it in the bin.

When Nathan tossed the thumb drive to Jakob, Bailey glanced at her brother to find him shaking his head once. Swallowing hard, she watched Jakob add the thumb drive to the bin before securing it and placing it in the trunk of Nathan's car, further confusing her as she looked back at Quinn and-

“Change of plans.”

CHAPTER 34



Emerald Bay, Florida

“This isn’t Massachusetts,” the small woman who’d passed out an hour ago mumbled sleepily as they pulled into the long driveway hidden by the surrounding woods.

“No, it’s not,” Quinn murmured absently as his gaze flickered to the rear-view mirror before shifting his attention back to the imposing security gate in front of them.

“You lied to me,” Bailey grumbled as she shifted to get more comfortable in the seat next to him.

“Yes, I did,” Quinn said, noting the cameras watching their every move.

“Bully,” Bailey muttered, making his lips twitch despite the fury tearing through him.

He’d fucked up.

He never should have brought her back there, never should have taken her to that fucking bar, and he should have walked away when he realized just how fucking badly he wanted her. There was no walking away.

Not now.

When the gate slid open seconds later, Quinn resigned himself to what he knew was coming as he drove through the gate and down the winding road as he took Bailey’s hand in his and realized that he didn’t fucking care anymore. He was done. Had been for a long time, but he didn’t realize it until Bailey fell asleep in his arms under that tree. The moment that he wrapped his arms around her...

It was like coming home.

He tried to fight it, tried to tell himself that it was a mistake, but the moment that his mouth found hers in the elevator, he knew that it was over. He'd stopped fighting it. He wanted her, more than anything.

For so fucking long, he'd told himself that his job was enough, but he'd been lying to himself. He wanted more in his life than a job that left him fucking exhausted, which, judging by the look on Tristan's face as he pulled in front of the house, most likely wasn't going to be an issue anymore.

Tristan didn't say anything as Quinn climbed out of the car, but then again, he hadn't expected him to. With a nod and a curious look in Bailey's direction, Tristan headed back inside the large house, leaving them to follow him inside. After one last look back at the driveway, Quinn made his way around the car and-

"I'm ready to be carried," the small woman that he was quickly becoming addicted to mumbled as she tried to curl back into a ball when he opened her door.

"You really are a pain in the ass," Quinn said, sighing heavily as he picked her up and pressed a kiss against her forehead before he kicked the car door shut and headed inside.

"I'm fine with that," Bailey murmured with a satisfied sigh as she laid her head against his chest.

"I bet you are," Quinn murmured, kissing the top of her head simply because he couldn't help himself.

"I really am," Bailey said as he stepped into the foyer and found Tristan waiting for them.

He watched his best friend's cold gaze shift from him to the small woman in his arms as he said, "We'll talk in the morning."

With a nod, Quinn carried Bailey upstairs and headed for the room at the end of the hallway that he normally used when he stayed here. As soon as he placed Bailey on the large bed, he headed back downstairs and wasn't surprised to find their bags by the front door and absolutely no signs of his best friend, letting him know just how pissed Tristan was.

Not that he could blame him, he'd fucked up, after all.

Telling himself that he'd worry about that tomorrow, Quinn threw Bailey's backpack over his shoulder before grabbing their bags and headed upstairs, only to find himself frowning when he walked into the room and found the bed empty. When he heard the shower running, Quinn placed their

bags by the door before closing it, and after a slight pause, he made his way into the bathroom and nearly fucking groaned when he spotted Bailey shimmying out of her panties.

God, she fucking destroyed him, Quinn thought, licking his lips hungrily as he ran his eyes over her. The last shower they took together, he'd been out of his fucking mind thinking about what could have happened to her at that bar to enjoy the sight before him. But now...

He toed off his shoes as he reached for his belt, pulling it loose before unsnapping his pants and carefully pulling the zipper down over the hard bulge that was quickly forming as he ran his eyes over her. She was so fucking beautiful, Quinn thought as he pulled his shirt loose before focusing on the buttons while he took in lightly tanned skin covering the decadent curves that had his cock becoming painfully hard.

When Bailey saw him standing there, she gave him a sleepy little smile that had his heart skipping a beat as he gave up unbuttoning his shirt and went to her. She felt so fucking good in his arms, Quinn thought as he wrapped his arms around her and met her for a slow kiss that had him groaning as his hands slid down her back, enjoying the feel of warm, soft skin beneath his touch.

So fucking good...



She needed this.

Needed *him*, Bailey thought as she lost herself in his touch, the way that his hands moved over her, sliding down her back and over her bottom as he slowly deepened the kiss. He felt so good, she thought as she reached for his shirt, working the last of the buttons free before she reached up and pushed his shirt off his shoulders.

Right now, Bailey didn't want to think about anything else, not the fact that someone was screwing with her life, the fact that her brother was keeping secrets from her, or just how close she was to losing everything. She just wanted to lose herself in his arms. With every touch, kiss, and gentle caress,

it became easier to pretend that nothing else mattered but this.

“You have no fucking idea how much I want you,” Quinn said, backing her up against the wall and-

Tore a moan from her throat when he slid his hand between her legs. Moving his lips over hers one last time, Quinn broke off the kiss and ducked his head, taking her nipple between his lips as he cupped her, moving his palm over her as she spread her legs further apart, making it easier for him as she wrapped her arms around him and ran her hands down his back and-

“Shit!” Quinn bit out when her hand brushed over his gun.

With a groan, he ran his tongue over her nipple one last time as he reached back and pulled his holstered gun free before pulling away just long enough to place it on the bathroom counter along with the holster on his ankle. Once he was weapon-free, Quinn was making his way back to Bailey as she stepped into the shower.

She watched as his gaze moved over her and felt herself tremble. She wanted him so much, Bailey thought, his gaze locking with hers as he shoved his pants down, revealing the large erection that left her feeling empty as her gaze flickered to the thick tip that felt incredible making its way inside her this morning and-

“My bag,” Bailey said, licking her lips as she ran her eyes over him, watching as he went still seconds before he nodded firmly and quickly made his way out of the bathroom.

When he walked into the bathroom a minute later, Bailey released a shaky breath as she watched Quinn rip the condom open with his teeth before placing it on the large tip and slowly rolled it down his cock. Unable to look away, she watched his hand move over his cock as he made his way towards her.

Swallowing hard, Bailey forced herself to look away as she turned around and-

Moaned when he reached around her, his fingers finding her clit as she felt him press his cock against her slit. As he teased her clit with gentle caresses, making her spread her legs further apart, she slapped her hands against the wall while Quinn teased her by pressing the tip of his cock against her entrance. Her head dropped forward on a gasp as he gently moved the tip back and forth, making her moan as she stood there, struggling not to push back.

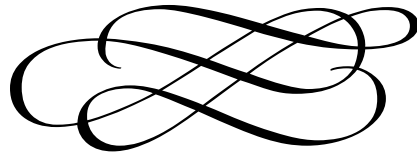
She'd never felt anything better, Bailey thought, giving up on trying to

stay still and pushed back, tearing a groan from him as she felt him slip inside her. He felt good, Bailey thought, licking her lips as Quinn filled her, his fingers teasing her, only to amend her previous thought and decided that she'd never felt anything better when he pulled back only to push back inside her.

Quinn groaned long and loud as the sensation went from good to incredible with the first stroke. With every stroke, it felt better, like nothing that she'd ever experienced before and-

Something was wrong.

CHAPTER 35



A groan was ripped from Quinn's throat as he slid inside her.

So...fucking...good...

He'd never felt anything better, Quinn thought as he kissed the back of Bailey's neck, his fingers moving over the little clit between her legs and-

Oh, fuck...no.

He felt it seconds before Bailey went still. Grinding his teeth, Quinn pulled back as he struggled not to moan when his cock slid free from the incredibly tight, wet sheath that had him moaning as the move caressed the underside of his cock, only to follow that up with a curse when he saw the condom had fucking ripped. Shit! Pressing another kiss against the back of Bailey's neck, he continued slowly moving his fingers between her legs.

After several teasing strokes, Quinn felt her begin to relax again, only to moan when he allowed his fingertips to tease her core. Pressing another kiss against the back of her neck, Quinn reached down and ripped the ruined condom off before tossing it on the floor. This morning in the elevator, he'd been out of his fucking mind when he slid inside her. He'd fucked up, but they'd been too fucking lost to think straight, and now...

God, he wanted to slide back inside her and find out just how fucking good it felt to fuck her, but that wasn't an option. He didn't take chances. At least, he never had until she came back into his life. Now...

He just fucking wanted her.

Nothing else mattered to him.

"What happened?" Bailey managed to get out on a moan.

"Condom broke," Quinn said, only to groan when she pushed back,

causing the soft curve of her ass to caress the underside of his cock.

“Get another one,” she demanded, making his lips twitch.

“Yes, ma’am,” Quinn said, kissing the back of her neck one last time before he dropped his hand away and headed back into the bedroom, grabbing a towel off the rack as he went and quickly dried off.

As soon as he reached her bag, Quinn dropped the towel on the floor and wrapped his hand around his cock, slowly stroking himself as he reached inside her bag and-

“Oh, fuck...” Quinn bit out on a groan when he felt Bailey’s small hand close around his and pull his cock down so that she could wrap her lips around him.

He grabbed a condom out of the bag and watched her mouth move over him, teasing the tip of his cock with her teeth and tongue while she used her hold to move his hand over his cock, stroking him in time to the movements of her mouth. She tore a moan from him when he raised the condom to his mouth and used his teeth to rip it open.

He-

“Stop,” Quinn said, frowning when he pulled the condom package away from his mouth and noticed a small mark on the package.

Telling himself that he was wrong, Quinn ignored Bailey as she asked, “What’s wrong?” and headed to the bathroom. He made quick work of rolling the condom open before he turned on the bathroom sink and-

Fuck!

Tossing the broken condom aside, he quickly made his way back into the bedroom, grabbed her bag and carried it back inside the bathroom, barely aware that Bailey had followed him inside. He grabbed individual condoms and sealed boxes, and every last one of them leaked when he filled it with water.

“Oh, my God...” Bailey muttered weakly as he tossed the box of twenty-four condoms back on the counter.

“Don’t touch anything,” Quinn said when she reached over to pick up one of the boxes.

“What’s going on?” Bailey asked, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she took in all the ruined condoms.

“I have no fucking idea,” Quinn said, but he was going to find out.



This probably wasn't going to end well, but...

She was surprisingly fine with that, Bailey decided as she found herself stepping into the large kitchen overlooking a beautiful lake before shifting her attention to the counter and zeroing in on the coffee machine. Licking her lips nervously, she risked a glance over her shoulder, and once she was assured that she was alone, Bailey quickly made her way across the large kitchen and tore through cabinets, drawers, and containers, looking for the only thing that was going to get her through this.

Once she found the coffee, a large mug, and sugar, she made quick work of filling the machine with water, added more coffee grounds than was probably necessary and pressed start, praying that it hurried up before Quinn was done doing whatever it was that he was doing. As soon as she heard the promising sounds of the machine bubbling, Bailey quickly turned her attention to the large refrigerator, too desperate for a caffeine fix to wait for the coffee to finish brewing.

As soon as she found what she was looking for, Bailey opened the can of Coke, released a satisfied sigh, and moved to take a deep, satisfying sip when she suddenly found her hand empty and a really large man who looked like he didn't know how to smile glaring down at her. Really hoping that he was just thirsty, Bailey cleared her throat, reached back in the fridge for another Coke and-

"Damn it," Bailey mumbled sadly when he plucked the soda out of her hand and placed it back in the fridge.

"No caffeine," the large man said firmly.

"But I have needs," Bailey said with a hopeful smile that quickly died away when he only continued glaring down at her.

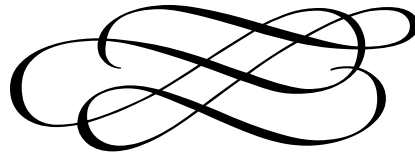
Knowing that it was pointless to argue, mostly because something told her that it was a bad idea, Bailey mumbled to herself as she reluctantly headed back the way that she came, hoping that Quinn was done with his mental breakdown so that she could-

"I'm curious about something," came the coldly murmured words that sent a chill down her spine.

“About?” Bailey said as she slowly turned around to find ice-cold blue eyes watching her.

“Everything.”

CHAPTER 36



“**W**hen were you going to tell me?” came the quietly murmured words as Quinn stood there wondering why Bailey was groaning pathetically against the kitchen table.

At her next incoherent mumble, Quinn threw Tristan a questioning look. “She negotiated her interrogation.”

“Totally worth it,” Bailey mumbled as she slapped her hands against the kitchen table and pushed herself up into a sitting position and-

“Owie.”

Somehow landed on the floor, where she immediately curled up into the fetal position, leaving Quinn standing there, biting back a sigh as he glanced at his best friend and asked, “Caffeine?”

“It was yummy,” came the sleepily mumbled words from the kitchen floor.

“She drove a hard bargain,” Tristan murmured absently as he threw the small woman curled up in a ball on his kitchen floor a curious look.

“I bet she did,” Quinn said, biting back a sigh as he walked over to the table, moved the chair out of the way, leaned down and picked the small woman who should have known better off the floor and-

“When were you going to tell me?” Tristan asked.

“Soon,” Quinn said, wondering how this was going to play out.

“She really is a cute little thing,” Tristan said when Bailey grumbled, shifted, and began lightly snoring in his arms.

“Yes,” Quinn said, turning his head and kissed her forehead as he kept his gaze locked on Tristan, “she is.”

Nodding slowly, Tristan took a sip of coffee as he considered him. “You should have told me sooner.”

“Yes, I should have,” Quinn murmured in agreement as Bailey snuggled closer to him.

“She’s too fucking kind,” Tristan said, shaking his head in disgust.

“Yes, she is,” Quinn said, chuckling when Bailey grumbled in his arms, making him wonder just how much caffeine she’d had.

“She also has no idea who’s behind this,” Tristan said, watching him curiously before adding, “And neither do you, but you have an idea.”

“Several.”

“Care to share with the class?” Tristan asked as he turned his attention to his laptop.

“The ex-business partner and at least one of her employees,” Quinn said, still working through several possibilities in his head.

“That’s what Nathan said,” Tristan murmured absently as he frowned at something on his laptop.

“What else did he say?” Quinn asked, glancing down at the small woman in his arms and just fucking sighed as he watched her blindly reach over and did her best to steal Tristan’s coffee.

“Besides threatening to kill both of us if anything happened to his sister?” Tristan asked as he grabbed his coffee before the little faker could. That was followed by cracking one eye open to glare at Tristan, a grumble, and settling unhappily in his arms before gesturing for them to continue.

“Are you going to join us for this conversation?” Quinn asked as he leaned down and kissed her forehead.

“I’m going to continue eavesdropping with the hopes that you say something that you don’t want me to know about,” came the mumbled response, followed by Bailey raising her hand and once again gesturing for them to get on with it.

“Sounds like a solid plan,” Quinn said, only to glare when the little brat wiggled her bottom enticingly on his lap.

God, she was fucking evil and she knew it too, judging by the way that her lips twitched when she did it, bringing his mind back to the one place that he was struggling to avoid. He’d been inside her twice in the past twenty-four hours and-

Fucking. Evil, Quinn thought, forced to bite back a groan when she did it again. He was in fucking agony. All he could think about was just how

fucking good it felt when the tip of his cock slid inside her. He'd never felt anything like it, warm, wet, and so fucking tight...

"Perhaps we should talk about this later?" Tristan suggested, sounding really fucking amused while Quinn sat there, struggling to focus.

"I'm fine with discussing this now," Bailey said with a satisfied sigh as she gave up pretending to be asleep and sat up, wiggled, shifted so that she was sitting on his lap with her back to him, and-

"Jesus Christ," Quinn groaned, forced to grab hold of her hips to stop her from torturing him when she wiggled again.

"You know what would be fun?" Bailey asked with another fucking wiggle.

God, he was going to spank her ass...

"What's that?" Tristan murmured absently.

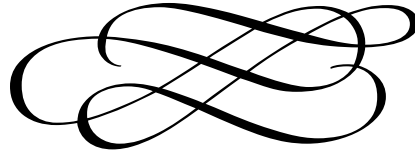
"If we started with my questions first," Bailey said, nodding solemnly as Quinn was forced to stop thinking about just how fucking good she'd felt, how much he liked kissing and touching her.

"You know what would be even more fun than that?" Tristan countered.

"What's that?" Bailey asked, leaning forward with a heartfelt sigh so that she could use the table to prop her chin on her fist while she waited for an answer.

"If you tell me that secret that you've been keeping from your brother first."

CHAPTER 37



Haven Technologies

“About fucking time,” Nathan said, dropping back in his chair with a sigh as he took in the fucking mess that they’d been forced to fix. Thirty hours of nonstop attacks on their systems, one right after the other, until finally, they were able to stop them.

He’d never seen anything like it before.

Whatever it was, it was definitely coordinated, Nathan thought as he glanced at Jess to find the woman who’d saved their asses looking really fucking relieved as she closed her laptop with a mumbled, “Finally.”

“All set?” Nathan asked, taking in the incredibly beautiful woman who’d always been there for them, only to once again find himself wondering why he was hesitating.

For the past year, he’d noticed the way that she looked at him, the way that she smiled when she saw him, the lingering touches when he was close to her, and-

There was something seriously fucking wrong with him.

“Everything’s back the way that it should be,” Jess assured him with another one of those smiles that should have him doing whatever it took to get her to go home with him, but instead, Nathan nodded as he shoved his chair back and stood up, biting back a groan as he glanced at the clock.

“How long will Bailey have to stay in Massachusetts?” Jess asked as she grabbed her bag and joined him.

“Until this is over,” Nathan said, watching as she opened her mouth to

say something only to close it with a sigh while he stood there, struggling against the urge to call the asshole that better be taking care of his sister to make sure that she was okay and-

God, he fucking missed her.

He hated this.

All he wanted to do was pull the little brat that he adored into his arms and keep her safe, but he couldn't take the risk. He loved her, more than anything in this world. She was his little sister and best friend and he honestly couldn't imagine his life without her. She-

"She'll be fine," Jess said with a teasing smile as she grabbed his bag and tossed it to him.

"She better be," Nathan said, making her chuckle as they headed towards the elevator while he tried to stop thinking about what he would do if he lost Bailey.

When this was over, he was definitely going to spank her ass, Nathan thought as they stepped into the elevator and pressed the button for the ground floor. "Let me make you dinner," Jess said with a hopeful smile that had him chuckling as she reached over and took his hand in hers.

"You don't know how to cook," Nathan reminded her with a teasing smile as he moved to pull his hand away when the elevator doors slid open, only to have Jess entwine their fingers together as she moved closer to him. "I don't like the idea of you being alone right now," she said as she gave his hand a gentle tug that had him following her off the elevator and heading towards the security doors.

"I'll be fine," Nathan said, looking into her incredibly beautiful baby-blue eyes as he found himself more than a little fucking tempted to say yes.

He could think of worse ways to spend the night than between the legs of an incredibly beautiful woman, Nathan thought as he opened his mouth to take her up on her offer, only to close it when movement on the security monitor caught his attention and-

He should have fucking known it was her.



Emerald Bay, Florida

“I can honestly say that I have no idea what he’s talking about,” Bailey mumbled against Quinn’s back as she hung there, trying to figure out what Tristan was talking about.

When Quinn didn’t say anything, Bailey found herself sighing as he continued carrying her upstairs and resigned herself to the glaring match ahead. Maybe she should go back downstairs and try to interrogate the large man who didn’t seem to trust her. She never should have accepted that cup of coffee. She definitely shouldn’t have accepted the can of Coke that he offered her when she refused to tell him about what was going on between her and Quinn. Then again, since she didn’t exactly know what was going on between them, she really didn’t think that she had anything to lose.

She’d been wrong.

Very wrong.

God, that man really knew how to interrogate someone. It didn’t hurt that he’d promised to sneak her another can of Coke tomorrow, Bailey absently thought, even as she had to wonder if he meant later today or if he was really expecting her to wait another twenty-four hours until he gave her the delicious, caffeinated beverage that she’d fully planned on enjoying from behind the safety of a locked door.

Realizing that Quinn still hadn’t said anything, Bailey cleared her throat and asked, “Any news?” hoping to get him to talk.

When her question was answered with more silence as he carried her into the room they’d been given, she followed that up with, “I’m sorry?” even as she wracked her mind trying to figure out if she actually had anything to apologize for.

It was possible, Bailey thought as she found herself gently dropped on the bed and-

The wiggling.

Definitely the wiggling, Bailey thought, trying not to wince when she saw the look on his face when he reached for her shorts. She probably shouldn’t have tormented him with all that wiggling, Bailey decided as she cleared her throat and opened her mouth to apologize when he tore a moan from her when he traced the seam running between her legs with his fingertips.

“Did you enjoy teasing me, Bailey?” Quinn asked as he watched his fingertips move over her.

“I feel as though it would be in my best interest not to answer that,” Bailey said, nodding solemnly only to moan as her hands fisted in the comforter when the pad of his thumb moved over her, teasing her through the material of her cotton shorts.

“And I feel like you were doing everything that you could to avoid answering any questions,” Quinn murmured as his gaze flickered to meet her gaze.

“I mean, that is possible,” Bailey found herself admitting while she watched him nod absently as he returned his attention back to what he was doing, which, at that moment, she truly appreciated.

“And all those things that you’re not telling me...” Quinn asked, tracing her lips between her shorts one last time before he reached for the waistband.

“There’s nothing to tell,” Bailey said, licking her lips as she watched Quinn slowly pull her shorts down along with her panties.

“Are you sure?” Quinn asked as his gaze landed between her legs and groaned in a way that had her breath catching.

“Yes?” she said, not really sure about anything at the moment.

Nodding, Quinn tossed her shorts and panties aside before he reached back and grabbed hold of his shirt and pulled it off before tossing it aside.

“And all that wiggling?” he asked as he unsnapped his jeans.

“Seemed like a good idea at the time,” Bailey found herself admitting as she watched Quinn slowly pull his zipper down over the large bulge pushing against it.

“I bet it did,” Quinn murmured as he finished pulling down his zipper before he reached inside his pants and pulled out the large, thick cock that felt so good sliding inside of her earlier, something that she’d been trying to stop thinking about.

“And my questions?” Bailey asked, deciding that this would probably be a good time to do a little interrogation of her own. She...

“What are they?” Quinn asked as he wrapped his hand around the large cock that she couldn’t seem to take her eyes off.

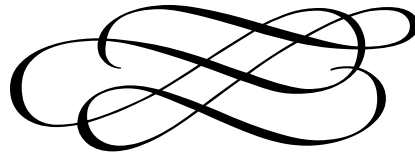
“Ummmm...” Bailey mumbled as she tried to remember what they were talking about while she watched Quinn run his hand over his cock.

“Then, why don’t we forget everything else, all the bullshit, work, everything that doesn’t matter right now and focus on the only thing that does,” Quinn suggested as he dropped his hand away and reached for her.

“And what’s that?” Bailey asked as she willingly went to him.

“Just how much I want you.”

CHAPTER 38



“**W**hy are you trying to distract me?” Bailey couldn’t help but wonder even as she had to admit that it was working.

“Is that what I’m doing?” Quinn murmured, sounding thoughtful while he kept doing that thing with his mouth against her neck that she really liked as she felt his hand slide between her legs.

“Kind of?” Bailey said as she struggled to remember what they were talking about, but at the moment, decided that perhaps this line of questioning could wait until later, much later, so that she could focus on that thing that he was doing with his fingertip.

“Kind of?” Quinn repeated, chuckling softly against her skin as his very talented fingertip found her clit and-

Decided that she was more than happy with how things were going when he abandoned her neck and wrapped his lips around her nipple. Her fingers threaded through his hair as her legs spread apart so that he could trace a path from her clit to her core. For several minutes, Quinn focused on her breast, licking and sucking on her nipple as he continued teasing her, lightly brushing his fingertip over her clit before running his fingertip back down to where she needed him most.

With one last flick of his tongue over her nipple, Quinn slowly kissed his way up to her neck as he continued teasing her with his fingertip. He kissed a path up her neck, pressed a kiss against her chin, and when his lips found hers, he-

“Oh, God...” Bailey moaned, her back arched off the bed when Quinn slid a thick finger inside her.

He took his time kissing her, brushing his lips against hers as he slowly worked his finger inside her, moving it with unhurried thrusts that left her moaning. It had been a long time since a man touched her, but God, she couldn't remember it ever being this good. She loved the way that he touched her, the way that he took his time kissing her, and-

"What do you want, Bailey?" Quinn asked, breaking off the kiss so that he could watch her as he moved his hand between her legs.

"I want you to keep touching me," Bailey said, reaching up to cup his handsome face in her hands and pulled him back in for a kiss, only to groan in frustration when he pulled his hand away.

Before she could complain, she felt him shift on the bed seconds before he settled between her legs and tore a moan from her when the move caused that large erection to brush against her slit. Deepening the kiss, Quinn settled more comfortably between her legs, causing the underside of his cock to rest firmly against her slit.

It felt so good, Bailey thought, only to amend that thought to it felt amazing seconds later when he began moving. She loved the way that he moaned against her lips, the way that it felt with every slow roll of his hips, the way that his cock moved against her, brushing against her clit with every move, but it wasn't enough.

Bailey ran her hands down his back and slid her hands beneath the back of his pants while he moved against her. As he took his time driving her crazy, she felt him reach into his pocket. A moment later, he was breaking off the kiss and turning his head so that he could rip a condom packet open with his teeth before his mouth once again found hers as she felt him reach between their bodies and roll the condom on the thick cock teasing her. Wondering where he got the condom, she moved to break off the kiss, only to feel her lips twitch when he answered the unspoken question. "It's been collecting dust at the bottom of my bag for the last two years."

"That's a long time," Bailey murmured, feeling her lips twitch.

"You have no fucking idea," Quinn said as he pulled his hand away and rolled his hips back as he shifted lower and-

Tore a gasp from her when she felt the large tip of his cock press against her seconds before he was pushing inside her. He felt incredible, Bailey thought on a moan as he slowly slid inside her, giving her a chance to get used to his size and-

"This isn't fucking happening," Quinn bit out as he dropped his head

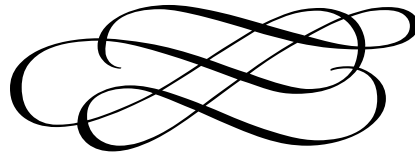
against the pillow as she lay there, slowly exhaling as she did her best to ignore just how much better he suddenly felt.

Having a pretty good idea why, Bailey asked, "Condom broke?"

"Yes," Quinn bit out, only to sigh when he reluctantly pulled away while she lay there wondering if it was possible to die of frustration.

She was afraid that she was about to find out.

CHAPTER 39



Haven Technologies

“This isn’t going to end well,” Casey admitted to herself while she knelt there, doing her best to beat her personal record. While she slid the pick into the keyhole on the locked desk drawer, she held her breath in a well-practiced move as she closed her eyes and focused on the sensation of the metal pick moving inside the lock, the soft clicks, the tension in the springs, and finally, the feel of the pick sliding into place and forcing the lock open.

Slowly exhaling, Casey opened her eyes and quickly pulled the pick free and put it back in her backpack before carefully opening the desk drawer as she shifted to the side, careful of the camera aimed at the desk and-

“Looking for this?” came the quietly murmured question that had her closing her eyes on a resigned sigh as she pushed the drawer closed.

“I can explain,” she said, even though she knew that it was pointless.

“I’d love to know why you’re breaking into my desk at two in the morning, Pam,” Nathan said before adding, “Or should I call you Casey?”

“Casey’s fine,” Casey said as she grabbed her bag and stood up, already knowing that he wasn’t going to believe anything that she had to say and knowing better than to waste her time.

It was over.

“That’s funny because Bailey never really told me how she met you,” Nathan drawled, not bothering to look up from the file on his lap, the same file that she’d been hoping to destroy before anyone could read it.

“That’s because there’s nothing to tell,” Casey said, shrugging it off as

she took in the incredibly handsome man who'd been keeping an eye on her since the day that Bailey dragged her through the front door, noting the way that a muscle in his jaw clenched as he looked through the file that she should have grabbed as soon as she saw it before her gaze flickered to the elevator less than thirty feet away and-

"I'm not sure that your parole officer would agree," Nathan said as dark, almost black eyes locked on her.

"You're probably right," Casey murmured in agreement, knowing that there was no point in sticking around to find out.

With that in mind, Casey adjusted her hold around her bag and headed for the elevator, deciding that she'd take her chances with the large security guard downstairs and worry about how she would get back inside later. She wasn't surprised when Nathan joined her a moment later by the elevator. She noted that the file was no longer in his hands and somehow resisted the urge to glance over her shoulder to see if he'd left it on the desk, but she knew that her luck had already run out.

"Are you ready to start talking?" Nathan asked, sliding his hands in his pockets as he leaned a shoulder against the wall while they waited for the elevator to slowly make its way to their floor.

"There's nothing to say," Casey said, biting back a sigh of relief when the elevator finally came to a stop.

"You really don't think that I'm going to let you leave this building after what you put my sister through, do you?" Nathan asked, watching as she grabbed hold of the metal gate and pushed it open.

"No," Casey simply said as she stepped into the large freight elevator and decided that there was no point in playing this game any longer. "How long?" she asked as she reached over to press the button for the lobby, only to pause with her finger hovering over the button as she shot him a questioning look.

"How long before I have security grab you or do you want to know how long you have before the police show up to arrest you?" Nathan asked, stepping into the elevator to join her before pulling the gate closed behind him.

"Both work," Casey said, shifting her attention to the keypad and quickly typed in Bailey's code before pressing the button for the third floor.

"It's over," Nathan said, watching her curiously.

"We'll see," Casey said, grinding her jaw as she watched the second floor slowly disappear before the third floor came into view.

“Tell me something,” Nathan said, sounding curious while Casey stood there, inwardly screaming at the elevator to go faster as she absently tapped her foot against the floor, willing it to go faster before it was too late.

“What’s that?” Casey murmured absently as she slowly exhaled.

“What did my sister ever do to you?” Nathan asked casually, but she didn’t miss the hard edge to his words or the way that he watched her every move, letting her know just how badly he was struggling not to make her pay for everything that Bailey went through.

It was understandable, but right now, it wasn’t her problem.

“You wouldn’t understand,” Casey said, reaching for the gate before the elevator had a chance to come to a stop.

“Try me,” Nathan said as he followed her off the elevator.

“It’s none of your business,” Casey said, quickly making her way through the large loft apartment and headed for Bailey’s bedroom, wishing that she didn’t have to do this, but she didn’t have a choice.

She should have done this as soon as she found Bailey, but...

This was the only way.

“You don’t think the bullshit that you put my sister through is any of my business?” Nathan asked as he followed her.

“I had nothing to do with it,” Casey said, pulling her bag off her shoulder as she made her way to Bailey’s bed.

“You really expect me to believe that?” Nathan asked, watching her curiously as she quickly opened her bag and grabbed the envelope that she’d been carrying with her for the last twenty-five years, and after a slight hesitation, she placed the battered envelope on Bailey’s pillow.

“I don’t care what you believe,” Casey said as she reached up and forced her trembling fingers to work the clasp on her necklace free before pulling it away and carefully laying it on top of the envelope.

Swallowing hard, Casey stared down at the small Celtic knot that had brought her comfort since she was a little girl before forcing herself to look away. Slowly exhaling, Casey shifted the bag on her back and turned to leave, only to find Nathan blocking her path.

Shaking his head, he said, “You’re done fucking with my sister’s head,” as he reached for the necklace.

“No,” Casey said firmly as she placed her hand on Nathan’s, stopping him from touching the one thing that she honestly didn’t think that she could live without.

Jaw clenching, Nathan glared down at her as Casey forced herself to ignore just how good his warm skin felt against hers. "I'm asking you nicely, Nathan. Please," she said, stressing the last word.

She watched as his angry gaze searched hers for answers that she couldn't give him. Whatever he saw had him reluctantly dropping his hand away as he asked, "Why did my sister lie for you?"

At her questioning look, Nathan added, "We had a deal. She wasn't supposed to hire anyone with a record, but for some reason, she broke that rule for you, and I want to know why."

"Because she's too damn nice," Casey said, watching as his lips twitched.

"Yes, she is," Nathan murmured as he stood there, watching her for another moment before he asked, "Did she know about your record?"

"Not exactly," Casey admitted, watching as he digested that information.

Slowly nodding, Nathan said, "That doesn't answer my question."

"That's the only answer that you're going to get," Casey said as her gaze flickered to the envelope on Bailey's pillow one last time before she moved to step around him when his hand found hers and-

"What the hell are you-" she started to demand when he tightened his hand around hers and pulled her into the small closet behind them. Before she could finish, Nathan was pressing his hand over her mouth and pushing her against the wall as he reached over and pulled the closet door closed until only a small stream of light shined in through a crack.

"Shhh," Nathan whispered softly as he pressed his large body against hers while she stood there, struggling not to panic as long-ago memories threatened to swallow her whole.

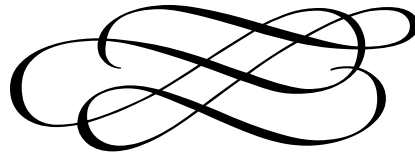
When she tried to pull away, Nathan moved closer, shaking his head once before he turned his head and watched through the small opening as she did the same, wondering why he was acting like this when it was probably just one of Quinn's men coming up to see what they were doing, only to feel her stomach drop as she watched the man that definitely wasn't one of Quinn's men slide his gun back in his holster before he reached for the necklace. Trying not to panic, Casey moved to shove Nathan away so that she could stop him, only to have Nathan's lips brush against her ear as he whispered, "Don't."

Knowing that it was useless, Casey stood there, feeling sick to her stomach as she watched the unknown man pocket her necklace before reaching for the envelope. That was followed by being forced to watch as he

tore the envelope open and read the letter that she'd guarded with her life as Nathan moved impossibly closer to her and whispered in her ear, "What's in that letter?"

"Our mother telling Bailey goodbye."

CHAPTER 40



Emerald Bay, Florida

“I think,” and this is where Bailey paused so that she could release a shuddering breath against the pillow that she currently had her face buried against, “that we should take this as a sign that you were only meant to worship me from afar.”

That was followed by the woman who was driving him fucking crazy nodding her head against her pillow, grumbling, and after another snuffle that had his lips twitching, a heartfelt sigh while Quinn stood there, trying to wrap his fucking mind around everything and-

“If you need a moment to cry, I’ll understand,” came the mumbled words that had Quinn glaring at the small woman blindly reaching back to grab hold of the comforter and pull it over her incredible body. “No need to make this any harder than it already is on you.”

“You really are evil,” Quinn said with a heavy sigh as he stepped away from the bed and checked the windows, making sure that they were locked before glancing at the closed bedroom door as he made his way back to the bed and dropped down near the small woman who was driving him crazy.

“And irresistible,” Bailey pointed out as Quinn pulled the comforter over him, only to wince when the soft material brushed against his cock and once again found himself wondering how much fucking more he could take.

He’d been inside her three times in the past twenty-four hours, each time so much fucking better than the last, and every fucking time, he’d nearly lost his fucking mind when he had to force himself to pull out of her. She’d felt so

fucking good wrapped around his cock, but it was so much more than that.

She felt like home.

“If you need a moment to fight back the tears, I’d understand,” Bailey mumbled as she shifted beneath the covers, turned onto her side, wiggled, grumbled, and-

Groaned when he felt her warm, soft lips wrap around the tip of his cock.

“I thought the plan was for me to worship you from afar,” Quinn said, licking his lips hungrily as she slowly slid her mouth down his cock as he pushed the comforter out of the way so that he could watch the woman that was driving him out of his fucking mind.

“It was,” Bailey said as she let his cock slip from his mouth so that she could begin a whole new line of torture by kissing a path along the underside of his cock, “but then I decided to take pity on you.”

“That was very generous of you,” Quinn drawled as he raised himself up so that he could watch the cruel woman as she teased his cock.

“I know,” Bailey murmured, nodding solemnly as she pressed a kiss against the spot right below the tip and-

Oh, fuck...

Licked a path down his cock, tearing a groan from him as Quinn dropped back against the bed. The groan barely had a chance to leave his mouth before he was reaching for her. He grabbed hold of her hips and picked her up, careful not to disturb her as she alternated between licking and kissing his cock and shifted her on the bed until her knees were resting on either side of his head, giving him the perfect view of the prettiest pussy that he’d ever seen.

Caressing her hips, Quinn leaned up and pressed a kiss against her soft slit, earning a moan, so he did it again, taking his time kissing a path along her slit before he followed that up by tracing her slit with his tongue and groaned loudly. She tasted so fucking sweet, Quinn thought, unable to help himself as he licked her slit again before he slid his tongue between her plump, soft lips and found her clit.

He took his time, licking her clit, loving the way that Bailey moaned as she wrapped her lips around his cock again and slowly took him back in her mouth. While she moaned around his cock, Quinn ran the tip of his tongue from her clit to her core and slid his tongue inside her. She moaned around his cock as he slowly fucked her with his tongue, sliding it deep inside her and wishing like hell that it was his cock.

But that wasn't an option.

At least not right now.

He'd promised his grandmother that he'd never take any chances, and up until now, he'd never been fucking tempted to break that promise. But god, did he want to know what it felt like as her silky walls gripped his cock and squeezed him dry. He wanted to feel her grow wet around him, wanted to fuck her and lose control, he wanted-

Christ, he wanted her.

"Quinn," came the whimpered moan as Bailey released him from her mouth and pressed her forehead against his hip as she squirmed over him, her pussy pushing down against his mouth as Quinn slid his tongue inside her.

He ignored the way that his cock ached, desperate for her touch, and kept licking her, alternating between fucking her with his tongue and licking her clit as he reached between them and found her breast, gently squeezing it in his hand as his thumb found her nipple and-

Thought he was going to lose his fucking mind when she climbed off him. Before he could reach for her, Bailey was turning around and climbing onto his lap and tearing a groan from him when her mouth found his as her pussy spread open over his cock. When he felt her small hand wrap around his cock as she rubbed her pussy against him, Quinn thought he'd died and gone to heaven.

So...fucking...good...

His hands found her breasts as she teased his cock and rubbed her wet pussy over him, her clit rubbing against him as she moved. Every roll of her hips dragged her pussy higher, her strokes became desperate until she pulled her hand away so that she could fist the sheets in her hands as she moved over him faster, rubbing her pussy along the underside of his cock until her clit was teasing the tip and-

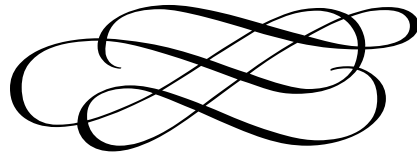
"Quinn," Bailey whimpered against his mouth as the next roll of her hips caused the tip to press against her core and-

Groaned as she pushed back against him, slowly taking him inside her.

"I don't want to stop," Bailey whispered against his lips as Quinn lay there, struggling to find the words to put a stop to this, knowing just how fucking badly this would end and-

"Then, don't," Quinn said, only to groan when Bailey pushed back and slowly took his cock inside her.

CHAPTER 41



S he was fucking lying, Nathan told himself as he paced his living room, wondering why he didn't turn her over when he had the chance and-
Fuck!

"Start talking," Nathan said as he pulled his phone out of his back pocket and moved to text Bailey, only to decide against it. She had enough to worry about right now and didn't need this bullshit added to the mix. After a slight hesitation, he shifted his attention to the small woman who refused to tell him anything.

God, she was a pain in the ass, Nathan thought as he ran his eyes over her, taking in brown hair that was several shades darker than Bailey's, the long curls that looked incredibly soft, the bright blue eyes narrowed on him, an adorable nose that looked familiar, a bottom lip fuller than the top, and the incredibly fucking generous curves that had him wondering what it would be like to-

There was something seriously fucking wrong with him.

"You should have let me get the letter back," Casey bit out, looking absolutely fucking lost at the moment.

"He had a fucking gun," Nathan bit out, still furious with himself.

He could have fucking ended this.

As soon as he heard the footsteps, he should have shoved her in the closet and did whatever it took to end this tonight, but...

The idea of something happening to her had him staying in that closet and waiting until after the asshole got what he came for to leave. He fucking hated standing there, knowing just how fucking close he was to putting an

end to this bullshit, and made sure that the woman that wouldn't stop fucking trembling didn't do anything stupid.

As soon as the asshole left the bedroom, Nathan moved his ass, making it into the living room just in time to see the asshole make his way down the fire escape. Before he could go after him, the little pain in the ass was there, determined to get the letter and necklace back, forcing him to grab her before she did something to get herself killed and-

"Why didn't you turn me over?" Casey asked the one question that he'd been asking himself since Quinn's men stormed into the apartment.

He should have turned her over and made sure that she never set foot inside Haven Technologies again, but...

Christ, what if she really was Bailey's sister?

"What was in that letter?" Nathan asked, needing to know what was in that letter so that he could protect his sister.

"I already told you," Casey said, sighing heavily as she slowly took in his living room while he stood there watching her as her gaze briefly hesitated on the doors and windows before focusing back on him.

"And you're going to tell me again. What was in that letter?" Nathan asked, dropping down on the chair across from her as he waited for an answer while he tried to figure out how that asshole got past security.

With the new security system, guards, and cameras, there was no way that he should have been able to get into the building, never mind make it to Bailey's apartment. Then again, since someone hacked into their system and bypassed all the security points that he'd paid a fortune for, he should probably be more concerned that he'd made his way past Tristan's men.

He'd known Tristan for ten years and he'd been the first one that Nathan turned to when he realized that Bailey was in trouble, but now, the thought of his sister in Tristan's care...

He needed to come up with another fucking plan.

But first...

"The letter," Nathan prompted when Casey didn't say anything.

"Is none of your business," Casey said with a stubborn tilt of her chin, a move that reminded him so much of Bailey.

Nodding, Nathan considered his next words as he sat there, watching her and found himself wondering who the real Casey was. For months, he'd barely noticed her, never really thought about her and when he did, he wondered why his sister hired her. She was beyond fucking incompetent,

scared of her own fucking shadow, and-

“Was it all a lie?” Nathan found himself asking her.

“Was what all a lie?” Casey murmured absently as her gaze once again shifted to his apartment door and landed on the deadbolt.

“The act,” Nathan said before adding, “Pam.”

“Meaning?” Casey asked, shifting her gaze once again to the windows.

“Acting like you couldn’t walk and breathe at the same time,” Nathan said, watching as her lips twitched.

Clearing her throat, Casey said, “I may have overdone it a bit there.”

“Meaning?” Nathan murmured, shifting to get more comfortable as he watched her.

“That Bailey and I share more than just a mother,” Casey said, making him wonder about that.

“Were you mentioned in the letter?” Nathan asked as he ran several possibilities through his head.

“Yes,” Casey said as she pulled her phone out of her bag, only to sigh when he reached over and plucked the phone out of her hand.

“By name?” Nathan asked, turning her phone off before slipping it into his pocket.

“Yes,” Casey said as she held her hand out, but he simply ignored her and continued.

“Does anyone know who you really are?” Nathan asked before something occurred to him. “Does Bailey know?”

“No one knows,” Casey said, shaking her head as she gave up waiting for him to give her back her phone and dropped back against the couch with a sigh.

“Why is that?” Nathan murmured.

“Because she didn’t need to know,” Casey said as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“Then, why go through so much bullshit to get into her life?” Nathan asked, watching as she looked away while she mumbled, “I just wanted to make sure that she was okay.”

“And when you realized that she wasn’t...”

When she didn’t respond, Nathan slowly nodded to himself as he said, “You decided to stay.”

Jaw clenching, she bit out, “I didn’t mean to hurt her,” making him frown until he remembered the incident with the bat.

“You expect me to believe that?” Nathan asked, even though he honestly had no fucking idea what he believed at the moment.

For all he knew, she had a partner and that whole scene in Bailey’s bedroom had been a show to get him to relax his guard around her. It wasn’t a risk that he was willing to take, especially when it came to his sister’s safety. There was too much bullshit going on and he had no fucking clue who he was supposed to trust right now. He just-

“I don’t care what you believe. I wouldn’t hurt her,” Casey snapped, looking adorably pissed and god, did she fucking remind him of Bailey.

“But you’d lie to her,” Nathan drawled, watching as her shoulders suddenly dropped in defeat as she mumbled, “It wasn’t like that.”

“Then, what was it like?”

When it became obvious that she had no plans of telling him anything else, Nathan pulled his phone out of his pocket and-

“You can’t do that,” Casey said, sighing heavily as she plucked the phone out of his hand.

“Is there a reason why you don’t want Quinn to know?” Nathan asked, moving to take his phone back only to have the little brat walk away as she focused her attention on his phone and began tapping away.

“Because I don’t trust him,” Casey mumbled absently as she dropped back down on the couch, still tapping away.

Sighing heavily, Nathan got to his feet and moved to grab his phone back when she took him by surprise. “Your phone has been cloned,” making him frown.

“That’s impossible,” Nathan said, moving to grab his phone back when she shifted it out of his reach, her gaze never leaving his phone as she did whatever the hell it was that she was doing.

“And yet, it is,” Casey murmured, frowning down at whatever she was looking at.

“I had Kelly check it. It’s fine,” he said, once again reaching for his phone.

“Then, she screwed up because this phone has definitely been cloned,” Casey said, shaking her head in disgust as she turned his phone over and took out the SIM card.

“You really expect me to believe that?” Nathan asked as she tossed his phone back to him.

“I honestly don’t care what you believe, but I’m not about to let you do

anything that would put Bailey in danger,” Casey said as she got up and made her way to his kitchen.

“I would never do anything to put my sister in danger,” Nathan bit out as he watched her toss the SIM card down the drain and turn the garbage disposal on.

“Then, we’re on the same page,” Casey mumbled absently as she made her way back into the living room and straight for his laptop.

“I already had that checked,” Nathan said as he watched her break into his computer a hell of a lot faster than Bailey ever did, letting him know that he’d underestimated her.

“By...” Casey said, letting the word trail off as she focused on whatever she was doing.

“Kelly,” Nathan said, watching as she slowly nodded at whatever she was looking at.

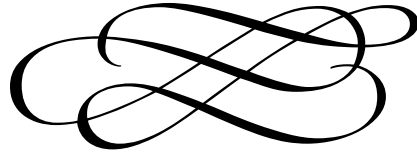
“What else did she check?” Casey asked, throwing him a questioning look.

“Why?” Nathan asked, wondering what else he didn’t know about her.

“Because someone’s been watching your every move,” she said, pointing at the small green light on his laptop and-

Aw, fuck.

CHAPTER 42



“Well, as much fun as this has been,” Casey murmured absently as she slowly took in the small hotel room that the man who’d clearly lost his mind dragged her to, “and this has been fun, I’m afraid that I have to be going now.”

With that, Casey moved to grab her backpack, only to have the man who’d been pacing back and forth in front of the small bed, ramming his fingers through his normally meticulously combed hair as he continued yelling at whichever unfortunate individual was on the other end of that call, step in front of her and block her from going anywhere. When she moved to step around him, Nathan shifted to block her again and held up his hand for her to wait.

Really not in the mood for any more bullshit tonight, Casey regally gestured to her phone and said, “You can keep the phone,” and once again moved to step around him.

When he shot her that glare that he’d used on her at his apartment right before he decided to take her to a secondary location, or would this be considered a third location? Casey absently wondered, only to shrug it off, deciding that she’d had enough for one night. Decision made, Casey adjusted the bag over her shoulder, turned and climbed onto the bed and quickly made her way across the bed, climbed off it with a satisfied sigh and-

Found the large man who was really starting to annoy her once again standing in her way. When he narrowed those dark eyes on her that she always found incredibly sexy, Casey released a heartfelt sigh as she gestured for him to get on with it. Muttering, “I’ll call you back later,” to whoever he

was talking to, Nathan hung up the phone and tossed it on the bed.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Nathan said, getting straight to the point, which she appreciated, she really did, but since that wouldn’t work for her...

“I really am,” Casey said, reaching over to grab her phone, only to have the big jerk that was really starting to annoy the hell out of her grab it before she could.

“You’re staying,” Nathan bit out evenly with a look that told her that he was done talking about it.

Unfortunately for him, that look didn’t work on her.

“See you around,” Casey said, sighing heavily as she pulled her backup phone out of her bag and headed for the door as she debated her next move.

She-

“Let’s get something clear,” Nathan said as she suddenly found herself turned around and pressed back against the door. “You’re not going anywhere,” Nathan said coldly as he placed his arm against the door above her head and leaned down until he was looking into her eyes and she could smell his cologne. “Not when my sister’s life is in danger and not until you answer my questions.”

“I’m not behind this,” Casey said, meeting his glare with one of her own.

For a moment, Nathan didn’t say anything as he watched her.

“Prove it.”

Nodding slowly, Casey said, “Bailey has several small scars on her wrist that cross each other.”

“All that proves is that you can see,” Nathan said, looking even more pissed than he had a minute ago.

“Did she ever tell you how she got them?” Casey asked as she reached down and worked on removing the watch from her right arm.

“Is this where you make up a bullshit tale to try to convince me that you’re really Bailey’s sister?” Nathan asked coldly as he placed his other forearm against the door above her and leaned in closer.

“No, this is where I show you the matching scar and once again remind you that I really don’t care if you believe me or not,” Casey said as she held her arm up and-

“Hey!”

-found herself once again wondering why he was manhandling her when he grabbed her hand and dragged her back over to the bed so that he could pull her arm closer to the small lamp on the nightstand. That was followed by

tilting her arm to the side so that he could get a better look at her scars and had her swallowing hard when he reached over and gently traced the scars that still managed to give her nightmares with his fingertips.

“How?” Nathan asked, tracing the long, winding scar that matched Bailey’s much lighter scar, the one that she hadn’t been able to take her eyes off the first time that she laid her eyes on her sister last year.

“It doesn’t matter,” Casey said, shaking her head as she moved to take her arm back.

“How?” Nathan demanded, tightening his hold around her arm to stop her.

“I refused to let her go,” Casey said, refusing to look at him as she pulled her arm away and quickly placed her watch back on her wrist, not really in the mood to relive one of the worst nights of her life right now. She-

“You were there,” Nathan said, not asked, she noted as she once again shifted the bag over her shoulder and headed for the door, deciding that she’d answered enough of his questions.

Casey moved to open the door, only to pause and swallow hard before she said, “Please don’t tell Bailey about me.”

“I won’t,” came the softly murmured words that had her nodding as she opened the door and-

“Oh, come on!”

-once again found herself wondering why the big jerk was manhandling her.



“What are you doing?” Nathan found himself asking when the small woman that he prayed like hell wasn’t lying to him typed something into her iPad.

“Looking up the definition of kidnapping,” Casey mumbled absently, making his lips twitch.

Definitely related to the little pain in the ass that he adored, Nathan thought as he placed her phone on the nightstand as he glanced at the small alarm clock and nearly fucking groaned when he saw what time it was. He

had to be up in a few hours and try to figure out how he was going to clean this mess up and-

God, he was fucking exhausted, Nathan thought as he toed off his shoes and began unbuttoning his shirt while he watched Casey and couldn't help but wonder why he'd never noticed just how much alike she was to Bailey. Because she did everything that she could to make sure that he didn't notice her, Nathan thought as he ran his eyes over her, taking in the way that she worried her bottom lip between her teeth, the way that she frowned down at whatever she was reading and sighed.

"I'm not kidnapping you," Nathan explained as he pulled his shirt off and tossed it on the chair.

"Then, what would you call it?" Casey asked, glancing up to send him a questioning look.

"Keeping you safe," Nathan said, reaching for his belt while she stood there, blinking as she watched the move.

"By stripping?"

"God, you really are a pain in the ass like Bailey," Nathan said, sighing heavily as he pulled his belt free and quickly unsnapped his pants.

"She gets it from me," Casey murmured absently before she gestured awkwardly in his direction. "Ummm, what exactly are you doing?"

"Getting ready for bed. I'm exhausted," Nathan said, shoving his pants down.

"And this whole thing about keeping me safe?" she asked, watching as he reached down and tossed his pants on the chair before pulling his socks off and climbed into bed, more than fucking ready to put an end to this seriously fucked-up day.

"They have the letter, Casey," Nathan reminded her as he dropped back against the pillows with a heavy sigh.

"And?"

"And now they know that Bailey has a sister and if they saw you go into her apartment, it won't be long before they come after you," he explained, watching as she went back to worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

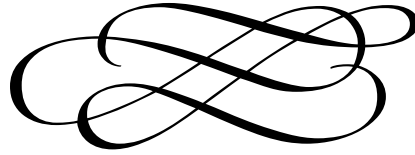
"And if they haven't..."

"Then, I'm going to need your help figuring out who's behind this and keep Bailey safe," Nathan said, watching Casey as she thought that over.

He watched as her gaze shifted to the door as she slowly exhaled before looking back at him and-

“What’s the plan?”

CHAPTER 43



God, what the fuck was he supposed to do now, Nathan found himself wondering as his gaze went back to the closed bathroom door and-

He should have turned her over.

Every time he found himself reaching for her phone to call Tristan, Casey's words played through his head, making him wonder just how badly he'd fucked up by letting Quinn take his sister. He didn't know him, didn't fucking like the way that he looked at his sister, but he couldn't risk something happening to her.

She was his little sister, his best friend, and the reason that he was going to drink one day. He needed to keep her safe, and right now, that meant trusting Quinn while he tried to put an end to this nightmare. If it was up to him, he'd close down Haven Technologies and start over, anything to keep his sister safe, but it would destroy Bailey.

She saw her employees as her friends and family, which was the reason why they were in this fucking mess, Nathan thought, giving up staring at the bathroom door and rolled onto his back. This had to fucking work, he told himself as he rubbed his hands roughly over his face before dropping them away and-

"What the fuck am I going to do?"

"Moving over would be a great start," the woman who took a long fucking time in the bathroom said seconds before Nathan found himself shoved over and the small woman that was seriously starting to piss him off, climbing into the bed next to him and-

Stole his pillow.

God, she was so much like the little pain in the ass, Nathan thought as he turned his head to glare at the little brat, only to find himself swallowing hard as he took in the small woman wearing his shirt. He took in her long, wavy, dark hair, the blue eyes watching him curiously before his gaze dropped to full, plump lips and-

What the hell was he doing?

“Your hair’s darker than Bailey’s,” Nathan said, shifting his attention back to her eyes to find them narrowed on him.

“I dyed it,” Casey said, shrugging it off as she settled more comfortably on her side as she considered him.

“Why?” he asked, reaching over to take one soft strand between his fingers and gently rubbed the silky strands between his fingertips, unable to help himself.

“Part of my disguise,” Casey murmured absently seconds before she worried her bottom lip between her teeth, looking as though she wanted to say something.

“What is it?” Nathan asked softly as he forced himself to release her hair.

Casey opened her mouth, only to close it, shake her head, and mutter, “Nothing. Forget it,” as she rolled over onto her back and stared up at the ceiling.

“Tell me,” Nathan said, so fucking curious about this woman.

For months, he’d barely noticed her, barely thought about her and-

That wasn’t true.

He’d noticed her.

But he had no idea why.

He’d noticed the way that she stood off by herself, but there was just something in her gaze that struck him as odd, something told him that the woman that couldn’t seem to get out of her own way didn’t miss a fucking thing. He’d shrugged it off, not really caring about his sister’s latest charity project, but when she stood next to him in the elevator or brushed against him as she scurried to get out of the room before anyone noticed her, Nathan couldn’t help but notice just how fucking soft her skin was and-

He really needed to get fucking laid, Nathan thought, once again wondering why he never took Jess up on any of her offers to spend the night. She was his type, incredibly beautiful, a perfect body, and there was no doubt in his mind that she was just looking for the same thing that he was, an escape from all the bullshit. Every time she offered, he reminded himself that

she was an employee and that wasn't a line that he was willing to cross, but now...

She wasn't the one that he was thinking about.

"What was Bailey like growing up?" Casey asked as she stared up at the ceiling, looking lost in thought.

Sighing heavily, Nathan rolled onto his back as he said, "A pain in the ass," with a fond smile.

"Like..."

"She had my father wrapped around her little finger," Nathan said, chuckling at the memory of his father looking absolutely fucking lost the first time that Bailey cried.

He couldn't remember all the details, but he knew that caffeine, the front step, and a video game were involved. She ended up skinning her knee pretty badly, enough that they ended up having to bring her to the emergency room and his father lost his fucking mind. She just sat there, quietly crying with a sniffle here and there and his father, the man that he couldn't remember ever letting anything get to him, had spent the entire time fidgeting, worrying his hands together, and looking like he was about to fucking lose it every time Bailey sniffled.

She was definitely a daddy's girl, Nathan thought, smiling as he thought about the way that Bailey managed to wrap the man around her little finger. The shit she could get away with...

"He loved her?" came the hesitant question that had Nathan turning his head to find Casey watching him.

"He adores her," Nathan promised her, watching the way that she looked lost in thought as she went back to staring up at the ceiling.

"And your mom?"

"Would lose her fucking mind if she knew what was going on," Nathan said, biting back a sigh as he thought about his parents.

He should have told them what was going on, but he'd promised Bailey that he wouldn't say anything. She didn't want them to worry. If he'd told their father what was going on, they would have taken her to the reservation and locked her in their grandparents' house and kept her there until they figured this out, and knowing his sister, she would have pouted every fucking minute, but she would have been safe.

Maybe that's what he should do, Nathan thought, go find his sister, tie the little brat up and throw her in the back of his car and bring her to their

grandparents' house so that their cousins could keep an eye on her, but it was already too late. Whatever this was, he couldn't risk putting their family in danger. He needed to put a stop to this before it was too late and he-

"Did she ever mention me?" came the softy whispered question that had him frowning as he once again found himself watching her. He noted the way that she stared at the ceiling, the way that she tried to act like the answer didn't bother her, but there was no mistaking the pain in her voice.

"What happened?" Nathan asked, turning over onto his side while he waited for an answer.

"I didn't heal fast enough," Casey said, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as he watched her chin begin to wobble as her eyes teared up before she reached up and angrily wiped at her face. "They promised that we would be back together after I left the hospital. Before every surgery, they promised that I would see her again, every time the pain became too much, they promised that everything would be okay and that I would be with my sister again, but they lied."

"They kept lying even after they transferred me to another hospital out of state, and then another, and kept lying until finally, there was no reason for them to lie anymore. They..." Casey said, her voice breaking as she moved to climb off the bed. "I can't do this."

Before the first sob broke free, Nathan was pulling her into his arms and pressing his lips against her forehead. When she moved to push him away, he tightened his hold around her and felt his heart break for her. He couldn't imagine losing Bailey. That first year after she came to live with him had been fucking brutal. Every time the social worker came, it had taken everything he had not to sneak Bailey out the back door and hide her, terrified that they were going to take her away.

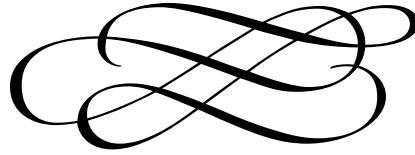
And now...

He would never survive it.

He couldn't imagine what Casey went through, losing her mother and her sister in the blink of an eye. He knew about the crash, but he never knew about Casey. From what his father said after he'd read the file that social services gave them, it had been a miracle that Bailey had survived and now Nathan had a pretty good idea why.

"You protected her in that crash, didn't you?" Nathan asked, only to swallow hard when Casey said, "I promised I would never let her go."

CHAPTER 44



Emerald Bay, Florida

“I ’m a good girl,” Bailey reminded herself as she lay there with her forehead pressed against Quinn’s shoulder while she struggled to ignore the incredibly thick-

Okay, so thinking about the incredibly thick tip that was currently stretching her in a way that made it impossible to think straight was definitely not helping, Bailey decided as she slowly exhaled. That was followed by deciding that she should probably be dealing with this inner turmoil issue somewhere else.

Releasing a shaky breath, Bailey said, “I’m going to need you to be the bigger person here and roll me onto the bed so that I can curl up into the fetal position and do my best to stop thinking about how good you feel inside of me right now.”

She felt Quinn go still beneath her seconds before he was wrapping his arms around her and rolling her onto her back as he slowly pulled that incredibly thick tip out of her, leaving her with no choice but to moan when the move was accompanied by pleasure. As soon as she was on her back, she mumbled, “Thank you,” with a snuffle, only to find herself wondering what Quinn was doing when he placed his hand on her belly and slowly slid his hand down to her navel and kept going while she lay there, struggling to think straight and-

“Oh, god...” Bailey somehow managed to get out on a mumble when that large hand slid down the rest of the way until it settled between her legs. That

was followed by his mouth finding her neck as he traced her slit with a fingertip, leaving her with no other choice but to spread her legs to make it easier for him. That felt so good, Bailey thought, unable to help but lick her lips as Quinn kissed her neck while he took his time teasing her slit with unhurried strokes.

“Is this okay?” Quinn asked as he kissed his way to her throat as he ran his fingertip over her slit one more time before he slid it between her lips and found her swollen clit.

“More than okay,” Bailey whispered, licking her lips as she dropped her head back to make it easier for him to brush his lips against her skin while he teased a path down her throat only to have her breath catch a moment later when his lips brushed against her nipple.

That felt so good, Bailey thought as her lips parted on a moan. Quinn released a groan as his lips wrapped around her nipple while that very talented fingertip teased her clit, gently rubbing circles around it, careful not to touch the tip where she needed his touch the most and driving her crazy.

“Quinn,” Bailey moaned, unable to stop her hips from shifting, desperate for his touch.

“Tell me what you need,” Quinn said, releasing her nipple as she reached up and ran her fingers through his hair.

“This,” Bailey said on a moan when his fingertip found the tip of her clit, and god, that felt incredible.

“This?” Quinn asked, rubbing his fingertip over her clit as he took her nipple back between his lips and gently suckled.

“Yes,” she whispered, spreading her legs even further when she felt that finger slowly make its way down to her core. He took his time tracing her core with his fingertip as he licked and gently sucked her nipple before releasing it so that he could shift over her and wrap his lips around the other one.

“You’re so fucking soft,” Quinn said, only to groan against her breast as he slid one long, thick finger inside her.

Her back arched off the bed as Quinn took his time sliding his finger inside of her while she lay there, struggling to convince herself that this was enough, but...

She wanted more.

Bailey cupped the back of his neck and gave him a gentle pull that had him releasing her breast and taking her mouth in another hungry kiss. She

moved her lips against his, meeting every stroke of his tongue as she reached down and wrapped her fingers around the hand moving between her legs and pulled it free, entwining their fingers together as she placed them on the pillow by her head.

With a groan, Quinn settled between her legs and-

“Oh, fuck...” he whispered hoarsely as his cock once again came to rest against her slit.

“You feel so good, Quinn,” Bailey whispered against his lips as she rolled her hips beneath him, rubbing her wet slit against the underside of his cock. A moment later, he tore a moan from her when he copied the move, rolling his hips back as she did the same and-

Left her feeling whole when she felt the large tip slip back inside of her.

“Be sure,” Quinn said softly against her lips, only to groan when she pushed back, taking another inch of the large cock filling her and-

He felt incredible, Bailey thought, struggling to breathe through the pleasure spreading throughout her body. She could feel every inch of him, from the thick, soft tip slowly making its way inside her to the veins wrapped around the incredibly thick, hard shaft starting to fill her. She’d never felt anything this good before, she thought, moaning his name, desperate for more.

“I’m sure,” Bailey promised him, her hands fisting in the comforter as Quinn wrapped his arms around her and rolled her onto her back, his intense grey eyes never leaving hers as he slowly pushed inside her, making her breath catch in her throat. He felt so good, she thought, unable to help but moan as he took his time filling her while he released the sexiest groan that she’d ever heard.

Intense gray eyes locked with hers as Quinn leaned down and took her mouth in an achingly sweet kiss that left her moaning his name as she reached up and cupped the face of the man that she was falling in love with.



He’d never realized just how fucking dangerous she really was.

Not until now, Quinn thought as Bailey cupped his face in her hands and fucking broke him when she moaned his name. As she caressed his face with her fingertips, Quinn took her mouth in a slow kiss as he reached down and ran his hand down her thigh, savoring the feel of soft, smooth skin against his. She felt so fucking good, he thought, cupping the back of her knee as he slowly rolled his hips, enjoying the feel of his cock sliding inside of her. She was so fucking wet and incredibly tight, Quinn thought as the feel of her walls tightening around his cock had him groaning, but it wasn't enough.

Not nearly fucking enough.

Using his hold, Quinn pulled her leg up and rolled over onto his back, wrapping his other arm around her as he moved. As soon as his back touched the bed, he was releasing his hold on her leg so that he could do the one thing that he craved more than anything.

Touch her.

“Oh, god...” Bailey managed to get out on a gasped whimper when the new position allowed her to push back, taking him deeper inside of her.

She was so beautiful, Quinn thought as he raised his head and took her mouth in a slow, hungry kiss that had Bailey moaning softly as she followed him as he laid his head back down on the pillow. As soon as he felt her breasts pressed against his chest, he was running his fingertips over her, taking his time running his fingertips along her spine before flattening his hands against warm, soft skin and ran them down to her generous ass as she slowly rode his cock.

Every slow roll of her hips had him groaning as the move caused her tight sheath to squeeze his cock. It had been a long fucking time since he had sex, but he knew that it had never felt like this before. It had never left him struggling to lose his fucking mind and no woman had ever felt as good as Bailey did in his arms.

Just being near her was addictive.

He'd never experienced anything like it before. Every time he was near her, Quinn felt himself relax and when he touched her...

Christ, it was like nothing that he'd ever felt before.

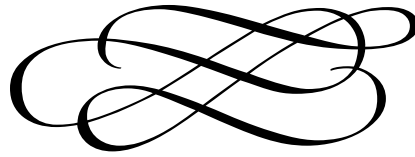
He loved the way that she teased him, the way that she dropped down on his lap like it was the most natural thing in the world to do, but he loved the way that she felt in his arms more than anything. He never knew that it could feel this good to touch a woman before, Quinn thought as he ran his fingertips over her back before he wrapped his arms back around her and

rolled her onto her back again.

Before her back touched the mattress, Quinn was moving, rolling his hips as he broke off the kiss so that he could watch her as he moved. His eyes locked with hers as he felt her sheath tighten around him, tearing a groan of pleasure from him as he watched her breath catch, and-

Realized just how fucking lost he'd be without her.

CHAPTER 45



Haven Technologies Building

“Good morning, Pam,” came the absently murmured greeting as Casey walked through the front door.

“Good morning,” Casey said with a nervous smile, easily slipping back into the role that she’d been playing for the better part of a year and helped herself to a donut from one of the many boxes lining the receptionist desk as she glanced back at the large security guard manning the front door that had given her a dismissive nod a moment ago to find him once again looking bored.

Deciding that it was now or never, Casey shifted her bag over her shoulder and made her way to the elevator, where she found a spot in the back, her gaze never leaving the front desk as she waited for the gate to close, praying that no one tried to stop her. When the gate finally closed a moment later, Casey took a bite of her donut and couldn’t help but wonder how long she had before Nathan sent security after her.

Then again, she was surprised that she’d been allowed to step foot in the building. She’d expected security to be waiting for her, but for whatever reason, Nathan hadn’t warned them, which she appreciated at the moment. It also meant that she really had to move her ass before he realized that she was here and-

God, what the hell was wrong with her? Casey found herself wondering as she took another bite of her delicious donut. She couldn’t believe that she’d cried. She never cried. But last night, once she’d started, she couldn’t

seem to stop. She wasn't sure how long she'd cried in Nathan's arms, but she remembered when she woke up to find his arms wrapped tightly around her.

She just...

Casey didn't know what she was thinking, but somehow, she'd found herself turned around in his arms, watching him sleep, unable to help but notice just how incredibly handsome he was. When that wasn't enough, she found herself running her fingertips along his jaw, enjoying the feel of light stubble teasing her fingertips before she forced herself to drop her hand away and climbed off the bed.

Ten minutes later, she was dressed and forcing herself not to look back as she walked out of that room and kept going. She stopped by the motel room that she'd been renting, packed the rest of her stuff, grabbed her laptop and debated breaking into Haven Technologies network remotely, only to decide against it.

The only way that she was going to be able to pull this off was by being here so that she could hide her activity and since she was currently supposed to be working as Bailey's incompetent assistant, she was going to be creative with how she spent the next few hours. As she debated between hiding in the supply closet or taking her chances and breaking into Bailey's apartment, the elevator stopped on the first floor and the man that she'd been hoping to avoid stepped inside.

Damn it!

Taking another bite of her donut, Casey dropped her gaze to the floor as she discreetly stepped to her left behind two men from accounting and then slowly started to make her way around them towards the elevator doors, deciding that she was going to have to go with Plan B when she felt a large hand wrap around her arm, stopping her.

Biting back a heavy sigh, she allowed Nathan to pull her back as she went to finish off her donut, only to have the jerk pluck the donut out of her hand and finish it off in one bite. He didn't say anything as the gate closed, and she didn't expect him to. When the elevator reached their floor, Casey moved to follow the small crowd off the elevator only to have Nathan give her arm a warning squeeze that had her staying where she was.

As soon as everyone was gone, Nathan reached over and quickly typed in his code for Bailey's apartment, making sure to keep his hold on her. Wondering how this was going to end, with the police or shouted threats, Casey slowly exhaled as she ran every possibility through her head until she

realized that she had two choices, the stairs by the elevator or the backstairs that was now heavily secured.

Since she didn't have time to screw around with the security system right now, Casey settled for the stairs by the elevator. Decision made, she stood there waiting until they reached their floor, making sure to stay relaxed as Nathan opened the gate and-

"We don't have much time, so whatever it is you're going to do, do it quickly," Nathan said, taking her by surprise when he released her arm and quickly made his way around the apartment, checking the rooms while she stood there, watching him.

"You're fine with me breaking into Haven Technologies?" Casey asked, needing to make sure that they were on the same page.

"If it means keeping my sister safe," Nathan said, checking the bathroom door before he glanced back at her, "then do it."

"Consider it done," Casey said, not needing to be told twice, she pulled her laptop out of her bag and quickly made her way to the couch, praying like hell that this worked.



This had to fucking work, Nathan told himself as he rammed his fingers through his hair and-

"If you could stop pacing, that would be great, thanks," the woman who'd nearly fucking destroyed him drawled.

"It's keeping me sane," Nathan said even as he forced himself to stop pacing and dropped down in the chair across from Casey, who hadn't looked up once since she'd started doing whatever the hell she was doing.

Other than confuse him, that is.

Last night, he'd nearly lost his fucking mind when the first tear rolled down her face. The sob that followed fucking destroyed him, but the feel of her in his arms...

God, he'd never felt anything like it.

He didn't know how to describe it, but he knew one thing, he'd never

wanted to let her go. He'd kept his arms wrapped around her long after she'd stopped crying, needing to know that she was safe and surprisingly, it had nothing to do with Bailey. He just...

Fuck.

He'd never wanted to let her go and that feeling only grew stronger this morning when he woke up with Casey in his arms, running her fingertips along his jaw. With every caress, he'd felt all the tension in his body fade away, leaving him struggling not to groan while her fingertips traced a path along his jaw.

When he felt her move away, it took everything in him to let her go and-

"You left this morning," Nathan said accusingly as he narrowed his eyes on the small woman that had felt so fucking good in his arms.

"Didn't have a choice," Casey said, not bothering to look up from her computer as she continued working.

"You could have stayed," Nathan said, wondering why he was reacting to her this way.

"I could have," Casey murmured in agreement with a nod before adding, "but if I did, whoever was trying to copy everything from Haven Technologies server would have everything they needed before they crashed it."

"What?" he asked, trying to make sense of what she was saying.

"Someone's trying to copy all your files, but I put a stop to it along with the virus they've tried to unleash on your system," Casey said, shrugging it off like it was no big deal, but it was a big fucking deal.

"Tell me that you're fucking joking," Nathan said, moving to get up and tear the computer out of her hands so that he could see for himself, but the small woman simply grumbled something to herself as she got up, crossed the short distance to his chair and-

"Look," Casey said, crawling onto his lap as she turned the computer around so that he could see what she was talking about.

"What the hell am I looking at?" Nathan asked, trying to focus on the computer screen instead of the small woman driving him fucking crazy.

"Right now, they're downloading the dummy files that I created," Casey said, shifting to get more comfortable as she pointed to the progress bar in one corner. "This is the virus that they tried to upload to the system, which I'm guessing is meant to distract everyone from what they're really doing as well as destroy everything once they got what they wanted, but I managed to

block it,” she explained as she pointed to the other corner.

“The progress bar is moving,” Nathan pointed out, doing his best not to panic, but it was a quickly losing battle knowing what was at risk here.

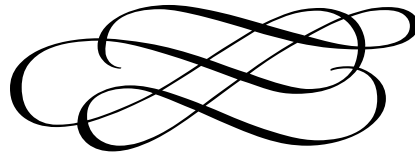
Everything.

“That’s what they’re seeing too, but the program has been stopped. I managed to delete what they sent and turned it back around on them, hiding it in the dummy folders so that they get a surprise along with this,” Casey said, pointing at the bottom of her screen where another progress bar was almost complete.

“What’s that?” Nathan asked, watching as the progress bar reached 98, 99, and then finally, 100.

“That,” Casey said with flourish as she turned the computer around between them, only to smile when she glanced down at the screen, “is the end to this game.”

CHAPTER 46



Emerald Bay, Florida

“Bailey,” Quinn whispered as he pressed a kiss against her bare shoulder, only to feel his lips twitch when the woman who normally acted like the Energizer Bunny grumbled pathetically in her sleep.

That was followed by a mutter, a whimper, and the cutest fucking pout that he’d ever seen as Bailey threw herself onto her stomach, shifted, and grumbled some more as she blindly reached down and grabbed the comforter and pulled it over herself as she curled up into a ball. When he reached over to adjust the comforter over her, Bailey released a vicious growl that had him chuckling.

It seemed that he finally found the one thing that was guaranteed to exhaust the small woman who never slept for more than a few hours at a time. As soon as she’d finished screaming his name, and Christ, just thinking about the way that she squeezed his cock dry had his cock hardening again, she’d mumbled something incoherently and ripped a groan from him when she decided to wiggle beneath him for the hell of it before she pulled him closer and promptly fell asleep.

When he shifted off her, she’d muttered angrily in her sleep, turned over, causing his sensitive cock to slip free from her, tearing another groan from him, curled onto her side, and shifted back against him as soon as he curled up behind her, and, of course, wiggled just to drive him fucking crazy. She was a cruel woman, Quinn thought as he moved closer so that he could curl up against her as he pressed a kiss against the back of her neck and-

Felt his lips twitch when Bailey decided to once again wiggle, causing the incredible ass that he'd loved holding while she rode him to tease his cock. "You're evil," Quinn murmured as he pressed another kiss against the back of her neck.

"I'm a good girl," Bailey said with a shuddering sigh as he wrapped his arm around her and-

Fuck!

-groaned when she decided that wiggling wasn't enough and pressed back against his cock as she slowly rolled her hips, the move causing her soft ass to caress the underside of his cock. Beyond fucking evil, Quinn thought, pressing another kiss against the back of her neck as he slid his hand up her soft belly and found her large breast.

"You really are," he murmured in agreement as Bailey reached back and cupped his hip as she kept moving back against him. God, she was driving him fucking crazy, Quinn thought, licking his lips hungrily as he gave her breast a gentle squeeze.

"I also need to get back to work if I'm going to meet my deadline," Bailey said with a reluctant sigh as she allowed herself one last teasing caress of his cock, reminding him that they both had a job to do. She needed to finish her program and he needed to figure out how he'd fucked up this badly.

Closing his eyes, Quinn pressed one last kiss against the back of her neck before he reluctantly pulled away from her and found himself wondering why it was so fucking hard letting her go. He-

Groaned when Bailey wiggled her ass enticingly against him one last time before she shoved the covers aside and moved to crawl off the bed only to lower herself onto her elbows and knees with a heartfelt sigh and an absently mumbled, "I'm going to need you to finish what you started," making his lips twitch.

"I started this?" Quinn asked, moving to sit up.

"You really did," Bailey said with a heartfelt sigh and a pointed wiggle of her ass that had him chuckling as he leaned over and kissed her hip.

"And all that wiggling?" Quinn asked as he moved behind her.

"Helped you," Bailey said on a soft moan when his hard cock brushed against her ass.

"Tormenting me helped me?" Quinn asked as he ran his hands over her back and hips.

“It’s helping you grow as a person,” Bailey mumbled into the pillow, only to mumble, “Oh, god,” when he ran one hand between her legs.

“That’s very generous of you,” Quinn murmured absently as he watched his thumb move over the soft, wet slit between her legs.

“It’s what I do,” Bailey said, only to moan when Quinn turned his hand so that he could slide his finger between her soft lips and found her swollen clit.

“And now?” he murmured absently, watching his finger move between her slit as he wrapped his hand around his cock.

“I’d really like you to finish what you started,” Bailey said on a soft moan as she spread her legs further apart.

Running his hand over his cock, Quinn moved closer to her as he dropped his hand away and traced her slit with his cock, unable to help but groan when the move coated the tip of his cock with her arousal. That felt so fucking good, Quinn thought, groaning as he ran the tip between the soft lips between her legs, alternating between teasing her clit and the entrance of the sheath that felt fucking incredible wrapped around him last night.

Quinn knelt there for another moment, watching his cock tease her before he slid the tip down to her core and-

“Aw, fuck...”

-groaned when Bailey pushed back, slowly taking his cock inside of her with a soft moan. She was definitely going to be the death of him, Quinn thought, groaning as he watched his cock disappear only to reappear a moment later, glistening before she pushed back, taking him back inside of her as his head dropped back on a groan.

He’d never felt anything better, Quinn thought, slowly exhaling as his hands gently caressed her hips as she moved. So fucking good, he thought as his head dropped forward and he watched her move for another moment before he used his hold on her hips to stop her from moving, keeping her firmly against him.

“Stop teasing me,” Bailey managed to get out on a moan as she dropped her head against the bed.

“Is that what I’m doing?” Quinn murmured absently as he slid one hand away from her hip and ran it down the middle of her back, gently caressing her skin as he shifted behind her and slowly pulled back until just the tip was left inside of her.

“Oh, god, that feels so good,” she moaned against the bed as she grabbed

hold of the pillows.

“You like that?” Quinn asked as he slowly pushed back inside of her.

Nodding against the mattress, she said, “Enough to let you keep doing that,” making his lips twitch even as he couldn’t help but moan as her sheath tightened around him.

“That’s very generous of you,” Quinn said as he allowed himself one last slow roll of his hips before he released his hold on her hip and leaned over her, placing one hand on the bed next to her hand and pressed his lips between her shoulders as he covered her body with his.

“I know,” Bailey mumbled into the mattress as he reached beneath her and-

Tore a whimper from the small woman beneath him when his fingertips found her swollen clit. As he moved, Quinn kept his thrusts shallow, savoring the feel of his cock moving inside of her as he took his time running his fingertips over her clit. She felt so fucking good, Quinn thought, groaning as he pressed another kiss against the back of her neck as he listened to her moan his name.

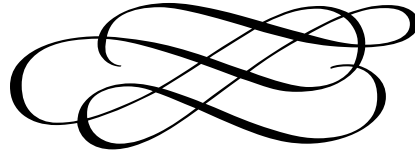
“Quinn, please,” Bailey said as she gave up her hold on the pillow so that she could reach back and cover his hand as he teased her clit while he continued rolling his hips. He’d never felt anything more perfect than this, Quinn thought as he closed his eyes and lost himself in her.

This felt so fucking right.

She was...

The only fucking thing that mattered to him.

CHAPTER 47



Haven Technologies Building

“What am I looking for?” Nathan asked as he stood there, willing the elevator to move faster.

“You’ll know when you see it,” Casey said, checking her phone as he reached over and pressed the button for the second floor again, praying that it wasn’t too late.

“I want you to go back upstairs and wait,” Nathan said, slowly exhaling as he watched the second floor come into view through the gate and-

“Not happening,” Casey said as he reached for the gate.

“Casey, I’m not fucking around right now. Go upstairs and...what the hell is that?” Nathan bit out, only to end up frowning in confusion as he pushed the gate open when the sounds of “Mmmmbop,” blasting suddenly hit them.

“The final piece of the puzzle,” Casey said as she moved past him.

“You really are like the little pain in the ass,” Nathan bit out as they headed towards the large group of employees forming in the back of the room.

“Turn it off!”

“Dear God, someone turn it off!” someone shouted as Nathan pushed his way through the group to find Jess covering her ear with one hand and yanking the power cord from the wall with the other.

“I’m trying!” Jess said, wincing when the move only caused the volume to go higher.

“Pull the battery out!” John said as he moved to do just that when Casey cut in front of him and quickly dropped down in the desk chair and set to work on the laptop that belonged to the woman that Nathan didn’t see anywhere.

“Not yet,” Casey murmured absently as she broke past Kelly’s password in a matter of seconds.

“Let me get in there and see if I can stop this,” Jess offered as she moved to reach for Kelly’s laptop.

“She’s got this,” Nathan said, making her pause as he threw one last look around the large room before he moved closer, placing his hand on the back of Casey’s chair as he watched her work. Within seconds, the music was turned off and Casey was quickly going through Kelly’s files.

“What’s going on?” came the question that had Nathan glancing back over his shoulder to find everyone moving closer to see what Casey was doing.

“Nothing. Why don’t you guys go back to work and we’ll take care of this?” Nathan said with a pointed look that had them grumbling as they reluctantly went back to work.

Once they were gone, Nathan turned his attention to Jess, who was frowning in confusion as she watched Casey work. “Where’s Kelly?”

“Umm, I have no idea,” Jess said, looking even more confused as she gestured to Casey. “What the hell is she doing?”

“Putting an end to this nightmare,” Nathan said as he leaned in closer to Casey to watch her work. “What have you got?”

“She’s managed to access this computer remotely,” she said, making his stomach drop because that was the last fucking thing that she should have been able to do.

“Did she manage to get into our system?” he asked as he watched her fingers fly over the keyboard as windows were opened and closed just as quickly.

“Not from a lack of trying,” Casey murmured absently as she pulled up another screen, this one with information that was being generated while they watched.

“Can you tell where she is?” Nathan asked, moving to take a knee next to her only to decide that wasn’t going to work.

Without a word, he picked Casey up, earning a disgruntled grumble from the small woman who didn’t stop typing as he sat down in the chair and

settled her on his lap. “I know where she’s not,” Casey said, shifting to get comfortable on his lap as he wrapped his arm around her and shifted them closer to the desk.

“Where?” Nathan asked, watching her work.

“She’s definitely not in the building,” Casey said as she continued to do whatever it was that she was doing.

“Nathan, what’s going on?” Jess asked, shifting her attention from the small woman on his lap to the computer.

“It’s a long story,” Nathan said with a heavy sigh as he found himself absently caressing Casey’s stomach, needing the comforting action to stop him from losing his fucking mind.

This had to work.

“I bet,” Jess said as she pointed to the screen. “There are two IP hits now.”

“Smart,” was all Casey had to say as she worked while Nathan sat there, regretting all of those times that he ignored his sister when she rambled on about all of this shit.

“And now, there’s a third,” Casey said, sighing heavily as she somehow managed to type faster.

“What are you doing?” Nathan asked, slowly exhaling as he struggled not to lose his fucking mind.

“Making sure that the only file they’re getting is the one that I gave them,” Casey said, clicking away, and Christ, was she fast, Nathan thought as he watched her work.

“What file?” Jess asked as she grabbed a chair and dragged it closer.

“The one that’s going to tell me everything that I need later,” Casey mumbled.

“What does that mean?” Nathan asked, watching as “Massachusetts” suddenly appeared by the first IP address, making his stomach turn. A few seconds later, “Chesterville” joined it.

“Isn’t that where Quinn took Bailey?” Jess asked as Nathan watched “Thorne, Georgia” appear near the second IP address.

“Yes, it is,” Nathan said as he watched “Emerald Bay, Florida” appear by the third IP address and-

Oh, fuck...



Emerald Bay, Florida

“Why are you being so mean to me?” Bailey asked, unable to help but pout as she watched the large man who clearly didn’t understand her needs as he took another sip from the Coke that had been left outside their door as promised.

“Because you’re a pain in the ass,” Quinn said with a heartfelt sigh as though the knowledge somehow pained him as he placed the Coke back on the nightstand and reached for her.

“That was my Coke,” Bailey mumbled sadly as she allowed herself to be pulled onto his lap.

“Which you got for an interrogation that I still have questions about,” Quinn murmured absently as he placed his hands on her jean-clad hips while she took in the incredibly handsome man that she couldn’t seem to get enough of.

Last night...

She honestly had no idea how to describe just how good it felt to be in his arms. The way that he’d held her, touched her, and the way that he’d looked into her eyes as he moved over her, his gaze softening as he’d leaned down and took her mouth in a tender kiss. He’d swallowed her moans, groaned her name when she screamed his and held her like she was the most important thing in the world to him while she’d struggled to catch her breath and-

She never wanted to let him go.

“You know my asking price,” Bailey said with a firm nod as she shifted to get more comfortable on his lap.

“Do I?” Quinn murmured as he leaned in and kissed her cheek.

“I believe you do,” Bailey said with a heartfelt sigh as she began toying with one of the buttons on his shirt.

“Refresh my memory,” Quinn said, absently running his hands down her thighs as his gaze met hers.

“I like to be worshiped,” Bailey said, gesturing for him to get on with it.

“I’ll do my best to remember that,” Quinn murmured absently as he considered her.

“It would make things easier, especially if you threw a Coke into the mix,” Bailey assured him as she watched him think that over for a moment and-

“What are you keeping from your brother?” Quinn asked as he settled back against the headboard, his intense gaze remaining locked on her.

“Many things,” Bailey said as she couldn’t help but decide that this would be the perfect time to finish getting a few answers of her own. “You know what I’ve been wondering?” she asked as she casually reached over and helped herself to the Coke.

“And what is that?” Quinn drawled as he plucked the Coke out of her hand.

“Were you ever planning on taking me back to Massachusetts?” Bailey asked, only to follow that up with a grumble as she watched him finish off the Coke.

“No,” he said with absolutely no hesitation, his gaze remained locked on her as he placed the can back on the nightstand.

Nodding, Bailey thought that over. “And that whole scene with Nathan firing you?” she asked, watching his lips twitch as he went back to running his hands over her thighs.

“It was something that we worked out ahead of time to let me know that he suspected someone,” he explained, taking her by surprise.

“It was a trap?” Bailey asked, watching him curiously.

“Yes,” Quinn murmured as he trailed his fingertips up her thigh and over her arm, leaving a trail of goosebumps behind.

“You knew Jonathan was lying?” she asked as he leaned back in and kissed her forehead.

“Yes,” he said against her skin as he took his time trailing his fingertips over her arm.

“How?” Bailey asked, trying to ignore just how good it felt to have his fingertips teasing her skin.

“What are you hiding from Nathan?” Quinn asked, pulling away only to turn his head so that he could press his lips against the spot just beneath her ear, making her breath catch.

“You have to be more specific,” Bailey said, feeling his lips twitch against her skin.

“Pam,” Quinn said, making her go still before she remembered who she was dealing with here and shrugged it off, hoping that it would be enough to move on.

“She’s an excellent assistant,” Bailey assured him as she shifted and opened her mouth to continue with her interrogation, only to end up releasing a soft moan when the devious man gently suckled on her neck, making it really difficult to focus.

“I’m sure she is,” Quinn murmured, only to pause so that he could press another kiss against her neck, “tell me how you met her.”

“Why are you so curious about Pam?” Bailey asked as she struggled to bite back a wince, wondering if Nathan found out.

“I’m curious about everyone you’ve lied for,” Quinn drawled as he brushed his lips across her neck and-

“Oh, god...”

-struggled to remember what they were talking about when his lips brushed against her ear, making it really difficult to focus.

“Where did you meet her?” Quinn asked, pressing one last kiss against her neck before he pulled back so that he could-

“Ran into her,” Bailey managed to get out when his lips found her throat.

“Where?” he asked, and when she didn’t answer him fast enough, Quinn turned his head so that his lips trailed down her throat, making her moan.

The man was evil, Bailey decided as she shifted on his lap to make it easier for him to continue doing that thing that he was really good at while she answered him. “Outside the coffee shop.”

“What was she doing there?” Quinn asked as he absently kissed a path to her chin and his hands slid back up her thighs.

“Looking for a job,” Bailey said, wondering how such a simple touch could feel this good.

“And?”

“And I, ummm, may have broken my promise to Nathan,” she said, pretty sure that he already knew everything. The man was devious, after all.

“Meaning...”

“I didn’t run a background check on her,” Bailey admitted, struggling to bite back a wince when she felt him go still against her.

“Because?” Quinn asked with one last kiss before he leaned back so that he could watch her as he waited for an answer that he wasn’t going to like.

She opened her mouth, only to rethink that decision, closed it, cleared her

throat, and then, finally, “I would very much like to ensure that this won’t lead to Nathan following through with that threat to beat my ass.”

“I can promise that your brother won’t beat your ass,” Quinn drawled as she felt herself relax, only to wince when he added, “because I’ll most likely be spanking it.”

Clearing her throat, Bailey said, “In that case, then, I’m going to require you to promise not to do that.”

“Depends on what you tell me,” Quinn murmured, leaning in to brush his lips against hers.

“I’m afraid that I’m going to need a better offer than that,” Bailey said, making his lips twitch against hers.

“I’m willing to overlook the fact that you managed to negotiate a second Coke behind my back,” Quinn drawled, which was probably going to be the best offer that she was going to get.

“Because I knew that she was running away from something,” Bailey finally grumbled, only to swallow hard when he said, “And you still hired her,” and-

“Oh, that can’t be good,” Bailey mumbled weakly when she saw the look on his face.

When he didn’t say anything after a minute, which was really starting to concern her, especially when a muscle in his jaw began ticking, she cleared her throat, shifted, and decided that this would probably be a good time to change the subject. “I should probably get to work now,” Bailey murmured, even though she had to admit that might be an issue with her laptop currently locked in a metal bin somewhere.

She opened her mouth to inquire about his laptop, only to rethink that plan when his eyes took on a dangerous glint and-

“Why can’t you access your files remotely?” Quinn asked, thankful for the change of subject even as she tried to figure out the best way to explain this.

“Technically, I can, but I choose not to because I don’t like to take chances,” Bailey said, only to decide that she should probably further explain when his eyes narrowed dangerously on her. Clearing her throat, she continued. “Haven Technologies’ server is set up for in-house use only. I set it up to stop anyone from accessing files from an outside IP as well as set a safeguard on the files to lock if the laptops were taken out of the building.”

“And if they make a copy of the file?” Quinn asked, looking lost in

thought.

“They won’t be able to access it without my key,” Bailey said, shrugging it off.

“What about the employees who are working on the program?” he asked as he ran his hands back down her thighs.

“I broke the project down into pieces and assigned each piece to a different team, making sure that it couldn’t be pieced together without my code. So, even if someone was able to get their hands on every part, they wouldn’t be to-”

“Piece it together,” Quinn finished for her with a nod of understanding. “Are your files in the same folder?”

“No, I learned my lesson the first time that one of my games was stolen,” Bailey said with another shrug as she gave up playing with the buttons on his shirt and reached up and ran her fingertips along his jaw, enjoying the feel of his early morning whiskers against her skin.

“Meaning?” Quinn asked as he turned his head and kissed her palm.

“I keep my files on a separate server along with the completed parts from my team,” Bailey admitted as she leaned forward and brushed her lips against his.

“Does anyone else know?” Quinn asked, running his hands back up her thighs and over her hips as he returned the kiss, making her moan softly as she felt herself melting in his arms. God, she was quickly becoming addicted to his touch and that terrified her, but not enough to put a stop to this.

“No,” Bailey said, moving to wrap her arms around him.

“Good. Keep it that way,” Quinn said as he reached up and ran his fingertips along her jaw. “Where does Jonathan’s program play into this?”

“How much do you know about coding?” Bailey asked, not really sure how she was going to explain this.

“Nothing,” Quinn murmured with a slight shake of his head as he leaned in and brushed his lips against hers.

“That makes it more difficult to explain this,” Bailey admitted as she worried her bottom lip between her teeth while she tried to figure out how to explain this to him.

“Try me,” Quinn said, leaning back against the headboard as he took her hands in his and entwined their fingers together.

Slowly exhaling, Bailey said, “This code for this game is more advanced than any of the other games that I’ve created and with it broken down like

this, I needed something to hold it all together and make the connection seamless, but that's a problem sometimes with millions of lines of code, each one with a different code structure because of how I broke this down. His program would have made it easier for players to move between levels and made sure that everything the player earned, coins, extra lives, powers, weapons, etc., moved with them."

"Isn't that the norm for video games?" Quinn asked, looking genuinely confused.

Shaking her head, Bailey said, "Not like this."

"What's different about this game?"

"Everything," Bailey said, unable to bite back an excited smile as she thought about her newest baby.

"Meaning?" Quinn asked softly as he leaned in and brushed his lips against hers again.

"Normally, each level provides the same player experience, making it easier for players to share codes and tips and know what to expect in the game. It also allows them to beat the game faster when they play it again because they've played it before and know what to expect, but not this game. I've created an AI program to enhance the experience so that it learns from the player, adapting to their skills, choices, and weakness so that it changes with each level, providing the player with a challenge and a whole new experience every time they play the game. There's nothing like it on the market. A million players could play this game and every one of them would have a different experience."

"Jesus Christ..." Quinn said, looking absolutely stunned.

"That's another reason why the game has been broken down into so many parts because the game needs information and code to work with to make this happen," she explained with a shrug.

"And Jonathan's program would allow this?" he asked, watching her curiously.

"Yes and no. I've already developed the program to pull it off, but his program would have made it easier to connect everything," Bailey said, slowly exhaling as she thought about all the work that she needed to get done.

"Can you pull this off without it?"

"Yes, it will just take more time, something that we've been trying to avoid," Bailey said, trying not to think about all of the sleepless nights ahead.

"Have you ever accessed the files from outside Haven Technologies

before?” Quinn asked, looking lost in thought.

“I’ve never had to before,” Bailey said, even as she told herself that she really didn’t have a choice anymore and-

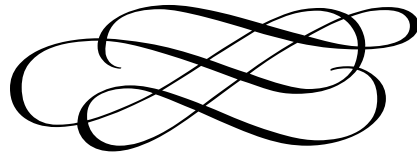
Suddenly found herself placed on the bed next to him with a kiss on her forehead. That was followed by her grumbling pathetically as she watched him climb off the bed with an absently murmured, “Stay here,” and headed for the door.

“Fine,” Bailey mumbled sadly as she watched him go even as she reminded herself that she had a job to do. She allowed herself a moment to pout before she reluctantly reached over and helped herself to his iPad, deciding that this would be a good time to figure out what she was going to do about her laptop and-

I miss you.

-felt sick to her stomach when she saw the text message waiting for him.

CHAPTER 48



“**Y**ou fucked up this time,” Tristan said, not bothering to look up from the file on his desk.

“Yes, I did,” Quinn said as he sat down in the leather chair in front of the large oak desk as he thought over everything he’d just learned and-

Christ, no wonder they were after her.

He didn’t know a lot about video games, but he knew enough to know that what she just told him was going to be a game-changer. It also meant that the pool of suspects just expanded into a fucking nightmare. Every video game developer in the world was going to want to get their hands on this game, which meant that she wasn’t going to be safe until the game was released.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you knew her?” Tristan drawled as he turned another page.

“I told you that I needed to be replaced,” Quinn reminded him.

Nodding absently, Tristan said, “Yes, you did, but you didn’t tell me why.”

“Would it have really made a difference?” Quinn asked as he watched the man who’d saved his life.

“Probably not,” Tristan murmured as he turned another page. “But it definitely would have made a difference finding out that you were fucking a client,” he drawled as he leaned back in his chair and leveled cold blue eyes on Quinn.

“She’s not a client anymore,” Quinn bit out as he forced himself to sit there, knowing that he was the one that fucked this up. He’d never crossed

this line before, never been tempted, but with Bailey...

He wasn't willing to give her up.

"No, she's not," Tristan said as he reached over and picked up the file that he'd been looking at off his desk and tossed it to him.

"What's this?" Quinn asked as he looked down at the file in his hands.

"The background check that we ran on Kelly Johnson," Tristan said as Quinn took in the face sheet, noting the list of convictions that Kelly managed to rack up by her eighteenth birthday.

Forgery.

Identity theft.

Burglary.

Theft.

Credit card theft.

Assault.

And finally, probation violation.

"When did this come in?"

"A few hours after it was confirmed that she was behind everything," Tristan said, taking him by surprise.

"How?" Quinn asked as he tossed the file back on the desk.

"The only thing that I know right now is that it was confirmed that her computer has been set up with remote access to Haven Technologies. They were able to track her down through a virus that had been uploaded to their system to destroy all of Haven Technologies' files, including the game that Bailey was currently developing. The police have a warrant out for her arrest."

"Shit," Quinn bit out as he rubbed his hands roughly down his face.

"Ten minutes after you left yesterday, she booked a plane ticket to Massachusetts. From there, she booked a hotel just outside of Chesterville where half of my men are heading now. The rest of my men are assisting the police, along with several Haven Technologies' employees. So far, they've been able to tear through her bank records and found large deposits made just before each incident and immediately afterward, including yesterday's attack on their servers."

"What else?" Quinn asked, wishing like hell that he'd been wrong, especially since he knew how much this was going to hurt Bailey. For whatever reason, she'd trusted Kelly and now she was about to find out that one of her best friends had tried to fuck her over.

“They found a collection of thumb drives in her apartment filled with Haven Technologies’ files, including files for the latest game,” Tristan said, watching him closely.

“Who paid her?” Quinn asked as he started running the possibilities through his head.

“We don’t know that yet, but we’re looking into it,” Tristan said as Quinn slowly nodded, wondering what else he’d missed. As soon as he’d realized who Bailey had working for her, he’d assigned his men to take a closer look at Kelly and keep an eye on her, watching where she went, who she talked to, but clearly, they’d fucked up.

“She’s not going back there. Not until they find Kelly,” Quinn bit out.

“Well, that might be a problem,” Tristan drawled, watching him curiously.

“And why’s that?” Quinn asked, in absolutely no fucking mood to play this game any longer.

“Because I told her brother that we’d bring her home today.”



Bailey forced herself to read the three words that left her feeling sick to her stomach one more time before she climbed off the bed and made her way into the bathroom, locking the door behind her before she placed the iPad on the bathroom counter and stepped away.

It was a mistake.

It had to be, Bailey told herself as she paced the large bathroom. Maybe she’d misread it, she thought as she found her gaze moving back to the iPad on the bathroom counter and...

“Screw it,” Bailey said, refusing to torture herself over this.

She was being an idiot.

That was it, Bailey told herself as she forced herself to walk back over to the iPad. Within seconds, she broke through the password and was opening the messenger app just in time to see the next text message show up and-

Did she tell you yet?

Her gaze flickered to the name at the top of the text box and took in the initials KJ before moving back down to watch as Quinn responded.

Not yet, baby.

Realizing that his iPad was linked to his phone, Bailey swallowed hard as she sat down on the edge of the tub and watched as Quinn told KJ how much he missed her, how he couldn't wait to hold her again while KJ told him how much she hated this, only to watch as Quinn promised that it was almost over and that they were going to make her pay for everything that she did to them. That was followed by watching Quinn tell her that he loved her.

Feeling numb, Bailey forced herself to scroll back through the messages until she came to the messages that started just a few months before Quinn came back into her life. She read through every text message, each one more devastating than the last, as they discussed everything from the game that she was working on to the money they were going to make selling it, their plans for the future, and a breakdown of the security at Haven Technologies. They knew about Nathan's connection to Tristan, about just how far they needed to push her to send Nathan running to Tristan for help, and how they were going to do whatever it took to keep her away from Haven Technologies building and away from a computer so that she wouldn't be able to stop them.

In a matter of minutes, she knew everything.

She knew that they had been planning this for years.

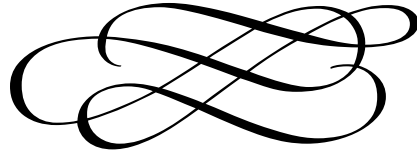
She knew that they hated her.

She knew that they were willing to do whatever it took to ruin her life.

She knew that someone that she trusted had screwed her over.

And she knew that this was almost over.

CHAPTER 49



“S he’s not going anywhere,” Quinn bit out with a look that told his best friend exactly how far he was willing to go to protect Bailey.

“That’s not really your decision to make,” Tristan said, leaning back in his chair as he watched him curiously.

“You don’t think so?” Quinn asked dryly, even as he considered his options since going back to Haven Technologies right now wasn’t an option. Then again, neither was staying here. Tristan had always been there for him and he wasn’t about to thank him by putting him in the middle of this.

“Tell me something,” Tristan said, reaching over to grab a folder off the large stack on his desk.

“What’s that?” Quinn absently asked as he debated bringing Bailey back to his cabin in Georgia, only to wonder if that was even an option anymore.

“Why does she look like she’s about to kill you?” Tristan asked, looking really fucking amused with a pointed look past him.

Frowning, Quinn turned his head and-

Wondered why Bailey was slapping her hand over his mouth. That was followed by wondering why she was narrowing her eyes on him as she placed his iPad on the desk so that she could press her finger to her lips with a softly whispered, “Shhhh.”

When Tristan went to open his mouth, she turned that glare on him until he sighed heavily and gestured lazily for her to get on with it. With a firm nod, Bailey shifted her focus back to him, and with one last look of warning, she began searching his pockets until she found his cellphone.

As soon as she had it, Bailey shot him one last warning glare before she

was climbing onto Tristan's desk and picking his iPad back up and placing it on her lap before shifting her attention back to his phone. For several minutes, she didn't say anything as she took her time scrolling through his phone only to frown, grumble to herself, and then shift her attention back to his iPad.

Not really sure what she was doing, Quinn shared a look with Tristan to find him watching her curiously as she did whatever the hell it was that she was doing. After several more minutes, a half-dozen grumbles, and the occasional glare in his direction to make sure that he wasn't going to say anything, Bailey reached back and helped herself to a pen and a notepad off Tristan's desk and began making notes.

When she still didn't say anything several minutes later, Quinn opened his mouth only to end up grunting when the little pain in the ass decided to get more comfortable by climbing off the desk and dropping down on his lap. That was followed by her pausing in what she was doing just long enough to gesture for him to move the chair closer to the desk.

Sighing heavily, Quinn wrapped one arm around her and stood up just enough so that he could grab hold of the chair and drag it closer to Tristan's desk. When he moved to sit back down, the little brat that he adored mumbled, "Closer," once again gesturing for him to get on with it. Narrowing his eyes on the back of her head, he pulled the chair closer and sat back down, taking her with him as he asked, "Better?"

"This will do," Bailey said with a snuffle as she settled back against him and-

Fucking wiggled.

"You're evil," Quinn said as he pressed a kiss against the back of her neck simply because he couldn't help himself.

"It helps me think," Bailey murmured absently as she read something on his phone and then made a note before shifting her attention to his iPad.

"What exactly are you doing?" Tristan drawled as his gaze flickered to him before shifting back to her.

"Proving my skills," she mumbled as she made yet another note.

"And what are those?" Quinn asked as he shifted around her so that he could see what she was working on and-

"What the hell is that?" he demanded when he saw the text messages on his iPad.

"If I were to guess, I would say that this was a desperate attempt to get

what they wanted,” Bailey said as she scrolled through his phone one last time before she focused back on her notes.

“What’s going on?” Tristan asked as he pushed his chair back and stood up, his curious gaze shifting between him and Bailey as he made his way around the desk to join them.

“I have no fucking idea,” Quinn said as he reached over and scrolled through all the text messages on his iPad and took in all the bullshit, the plans to destroy Haven Technologies, the callous comments about the attacks, just how fucking much they hated Bailey and wanted to make her pay, and the professions of love that had his jaw grinding as he read through every fucking word while Tristan read over his shoulder.

When Quinn was done, cold dread spread down his spine as he thought about everything that he’d just read as he slowly looked up, terrified that he was about to lose Bailey over this bullshit and-

She. Fucking. Wiggled.

Narrowing his eyes on the little brat tormenting him, Quinn grabbed hold of her hips as he tried to figure out what he was going to say to convince her that he had nothing to do with this. He opened his mouth and-

“You were yelling,” Bailey said, shrugging it off while he sat there trying to make sense out of what she’d just said.

“When was he yelling?” Tristan asked as he leaned down to see what Bailey was writing.

“When he was supposed to be sending the text message about trying to find out where my program is being stored, he was turning me over and-”

“Jesus Christ,” Tristan said, turning his head and coughing to hide his chuckle as Quinn was forced to cover Bailey’s mouth with his hand.

“You’re killing me,” Quinn said as he leaned in and kissed the back of her neck as he dropped his hand away and-

“That’s what you said this morning when I got on my knees and-”

“God, you’re fucking evil,” Quinn said with one last kiss against her neck.

“You also said that,” Bailey pointed out as she once again shifted to get more comfortable on his lap.

“You want to break this thing down for me and tell me why you wouldn’t let us say anything when you came in here a few minutes ago?” Quinn asked as he shifted Bailey on his lap so that he could see what she was writing.

“I wanted to make sure that they weren’t listening,” Bailey said, only to

pause in what she was writing to gesture between the iPad and the phone.

“And you needed to do this because...” Quinn asked, only to lean back in his chair when she took that as her cue to shift on his lap so that she could throw her legs over his and shift more comfortably back against the armrest while she continued making notes.

“I needed to figure something out,” Bailey said, shrugging it off.

“Are you going to share with the rest of the class?” Tristan drawled as he leaned back against his desk and picked up the iPad.

Nodding, Bailey said, “You might want to turn that off now,” with a pointed look at the iPad in Tristan’s hands.

“Do you remember that talk we had about spanking your ass?” Quinn asked, watching as Tristan considered her for a moment before he turned off the iPad and placed it back on his desk.

“Vividly,” Bailey assured him with a solemn nod. “Which is why I knew this wasn’t you.”

“And the reason you knew that...” Quinn prompted.

“Because I knew that you adored me,” she admitted with a heartfelt sigh as she turned her attention to Tristan and held out her hand in silent demand.

Nodding slowly, Quinn said, “I’m going to spank you.”

“Probably,” Bailey said, not really sounding all that concerned as she cleared her throat and gave her hand a pointed look when Tristan only continued standing there, frowning down at her only to curse when she said, “Phone.”

“What are you looking for?” Tristan asked as he pulled his phone out of his pocket and handed it to Bailey.

She placed the iPad on her lap so that she could take the phone and began looking through it. “To see if the virus on his iPad made its way to your phone,” Bailey explained.

“What virus?” Quinn asked as he shared a look with Tristan.

“The one that I’m pretty sure that I accidentally downloaded a few weeks ago when I helped myself to your iPad at your grandfather’s old cabin,” Bailey murmured absently as she finished what she was doing and sighed. “You might want to turn that off for now and find a way to tell your men to do the same,” she said while Quinn sat there thinking about exactly what that meant, their clients, files, security, fucking everything.

“That explains how they were able to get around our security at Haven Technologies,” Tristan said, sighing heavily as he quickly sent a text message

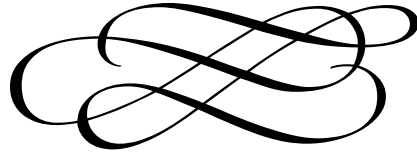
before turning off his cellphone.

“Probably,” Bailey murmured absently.

“I’m going to need you to explain what’s going on, Bailey,” Quinn said as he gently cupped her face in his hand and pulled her attention back to him and-

“It’s not Kelly.”

CHAPTER 50



“We’ll get to Kelly in a moment,” Tristan said as he gestured towards the iPad, “Tell me what’s going on.”

“Since the text messages didn’t start until a minute after Quinn left the room, I knew that there had to be a triggering event that set it off,” Bailey began, only to realize that she should probably break this down a little more when she saw the matching frowns on their faces.

Licking her lips, Bailey decided to approach this the way that she did whenever she had to explain something to Nathan. “In order to pull this off, whoever sent the texts had to make sure that Quinn wasn’t in the room, otherwise it would have been clear that he wasn’t the one sending them. That meant that they had to come up with a way to know that he wasn’t in the room but that I was.”

“And how did they do that?” Tristan asked while Quinn sat there quietly, looking lost in thought as he absently ran his fingertips over her knee.

“That’s what I wanted to know, so I started with the settings, looking to see which apps had access to things like the microphone, camera, Bluetooth, and GPS, knowing that one of them was being used to trigger the text messages,” Bailey explained, watching as Quinn absently nodded along with Tristan.

Thankful that she hadn’t lost them yet, Bailey continued. “The app had to know that Quinn left the room, which meant that either someone had to be listening, watching, or receiving a signal from another device.”

“Which means that Quinn leaving the room was the triggering event, letting them know to send the messages,” Tristan correctly guessed.

Gesturing to the iPad, Bailey said, “The messenger app had access to everything except for the Bluetooth and GPS, which normally would have led me to believe that whoever was behind this was at least listening, but-”

“They would have known that Quinn was otherwise occupied when they decided to send that text from him,” Tristan drawled as Bailey decided that she would be avoiding making eye contact with the large man for the rest of this conversation.

“Exactly,” Bailey said, clearing her throat as she continued, “which means that video and the microphone are out.”

“You said the messenger app didn’t have access to the Bluetooth or GPS,” Tristan reminded her, sounding confused while Quinn sat there, looking lost in thought as he continued absently running his fingertips over her knee, making her wonder what he was thinking.

“Which didn’t make sense, so I went back to the app and tried to figure out what I was missing. I checked the settings and went through everything again and found an app that looked off. After a quick check, I realized that there were actually *two* messenger apps on the iPad. The one that came with the iPad had been deleted from the home screen and replaced with a fake app designed to look and work like the real thing, but this app is connected to the GPS,” Bailey explained, gesturing between the iPad and Quinn’s phone. “It’s using the coordinates from his phone to track his movement so that-”

“It knew when he was leaving the room,” Tristan murmured, sounding thoughtful as he glanced back down at the devices on his desk before his curious gaze found her. “How did they know that you were still in the room?”

“Because there were two parts to this triggering event, Quinn’s phone moving away was the catalyst that put the app on alert and when I accessed the iPad, it activated the program and sent the messages,” Bailey explained, once again unable to help but notice that Quinn still hadn’t said anything.

“Why did you mention Kelly?” Tristan asked as his gaze flickered to Quinn as the man that was really starting to make her nervous just sat there, absently running his fingertips over her thigh.

“Because whoever sent the texts was trying to make it look like Kelly was behind it,” Bailey said, knowing without a doubt that Kelly had nothing to do with this.

“We know that it’s Kelly, Bailey,” Tristan said as he gestured to the file on the desk behind him. “We have bank records, emails, dates that match the attacks, an extensive criminal record, and this morning, your staff was able to

trace an attempt to break into Haven Technologies' server and attempted to download your files while simultaneously uploading a program to destroy everything."

"On her work laptop?" Bailey asked, trying to wrap her mind around what he'd just said.

"From what I've been told, it was her work laptop," Tristan said.

"And you're sure that it was her work laptop?" she asked as her gaze flickered between Tristan and the file that apparently proved that Kelly was behind everything.

"Yes," came the answer that had her absently nodding as she said, "Then, it can't be her."

"Bailey," Tristan began, only to pause to share a look with Quinn before he continued, "everything points to Kelly."

"I know it does," Bailey said, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she glanced back at the iPad as she thought over everything and-

It was too easy.

"And those text messages point to you," Bailey said as she glanced back at Quinn to find him watching her through those cold gray eyes that she loved so much.

"Tristan?" Quinn said, keeping his eyes locked with hers as he gave up running his fingertips over her thigh so that he could reach up and cup her face in his hand.

"I'll see what else I can find out," Tristan said as he pushed away from the desk and headed for the door while Bailey thought over everything they'd said and-

None of it made sense.



"She didn't do this," Bailey mumbled absently, looking completely lost as Quinn caressed his fingertips along her jaw one last time before he dropped his hand away so that he could pick her up and place her on her feet.

Never taking his eyes off her, Quinn took her hands in his as he stood up

and stepped away from the chair and kept moving, leading her into the hallway and towards their room, noting the way that she worried her bottom lip between her teeth, looking lost in thought and-

He couldn't fucking lose her.

"You scare the hell out of me," Quinn admitted as he backed her into their room, watching as her expression turned confused.

"What?" Bailey asked as he reached back and closed the bedroom door behind them.

"You're a pain in the ass," Quinn said as he locked the door, watching the way that her beautiful blue eyes narrowed on him. "And you drive me fucking crazy," he said as he reached up and cupped her face in his hands.

"I do that to everyone," Bailey pointed out with a solemn nod, making his lips twitch as he ran his fingertips over her jaw as he leaned down and pressed his lips against her forehead.

"I'm really not surprised," Quinn whispered against her forehead before he pulled away so that he could turn his head and kiss her cheek.

"What else?" Bailey asked as she reached up and covered his hands with hers and pulled them away so that she could entwine her fingers with his.

"I can't stop thinking about you," Quinn murmured softly as he pulled back so that he could turn his head and kiss her other cheek.

"That's because I'm irresistible," she assured him, making his lips twitch as he turned his head and brushed his lips against hers.

"Yes, you are," Quinn said, groaning softly when she moved her lips teasingly against his.

"What else?" Bailey asked as she released his hands so that she could reach up and place her hands against his chest.

"I want you," he admitted, wondering if she had any idea just how fucking much.

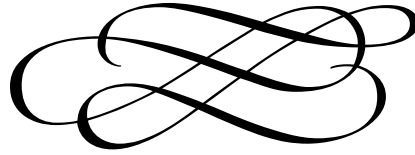
"And?" Bailey asked, smiling as she gave him a gentle push that had him moving until his back was pressed against the door.

"And," Quinn said softly as he slowly brushed his lips against hers, "I'm beyond fucking terrified that this is all a dream."

"Am I your dream, Quinn?" Bailey whispered against his lips as she reached up and ran her fingertips along his jaw.

"No," he said softly, "you're everything."

CHAPTER 51



“Is that what I am?” Bailey asked as she ran her fingertips down his throat and over his chest.

“Yes,” Quinn said, cupping her face in his hands as she ran her hands down his body, savoring the feel of the crisp cotton shirt covering his hard chest.

Nodding slowly, Bailey brushed her lips against his one last time before she pulled away just enough so that she could press her lips against his chin as she said, “I lied.”

“About?” Quinn asked, only to groan when she turned her head and kissed his throat.

“On the train,” Bailey said as she reached for the hem of his shirt and pulled it free from his pants.

“Did you, now?” Quinn asked as she reached up and released the first button on his shirt.

“I really did,” Bailey assured him, pressing her lips against the tanned skinned that she’d just revealed as she released the next button.

“Are you going to tell me what you lied about?” Quinn asked, groaning as she continued kissing her way down his chest while she unbuttoned his shirt.

“I watched you,” Bailey admitted, unable to help but moan when her lips brushed against the well-defined abs that she ran her hands over this morning as she slowly rode him.

“You watched me?” he asked, sounding confused as she finished unbuttoning his shirt and reached for his belt.

“Mmmhmm,” Bailey murmured as she pressed a kiss right above his navel, knowing that they shouldn’t be doing this, but at the moment, nothing else mattered to her but him.

Everything else could wait.

“You were my first crush,” she whispered against his skin, only to smile when he bit out, “Christ,” when she reached for his fly.

“I liked watching you,” Bailey admitted as she pressed her lips against the spot just beneath his navel and reached for his zipper only to decide against it and traced the large bulge pressing against his pants instead.

“What else?” Quinn asked as she pressed one last kiss against his stomach before she stood up, running one hand up his chest while she continued caressing his cock through his pants with her fingertips.

“I’ve thought about you over the years,” she said as Quinn leaned down so that she could brush her lips teasingly against his as she slid her hand beneath his shirt and moved until he took the hint and let the shirt fall to the floor.

“Wondering when I was going to show up to spank your ass?” Quinn asked when she broke off the kiss so that she could watch her fingertips as they moved over him.

“Something like that,” Bailey murmured absently as she toed off her shoes.

“And now?” Quinn asked, sliding his hand behind her neck.

“Now,” Bailey said, letting him draw her closer while she ran her fingertips over him one last time before reaching for his zipper, “I want more.”

“You want more?” Quinn asked as he used his hold to pull her closer while she slowly pulled his zipper down.

“I want you,” Bailey said as she slid her hand inside his boxers and wrapped her hand around him.

“You have me,” Quinn promised, taking her mouth with a groan while she pulled his cock free.

“Do I?” Bailey asked, wondering if he had any idea just how badly she wanted that to be true. She’d never felt like this before, never wanted a man the way that she wanted him, and she’d never been this close to falling in love before and that absolutely terrified her.

“God, yes,” Quinn whispered against her lips as she took her time running her hand over him, enjoying the way that he felt in her hand, thick,

hard, and hot.

“Show me,” Bailey said as she ran her hand over his cock, loving the way the thick tip felt in her hand, smooth and soft, only to moan when she remembered how it felt pushing inside her.

Groaning, Quinn deepened the kiss, moving his lips against hers as he reached for her shirt, forcing her to release her hold on him and break off the kiss so that he could pull it off her. As soon as her shirt hit the floor, he was taking her mouth in a hungry kiss as her hand wrapped back around him.

He moved his lips against hers once, twice, and then, Quinn was reaching around her and releasing her bra as he parted her lips with his and slid his tongue inside her mouth while she continued moving her hand over him. In seconds, her bra joined her shirt and Quinn was tearing a moan from her when his hands found her breasts.

For several minutes they stood there, caressing each other until it wasn't enough and she reached down with her free hand to unsnap her jeans only to have Quinn gently brush her hand away. As he unsnapped her jeans, he caressed her breast with his other hand, gently squeezing it as his palm teased her nipple, driving her crazy. She loved the way that he touched her, but she loved the way that he reacted more when she touched him, the way that his breath caught seconds before a groan was torn from his throat and he moaned her name.

“Turn around,” Quinn said, breaking off the kiss as he released her breast so that he could cup her hips and move her, turning her around and-

Tore his name from her lips when he pulled her back against him so that the large, hard cock between his legs was pressed against her back. She licked her lips hungrily as he reached for her pants and slowly began pushing them down. His lips brushed teasingly against her ear before they found the back of her neck, making her moan softly.

As soon as her jeans slid past her knees, Bailey was kicking them off, leaving her standing there in her panties while Quinn took his time kissing the back of her neck as his hands covered her breasts, alternating between gently squeezing them before allowing her nipples to slide between his fingers. His hands felt so good, she thought, only to amend that thought when he slid one hand down her stomach and beneath her panties seconds later.

“So fucking wet,” Quinn whispered hoarsely against the back of her neck as he took his time tracing her slit.

When his fingertip found her clit, Bailey released a soft moan as she

spread her legs apart, making it easier for him to tease her. That felt so good, she thought, closing her eyes as she dropped her head back against his chest. When he whispered her name, Bailey tilted her head back, tearing a groan from the large man that was driving her crazy when his lips found hers.

She'd never reacted to a man like this before, never thought that she could want someone this much, but all it took was one look from Quinn and...she was lost. There was no other way to describe it. She didn't think that she would ever get enough of him, Bailey thought as she reached down and covered the hand moving between her legs. She-

“Quinn!”

-felt her knees buckle when he turned his hand and slid one long finger inside of her.

He swallowed her moan as he kept moving his hand between her legs, slowly thrusting his finger inside of her as his other hand teased her breast one last time before sliding down her stomach and over her hip as he pulled his hand free from between her legs. Never breaking the kiss, Quinn shifted behind her and picked her up, cradling her in his arms as he made his way to the large bed behind them.

Before he finished laying her down on the bed, she was wrapping her arms around him, refusing to let him go. Placing one hand on the bed next to her head, she felt him reach down and pull his holster free from his pants and placed it on the nightstand before settling between her legs. He groaned against her mouth as his cock settled between her slit before pulling back until the large tip was pressing against her slit and-

“I'm never letting you go,” Quinn said on a groan as she felt the large tip push inside of her.

“You promise?” Bailey whispered as she cupped his face in her hands.

“God, yes,” he swore, taking her mouth in another hungry kiss as he slid the rest of the way inside of her, making her realize something important.

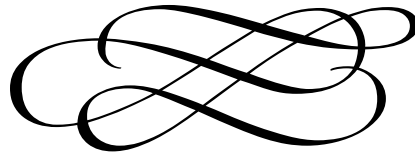
She'd been lying to herself.

She wasn't falling in love with him.

She already loved him.

More than anything.

CHAPTER 52



He never thought he'd find someone like her.

Never thought that he could feel like this, like he'd finally found the one thing missing in his life and-

That fucking terrified him.

If he ever lost her...

Christ, he would never survive, Quinn realized, closing his eyes as he pressed his lips against her forehead and prayed like hell that he would never find out. Swallowing hard, he pulled away as he opened his eyes and found himself staring down into the beautiful blue eyes that had haunted him for most of his life. He-

"It's only fair," Bailey whispered softly as she reached up and ran her fingertips along his jaw.

"What's that?" Quinn asked, turning his head so that he could kiss her palm and-

"You scare me, too," she said, making him go still.

Swallowing hard, Quinn turned his head to watch her as she leaned up and brushed her lips against his as he felt her hands press against his chest and pushed. He cupped her face in his hand as he moved, wrapping his other arm around her and took her with him as he turned over onto his back.

His back barely touched the bed before Bailey began moving, slowly rolling her hips as he wrapped his arms around her. He ran his hands over her back, her hips, and back up again, needing to touch her and...

He just fucking needed her.

While she moved on him, and Christ, he couldn't get over just how

fucking good she felt wrapped around his cock, Quinn broke off the kiss so that he could press his lips against her chin as his hands slid down to her ass and gently squeezed, encouraging her to keep moving. As he kissed his way to her throat, Bailey's hands fisted in the sheet as she kept moving, riding him with sensual rolls of her hips that left him struggling not to lose his fucking mind.

He was in fucking heaven, Quinn thought while he lay there, pressing his lips against her throat, her large breasts pressed against him, and his hands kneading her incredible ass as she moved on him, stroking his cock with her tight, wet-

"Quinn?" Bailey said on a soft moan as she pushed back on his cock.

"Mmm?" he moaned his reply, unable to handle anything more than that at the moment.

"Remember what I said earlier about being worshiped?" Bailey asked, making his lips pull up into a smile against her throat.

"I think I remember something about that," Quinn murmured, pressing his lips against her throat one last time before he wrapped his arms back around her and rolled her onto her back.

He allowed himself one slow thrust between her legs before he pulled out of her, licking his lips hungrily when the move caused her wet sheath to caress his cock. As soon as his cock was free, Quinn was brushing his lips against hers as he moved his legs over hers so that he was kneeling on the bed next to her.

With one last brush of his lips against hers, Quinn slid his hand between her legs and found the soft lips that had welcomed his cock. While he teased her slit, Quinn kissed her chin, her throat, and down to one breast, where he took his time tracing her nipple with his tongue before taking it between his lips.

He traced her slit with his fingertips as he gently suckled her nipple, earning a soft moan before he flicked it with his tongue and released it so that he could kiss and lick his way down her stomach while his fingertips found her swollen clit. He gently caressed her clit as he kissed the spot just below her navel.

"Do you feel worshiped yet?" Quinn asked while he kissed his way down to the neatly trimmed dark hair between her legs.

"I'm starting to," Bailey said softly as she threaded her fingers through his hair and moaned when he pressed his lips against her soft slit.

He traced her clit one last time with his fingertip before dragging it down to her core and-

“Oh, God!”

-slid it inside of her as his tongue found her clit.

“Better?” Quinn asked, flicking his tongue over her clit as he slowly fucked her with his finger.

“God, yes,” Bailey moaned as her hand slid down his back, over his side and tore a groan from him when she wrapped her small hand around the base of his cock.

“You’re fucking evil,” Quinn said, groaning as she moved her hand over his cock and gave the tip a squeeze that had his breath catching.

“You love that about me,” Bailey said, making him smile as he pressed one last kiss against her clit before he pulled back, pausing only long enough to kiss her hip before he laid down next to her on his side.

“Yes,” Quinn said as he leaned over and kissed her, “I do.”

Moaning his name, Bailey turned onto her side to face him as she ran her fingertips along his jaw. Quinn slowly moved his lips against hers, savoring every brush of her lips against his as he reached down and cupped the back of her knee and used his hold to pull her closer while he hooked her leg over his hip.

She caressed his jaw with her fingertips one last time before she ran them down his throat, over his chest, and down his stomach only to tear a moan from him a moment later when her hand wrapped back around his cock. As she stroked his cock, Quinn deepened the kiss, unable to help but moan as she used her hold around him to trace her slit.

“Baby, please,” Bailey whimpered against his mouth as she placed the tip at her core and-

Quinn rolled his hips forward and slowly pushed his cock inside the woman that meant the world to him. He kept his thrusts shallow as he kissed her. She felt amazing, Quinn thought as he felt her fingertips caress his face. Opening his eyes, he broke off the kiss and turned his head, his gaze never leaving hers as he kissed her palm.

He watched the way that her lips parted on a moan, the way that her beautiful blue eyes struggled to remain locked with his as he moved and-

God, he fucking loved her.



“Quinn?” Bailey said, watching the gray eyes that she loved so much lock on her as she felt him pull her leg up higher and-

“Oh, god...” Bailey moaned, her head dropping back as pleasure tore through her body while the man that she couldn’t seem to get enough of began to really move. She felt his lips press against her throat as he moved, taking her in slow, hard thrusts that left her with no choice but to grab onto his shoulder and hold on.

It felt so good, so perfect, Bailey thought as she felt that thick tip moving inside of her, stroking her just right and-

“Fuck!” Quinn bit out against her neck as she felt him swell inside of her as he tore his name from her lips again.

For several minutes, Bailey lay there, struggling to catch her breath while Quinn did the same. When she felt his lips press against her throat one last time, she reluctantly let her leg slide free, knowing that their small reprieve from reality was over. Slowly exhaling, Bailey pulled away from Quinn only to have him stop her as he pressed his lips against her forehead.

“We need to talk, Bailey,” he murmured softly as she closed her eyes on a resigned sigh.

“I know,” she mumbled sadly as she thought about all those things that they needed to talk about, everything that was happening at Haven Technologies, her game, Kelly, and the fact that she wasn’t ready to let him go.

“Baby, look at me,” Quinn said as she felt him pull away.

“It doesn’t end well for the bodyguard in the movie,” Bailey pointed out as she opened her eyes to find him watching her.

“Nothing’s going to happen to me,” Quinn promised, his gaze softening as he leaned back in and pressed his lips against her forehead again.

“Promise?” Bailey mumbled sadly, hating that he’d been dragged into this mess.

“Promise,” he said as she worried her bottom lip between her teeth while she debated asking him the one thing that she’d been wondering about for a while now, but...

“I can feel you thinking,” Quinn murmured against her forehead.

“What happens when this is all over?” Bailey asked, forcing herself to ask the one question that she wasn’t sure that she wanted an answer to.

“How did it end in the movie?”

Frowning, she pointed out, “You were there when I watched it.”

“I was busy glaring at you,” Quinn said right around the time that she decided to get more comfortable.

“Fair enough,” Bailey said with a firm nod as she reached over and shoved him onto his back.

“I’m going to need you to enthrall me with that ending,” Quinn drawled as he reached over and helped her crawl onto his lap.

“Prepare yourself,” Bailey said as she dropped onto him with a satisfied sigh when he released a pained grunt that put a smile on her face.

“Consider me prepared,” Quinn drawled as he waited for her to finish getting comfortable.

“Well,” Bailey said, folding her arms over his chest so that she could rest her chin on them to make it easier for him to look at her adoringly, “after he saves the day by being shot-”

“Of course he did,” Quinn muttered as he wrapped his arms around her.

“Why are you interrupting my heart-wrenching story?” Bailey asked, blinking at the incredibly handsome man who was making her crave all those things that she’d never thought she’d want in her life.

“My apologies,” he murmured absently as he leaned forward and gave her one of those achingly sweet kisses that she was quickly becoming addicted to.

With a snuffle, Bailey said, “I suppose I could forgive you.”

“That’s very generous of you,” Quinn said, brushing his lips against hers one last time before settling back against the pillows.

Nodding as though that was a given, Bailey said, “After he almost died saving her, they showed that she already had a new bodyguard and of them saying goodbye before she got on a plane and was forced to leave him behind.”

“And he let her go?” Quinn asked, looking thoughtful.

“He really did,” she said with a sad shake of her head and a heartfelt sigh.

“He was an idiot,” Quinn said as he ran his hands over her back.

“Why’s that?” Bailey asked, shifting forward so that she could kiss his chin.

“Because I never would have left you,” he said, earning a glare.

“I would have preferred that you said that you never would have been hurt in the first place,” she pointed out.

“That just went without saying,” Quinn said as he leaned forward and brushed his lips against hers again. “We need to talk about that other thing.”

“What’s the other thing?” Bailey asked, terrified by just how much she loved this man. She’d never felt this way about anyone before, never even came close, and for the first time in her life, she wanted something more than her work.

She wanted him.

“Just how much I love you,” Quinn whispered against her lips before pulling away and-

“I’m going to need a new computer,” Bailey said, following that up with a solemn nod before adding, “And a new phone.”

“Bailey, I-” Quinn began, only to groan when she wiggled, causing her lower body to caress that large appendage between his legs that seemed to really like the attention.

“It’s going to take time setting up the computer the way that I like it,” Bailey continued, seemingly lost in thought as she once again followed that up with a wiggle and a heartfelt sigh, “but I really don’t have a choice.”

“Bailey,” Quinn said, forced to grab hold of her hips to stop her from wiggling again, “I’m going to spank your ass.”

“Why?” Bailey asked, blinking innocently as she struggled not to smile when his eyes narrowed dangerously on her.

“The wiggling,” Quinn bit out between clenched teeth with a look that dared her to do it again.

Blinking, Bailey asked, “You mean this?” as she once again wiggled.

“Christ, you’re evil,” Quinn said, chuckling as he wrapped his arms around her and rolled her over onto her back, most likely to put a stop to her wiggling.

“And you love me,” she reminded him with a warm smile as she wrapped her arms around him.

“So, you did hear me,” Quinn murmured as he leaned down and brushed his lips against hers.

“I might have heard part of your declaration of your undying love,” Bailey said, only to sigh, “but just in case I missed something, you should probably tell me again.”

“Should I?” Quinn asked, sounding amused.

“You really should,” Bailey assured him with a nod.

“What will you give me if I do?” Quinn asked, brushing his lips against hers one last time before he kissed her chin.

“I might consider letting you know just how much I love you,” Bailey said, feeling him go still before gray eyes warmer than she’d ever seen them before locked with hers.

“You love me?” Quinn asked, swallowed hard as he watched her.

Smiling, Bailey traced his jaw with her fingertips. “More than anything,” she promised him, only to sigh as she closed her eyes in defeat and added, “But I need to go back and see how much damage has been done. I can’t let them destroy everything that we’ve worked so hard for.”

“You can’t go back yet, Bailey. I’m sorry,” Quinn said as he turned his head and kissed her fingertips.

“I can’t stay here forever and especially not now,” Bailey murmured as she shifted to get more comfortable beneath him.

“Until they have Kelly in custody, you’re not going anywhere,” Quinn said, sighing heavily as he rolled back over onto his back, taking her with him.

“It wasn’t Kelly,” Bailey murmured with a helpless shrug as she folded her arms over his chest and settled back on top of him.

“Bailey, we have proof,” Quinn said softly.

“It couldn’t be her,” Bailey mumbled, shaking her head with a heartfelt sigh as she propped her chin on her folded arms.

“Why’s that?” Quinn asked as he leaned up and brushed his lips against hers.

“Because-” Bailey began to explain, only to get cut off when three quick knocks sounded at their door. Before she could ask Quinn what that was, she felt him go still beneath her seconds before she found herself rolled over onto her back with an absently murmured, “Stay here.”

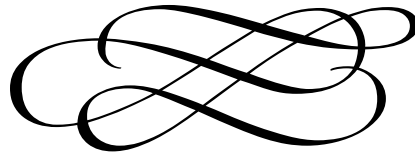
“What’s going on?” Bailey asked, watching Quinn climb off the bed as he yanked his pants back up.

“I need you to stay here and keep the door locked,” Quinn said as Bailey watched his movements turn clipped while he made his way around the room, pulling a white tee-shirt on as he made his way to the closet.

“Tell me what’s happening,” Bailey said as she quickly climbed off the bed and grabbed her clothes only to feel her stomach drop when she saw him

reach for the bulletproof vest. “Quinn?”
“We have company.”

CHAPTER 53



“C heck everything,” Nathan said, his grip tightening around the steering wheel as he told himself that Bailey was fine and wishing like hell that he believed it. He never should have let her go, never should have fucking trusted Quinn, and he never should have-

“I am,” the stubborn pain in the ass said, drawing his attention to find her reaching for the Coke that he’d grabbed when he’d been forced to stop for gas earlier when a thought occurred to him.

“Do you react the same way that Bailey does to caffeine?” Nathan asked as his gaze flickered back to the long dirt road that they’d been navigating for the past ten minutes.

“Guess you’re about to find out,” Casey said in a teasing tone as she moved to take a sip only to end up glaring when he reached over and swiped the can out of her hand.

“It’s honestly like you want me to hurt you,” she said, not bothering to look up from the laptop that she’d helped herself to from Haven Technologies.

“And it’s honestly like you want me to spank your ass,” Nathan drawled, making a show of taking a sip of Coke simply to piss her off.

“Look,” Casey said, licking her lips as she shifted to get more comfortable, “I know that I don’t look it, but I’m actually a really violent person.”

“It’s the first thing that I noticed about you,” Nathan murmured as he enjoyed another refreshing sip.

“I’m not kidding, Nathan,” Casey murmured absently as she frowned

down at the computer.

“I didn’t think you were,” Nathan said, still wondering how they could have fucked this up so badly.

“Yet, you’re ignoring the only warning that you’re going to get,” Casey said with a sad shake of her head as she continued typing away.

Nathan opened his mouth to explain just how badly he wanted to spank her ass when the small woman sitting in the back seat that he’d completely forgotten about, asked, “Umm, why am I here again?”

“Because we need help making sure that Haven Technologies’ server hasn’t been compromised,” Nathan explained even as he moved to finish off the Coke only to have the little brat pluck it out of his hand with a satisfied sigh.

“Makes sense except for the fact that we’re not supposed to be accessing Haven Technologies’ server remotely,” Jess murmured, drawing his attention to the rear-view mirror to find her looking thoughtful as she pointed to Casey. “And Pam?”

“I take my position as Bailey’s assistant very seriously,” Casey said as she finished off the Coke, reminding him that he still needed to figure out what he was going to do about her.

Bailey would never forgive him if she found out that he let her sister walk away and Casey...

Christ, he didn’t know what he was going to do about her, but one thing was clear, he couldn’t let her walk away after this. She came here looking for Bailey for a reason and he wasn’t letting her go until she told his sister everything.

“We only have enough access to see if there’s been any damage. The main files are still protected,” Nathan said, not bothering to point out that the new game was on Bailey’s personal server.

“Fair enough,” Jess murmured absently as she shifted her focus back to her laptop while Nathan’s gaze flickered back to the small woman sitting next to him.

“Anything?” Nathan asked as he found himself watching the way that Casey worried her bottom lip between her teeth and-

He really needed to fucking focus, he realized when he found himself wondering just how good her lips would feel against his skin. They didn’t have time for whatever the hell this was. It didn’t help that she was the last woman that he should be thinking about, especially right now.

“A huge mess,” Casey said with a heavy sigh as his gaze flickered back to the rear-view mirror.

“Jess?” Nathan said as he watched the woman that he was counting on to help them fix this shake her head with a heavy sigh.

“Same. Whatever she did, she left a huge mess. I’m going through everything, cleaning and checking files as I go, but so far it doesn’t look like she was able to do that much damage, but not from a lack of trying,” Jess mumbled absently while he tried wrapping his mind around everything that happened in the last twenty-four hours.

None of this made any sense.

He knew about the history with Kelly, mostly because he’d pinned Bailey to the floor and made her “hit herself” until she told him everything, but he really couldn’t see her doing any of this. She-

“Shouldn’t the gates be closed?” Casey asked, drawing his attention to the large iron gates at the end of the dirt road that had been left wide open.

“Yes, they should,” Nathan said as he struggled to bite back the fear that had been threatening to take over since he’d realized just how badly he’d fucked up by trusting the asshole to keep his sister safe.

When they reached the gates, Nathan rolled to a stop in front of the security panel, taking in the red light flashing beneath the keypad before glancing at the monitor and noted that it had what his sister would have called “Smurf screen.”

“Blue screen of death,” Casey noted as she followed his gaze.

“Do me a favor,” Nathan began as he focused on the winding road ahead.

“What’s that?” Casey asked, sounding distracted.

“Stay in the car,” Nathan said as they came around the last curve and spotted the large house ahead.

“Not a chance in hell,” Casey said, already moving to close her laptop.

Tightening his grip around the steering wheel, Nathan bit out, “I’m not fucking kidding.”

“I didn’t think you were,” Casey murmured conversationally as he pulled up behind the SUV that Jakob lent to Quinn.

“Stay in the car,” Nathan repeated as he pulled to a stop and-

“Goddamnit!”

-snapped when the little brat that was going to get her ass spanked shoved her door open and climbed out before he could stop her.

“Wow, she really loves her job,” Jess said, shaking her head in wonder as

she watched Casey head towards the large house, leaving him to curse under his breath as he moved his ass.

In a matter of seconds, he was making his way up the stairs and reaching for Casey's hand just as the front door opened. "Nathan, to what do I owe the pleasure?" Tristan drawled as his cold gaze locked on Casey.

"You didn't answer your phone," Nathan said, watching the way that Casey met Tristan's gaze head-on.

"How did you get past the gate?" Tristan asked as he stepped aside.

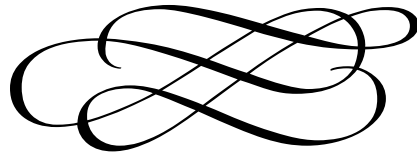
"It's wide open," Nathan said as he tightened his grip around Casey's hand when she tried to pull her hand away.

"That explains a few things," Quinn said, drawing his attention to find the asshole that had a lot of explaining to do leaning back against the wall with his gaze locked on something across from him, drawing Nathan's attention and-

"Please tell them that I had nothing to do with this, Nathan!"

-found himself looking at the last person that he'd expected to find here.

CHAPTER 54



They were going to have words.

A lot of them, Bailey decided with a firm nod as she stood there for another minute, glaring at the locked bedroom door that Quinn disappeared through a few minutes ago before she decided that it was time to take matters into her own hands.

She was done playing this game.

Hoping that whoever was behind this left something behind that she could use, Bailey grabbed Quinn's laptop and debated her next move. She could use it to access Haven Technologies' server, something that she really didn't want to do remotely, or she could go take a closer look at that virus.

Decision made, she grabbed her backpack and shoved his laptop in it before making her way to the bedroom door. Once she was there, Bailey sent a silent apology to her ass for the spanking that she would be receiving once Quinn found out that she'd left the room and-

He loved her, Bailey thought, unable to help but smile as she stood there, adjusting her backpack over her shoulder as she slowly exhaled with a firm nod. She needed to stay focused, figure out who was behind this and then...

Then, she would let herself panic, but for now, it was time to get to work. Releasing a shaky breath, Bailey stood there for another minute, listening for any signs that Quinn was coming back, and when she didn't hear anything, she decided that it was now or never.

A moment later, Bailey unlocked the door, listening intently for any signs that she wasn't alone as she opened it slowly and glanced out into the hallway, making sure the coast was clear before she quickly made her way

down the hallway and backstairs that led to the kitchen. Once she reached the bottom of the stairs, Bailey released another shaky breath, double-checked to make sure that the coast was still clear and headed across the large kitchen, only to turn right back around and head back to the fridge, deciding that she was going to need some liquid courage to help her get through this.

Once she had a Coke stuffed in her backpack and one in her hand, Bailey made her way across the kitchen, turned left down the small hallway, and when she reached the last door on her right, she cracked open the Coke and took a fortifying sip. That was followed by a second sip, a nod, and another sip, knowing that this wasn't going to end well as she let herself back into the office.

A few minutes later, Bailey had everything that she needed laid out on the large oak desk, from Quinn's laptop to the lovely selection of thumb drives that she kept hidden in her bag along with a few wires. With a satisfied sigh, she connected his iPad to his laptop before sliding the thumb drive that she was going to need for this job into its slot.

After making sure that she had everything set up, Bailey shot the closed office door one last look before she turned on the laptop and-

"MmmmBop!"

-felt her lips pull up into a smile when she saw what was waiting for her. In a matter of seconds, her program was taking control of the virus that had made its way onto Quinn's computer along with quite a few of Haven Technologies' files from the server. While she enjoyed a sip of Coke, Bailey absently nodded along to the song that was most likely meant to torment the receiver only to release a disappointed sigh when her program turned it off seconds later.

By the time her program finished scanning the virus, Bailey managed to finish off the first Coke and was taking a sip of her second Coke as she waited for her it to finish summarizing the virus and-

"Oh, that can't be good," Bailey murmured absently when she noted that the Wi-Fi had been turned off. Curious, Bailey reached over and picked up Quinn's cellphone and turned it on only to sigh a moment later when she saw that there was no cellphone service either.

"Interesting," Bailey mumbled, taking another sip of Coke as she shifted her attention back to the laptop, noting that the summary was ready.

"Hmm," Bailey murmured as she read through the file, her frown deepening with every line that she read, looking for anything that would give

the creator away, but there was nothing.

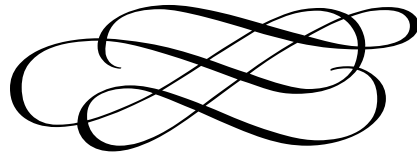
She also didn't understand why this program had been released into Haven Technologies' system, especially since it appeared as though it had been released to protect their files. It didn't make sense, Bailey thought, going through the notes one more time before sighing heavily as she removed the thumb drive and went to grab the next one only to rethink that decision and reached for the one at the end. She never had to use this one before, but then again, something about this whole situation told her that she was going to need it.

Praying that this worked, Bailey slid the thumb drive into the slot, and after a few clicks, she told her program what she wanted it to do. After a slight pause, her program did what she'd created it to do and took over the unknown program, finding out everything that it could about it, when it was sent, and what it was meant to do.

Two beeps later, Bailey had her answer as she was presented with the virus that had been released into Haven Technologies' system, making her swallow hard until she realized that the unknown virus had been stopped completely in its track, had been taken over, and sent back to the source.

Whoever was behind this was hoping that they'd focus on the virus meant to destroy their system and ignore the fact that they'd also tried to steal all their files. Whoever released the second virus had saved them from a nightmare, Bailey thought as she looked for the original virus, searching through the program that saved Haven Technologies and once again wondered who wrote this. She didn't recognize this coding style, but she recognized the one that it stopped.

CHAPTER 55



“Start talking,” Quinn said as he kept his gaze locked on the small woman who’d taken them by surprise when she’d walked up to the front door and rang the fucking bell.

“Just as soon you tell me what’s going on,” Nathan said as his gaze remained locked on Kelly as he pushed the small woman that had a lot of explaining to do behind his back when she moved to yank her hand free.

“Thanks for waiting for me,” Jess said with a heartfelt sigh as she walked into the house only to follow that up with, “What the hell’s going on?” when she spotted Kelly kneeling on the hardwood floor with her arms handcuffed behind her back.

“That’s what we’re about to find out,” Tristan said as his gaze remained locked on Pam as Nathan was once again forced to push her back. “Is this who I think it is?”

“Yes,” Quinn said, pushing away from the wall as he pulled another set of handcuffs from his pocket.

“Where’s Bailey?” Pam demanded as she glanced from Tristan to him.

“Somewhere safe,” Quinn said, pushing one of the metal cuffs open with his thumb as he made his way across the foyer towards her only to frown when he heard it.

“What the hell is that?” Tristan demanded when what sounded suspiciously like “*Mmbop*” suddenly filled the house.

“My calling card,” Pam said with a satisfied sigh as Quinn shared a look with Tristan just as the music suddenly stopped playing.

After a slight nod, Quinn tossed the handcuffs to Tristan and made his

way upstairs with Nathan close behind. Within seconds, he was cursing when he spotted the empty bedroom and moved his ass towards the backstairs, through the kitchen, down the back hall only to regret not locking the little pain in the ass that he loved more than anything in a closet when he spotted her slumped over Tristan's desk before taking in the empty Coke cans next to her.

"Glad to see that you're taking care of my sister," Nathan drawled as he moved to go to Bailey only to end up glaring when Quinn beat him to it.

She really was a pain in his ass, Quinn thought, kissing her forehead before he tossed her over his shoulder and-

Fucking sighed when she started humming the theme song to "The X-Files" against his back. She really was too fucking adorable for words, Quinn thought as he started making his way back down the long hallway towards the foyer.

"I have no fucking idea what's going on," Quinn admitted, carefully shifting Bailey over his shoulder as he glanced towards the foyer, noting that it was empty before he made his way into the kitchen.

"You honestly expect me to believe that?" Nathan demanded as they walked into the kitchen to find Kelly sitting at the table, looking lost while Pam glared at him as she pointedly raised her cuffed hands.

Ignoring her, Quinn said, "I really don't fucking care what you believe," as he kept moving, noting the curious gaze that Jess was throwing Kelly and Pam or whatever the hell she was calling herself before reluctantly shifting her focus back to her laptop with a heartfelt sigh.

"And why's that?" Nathan asked as they headed for the backstairs.

"Because you think that I had something to do with this," Quinn pointed out as he made his way up the back stairs, praying every step of the way that Bailey took pity on him and stayed passed out until after this was all over.

"Tell me that I'm wrong," Nathan said as they reached the second floor.

"I had nothing to do with this," Quinn said as he headed towards their room.

"And the fact that we were able to trace the attack on Haven Technologies to this location as well as to the cabin you own in Georgia and your grandmother's old house in Massachusetts was what? A coincidence?" Nathan drawled, making Quinn frown as they reached their room and-

"His cabin doesn't have internet," Bailey mumbled weakly against his back seconds before she began humming the theme song to "Jaws."

“I use my data plan when I’m at the cabin,” Quinn said as he carried Bailey to the bed and carefully laid her down.

“And your grandmother’s house?” Nathan asked as he made his way to the other side of the bed.

“She sold her house just before she died so that she could send Jaxon to college,” Quinn said, wishing like hell that she’d come to him for the money instead. “She was determined to make sure that my cousin didn’t follow in my footsteps and sign his life away.”

“Is that what you did?” Nathan asked as he reached for the covers.

“No, it’s what I needed at the time,” Quinn said as he grabbed hold of the covers on his side and pulled them over Bailey.

“And now?” Nathan asked, sending him a curious look.

“I have everything that I need,” Quinn murmured softly as his gaze shifted to Bailey and-

“He loves me,” Bailey mumbled with a heartfelt sigh against her pillow.

“Yes, I do,” Quinn said, unable to help but smile as he leaned down and kissed the back of her head only to sigh when she began humming the theme song to *“SpongeBob SquarePants.”*

“In that case,” Nathan drawled as he pulled the covers tightly over Bailey to make sure that she wasn’t going anywhere for a while before heading for the door, “we should probably have that talk.”

“What happened?” Quinn asked as soon as they reached the kitchen.

“They got desperate,” Nathan said as Quinn met Tristan’s gaze while his best friend pushed away from the wall with a barely noticeable nod and left the room.

“Meaning?” Quinn asked as he took up Tristan’s abandoned position by the wall and ran his gaze from the patio doors on his right to the door on his left, only pausing long enough to take in the backstairs in front of him before shifting his gaze back to Nathan.

“She released a full-blown attack on our system,” Nathan bit out with a glare aimed at Kelly.

“I-I had nothing to do with this,” Kelly mumbled weakly, noticeably paling as she sent Nathan a pleading look. “Please, you know that I didn’t do this.”

“It all points to you,” Nathan said, only to sigh heavily when Pam said, “And to him,” with a pointed look in Quinn’s direction.

Sighing heavily, Nathan rubbed his hands roughly down his face as he

muttered, “What a fucking mess.”

“I’m going to need Bailey’s password to fix this,” Jess mumbled absently as she frowned down at her computer.

“It’s going to have to wait,” Nathan said, looking fucking exhausted as Quinn ran his gaze around the room, taking in all the exits again before he took in the two women handcuffed, noting the way that Kelly trembled while Pam glared.

“I can’t do anything else without that password,” Jess said with a heavy sigh as she closed her laptop and stood up. “I’m gonna go sit with Bailey and wait for her to wake up so that she can take over this mess.”

“It might be a while,” Nathan pointed out as he kept his glare locked on Kelly.

“Hopefully, the block will hold until then,” Jess said with a helpless shrug as she grabbed her laptop and headed for the backstairs, only to pause by the refrigerator to help herself to a Coke and-

“In the meantime, why don’t we talk about what happened between you and my sister,” Nathan drawled as he leveled a glare on Quinn.

That was followed by Jess clearing her throat as she turned around with a hopeful look and a murmured, “Perhaps, I should wait down here and Casey can go upstairs and wait with Bailey?”

“Keep an eye on Bailey and make sure that she stays out of trouble,” Nathan said while Quinn stood there, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on.

“Damn it,” Jess mumbled sadly as she turned around and reluctantly made her way upstairs with a disappointed sigh.

“I adore the little pain in the ass,” Quinn said as he went over everything that he knew in his head and-

He still had no fucking clue what was happening.

“Walk me through everything that happened,” Quinn said, pushing away from the wall and began pacing the large kitchen.

“There was an attack on our system this morning,” Nathan began, only to stop when Quinn shook his head.

“Go back to the beginning when this all started,” Quinn said, his gaze shifting to the patio doors before glancing back at the kitchen door when Tristan walked back into the room and took up his position by the wall again with another slight shake of his head, letting him know that the phones and internet were still down.

“They started a year ago,” Kelly said, swallowing hard as she shifted in her chair.

“Was that before or after Bailey came up with this new game?” Quinn asked, thinking that over.

“She’s been working on this game since high school,” Nathan said with a heavy sigh, looking fucking exhausted. “We started officially working on it three years ago.”

“When was it announced?” Tristan asked as his gaze flickered between Kelly and Pam.

“Two years ago,” Kelly said, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

“And how long ago were you hired?” Quinn asked as he watched her, looking for any signs that she was lying to him.

“Five years ago,” Kelly said as Quinn’s gaze shifted to Pam. “And you?”

When she only glared, Nathan sighed heavily as he answered for her. “A little under a year,” earning a grumble from the small woman.

Nodding, Quinn sat down at the end of the table and watched her for a moment, only to feel his lips twitch when she met his gaze head-on. There was just something about the small woman that made it really fucking difficult to hate her.

“Who are you?” Quinn asked as he considered her.

“The person who’s not going to answer your questions until you remove the handcuffs,” Pam said as she held up her cuffed hands.

“Tell me your role in all of this,” Quinn said as he leaned back in his chair, his curious gaze never leaving her.

“She didn’t have anything to do with this,” Nathan said, gesturing for them to remove her cuffs.

“We’re going to need more than just your word,” Tristan said as they watched Nathan glance at her, only to have the small woman pointedly ignore him as she continued glaring straight ahead and-

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Nathan said as he reached over and grabbed her arm.

“No, wait!” their mystery woman said, noticeably panicking as she tried to pull her arm away only to have Nathan ignore her as he focused on removing her watch.

Muttering, “This is for your own good, Casey,” Nathan finished pulling off the watch and held her arm up as Quinn’s gaze locked on the scars that he would recognize anywhere. “She’s her sister.”

“Oh, god...” Kelly whispered hoarsely.

For a moment, Quinn could only sit there, staring at the familiar scars that marred Casey’s wrist. “Start talking,” he said as he took in everything from the stubborn set of her jaw to the incredible blue eyes that matched the small woman passed out upstairs and found himself wondering how he could have missed it before.

“There’s nothing to talk about,” Casey said, moving to fold her arms over her chest only to grumble when her cuffed hands stopped her and settled on glaring at him.

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Nathan repeated, shaking his head in disgust as he answered for her. “They were separated after the car accident that killed their mother. They both grew up in foster care, both got into computer programming, and they’re both pains in my ass,” he explained with a heavy sigh, earning a glare from the small woman.

“That last part was unnecessary,” Casey said, only to sigh before she took over. “It took some time, but I was finally able to track Bailey down to Florida thanks to the adoption records. I just wanted to meet her, but then, I realized that something was wrong and decided to stay and keep an eye on her.”

“It was her program that stopped the attack this morning and traced it to this address,” Nathan pointed out before shifting his gaze to Kelly. “Now, tell me what she’s doing here.”

“He sent me a message telling me to come here,” Kelly said, gesturing helplessly with her cuffed hands in Quinn’s direction.

“I didn’t send you anything,” Quinn said, watching as Kelly frowned in confusion.

“Yes, you did. You sent it to me last night, telling me that you needed my help. You said that Bailey was locked out of the server and she couldn’t remember the answers to the security questions that she’d set up and was hoping that I could help refresh her memory,” Kelly rushed to explain as Quinn watched Nathan and Casey go still.

“What kind of questions did he ask you?” Nathan asked as Quinn watched Tristan pull the phone that he’d confiscated off Kelly out of his pocket and tossed it to him. Without a word, Quinn caught it and slid it across the table to Nathan, who quickly handed it off to Casey.

“He wanted to know who Bailey’s favorite teacher was, what her first pet’s name was growing up, and where she was born,” Kelly said with a

helpless shrug as Casey gained access to her phone really fucking fast and began searching through it and-

“They’re all in voice texts, even the ones sent out,” Casey said, frowning as she hit the first message, which was an artificial man’s voice asking Kelly to come here this morning.

“That isn’t my voice,” Quinn pointed out.

Licking her lips nervously, Kelly said, “I have dyslexia and dyscalculia. I c-can’t read letters or numbers. That’s why I used to make Bailey’s life a living hell. She found out and-”

“You thought that she was going to tell someone,” Quinn finished for her as a thought occurred to him. “And your criminal record?”

“Steve and Jennifer stole my social worker’s identity and used it to open credit cards and forged her checks. They used my bank account to deposit the checks. I didn’t know what they were doing until the police showed up at school, and by then, it was too late. The judge didn’t believe me because I’d deposited one of the checks into my account after Jennifer told me that it was my monthly stipend from the state. I couldn’t read the name on the check,” Kelly explained with a helpless shrug.

“Did anyone else at Haven Technologies know about this?” Quinn asked as he shared a look with Tristan.

“No,” Kelly said hoarsely, “Bailey made sure that no one found out.”

“Everything from her email to her calculator is tied to an A.I. voice program,” Casey said, looking even more confused than she was a minute ago. “She doesn’t have cell service and nothing is coming up for a Wi-Fi search.”

“Everything is down,” Tristan explained, watching Casey’s frown deepen as she slowly looked up from the phone.

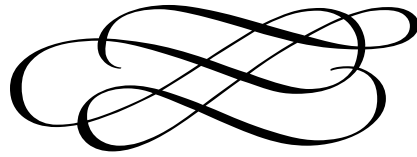
“They’re blocking the cellphone signals and Wi-Fi to make sure that we can’t stop them,” Casey said, confirming their suspicions.

“They’re cutting us off,” Nathan said, making him wonder what they were up to.

“She shouldn’t be able to access the server without internet,” Casey said, looking lost in thought as she glanced from the cellphone on the table to the backstairs and-

“She knew my name.”

CHAPTER 56



“B ailey?” came the soft whisper as the hand on her shoulder gently shook her. “You need to wake up.”

When she didn’t open her eyes, there was another shake, an annoyed sigh, and then the sounds of the bedroom door opening and clicking shut a few seconds later. Bailey kept her eyes closed as she lay there, counting to fifty in her head before she slowly opened them and-

“What gave me away?” Jess asked from the comfort of the oversized leather chair in the corner, looking completely relaxed while Bailey struggled to remember how to breathe as she took in the gun aimed in her direction.

“The virus,” Bailey said, swallowing hard as she glanced up to find Jess frowning until she added, “You hate spaces and you always use your initials to name your functions.”

Sighing heavily, Jess said, “I had a feeling that was going to be my downfall one day.”

“You know that this isn’t going to end the way that you think it will, right?” Bailey pointed out as she slowly pushed the covers off and sat up, deciding that her best option at the moment was to keep Jess talking until she figured a way out of this mess.

“You have no idea how I expect this to end,” Jess said as she gave the gun in her hand a small shake, gesturing towards the black laptop on the small table to her left.

“You could always tell me,” Bailey said as she moved to climb off the bed, her gaze remaining locked on the gun that was aimed at her chest.

“I could...” Jess murmured absently as her gaze shifted to the bedroom

door.

“He’s never going to let you get away with this,” Bailey said, having absolutely no idea how Jess got in here, but she prayed that Quinn was safe.

“I think he’ll have other things to worry about than me,” Jess said as her gaze shifted back to her.

“Meaning?” Bailey asked, swallowing hard as she kept her gaze on the gun while she slowly moved across the room towards the table.

“That it would be in your best interest to stop trying to stall,” Jess said with a pointed look at the laptop.

“Is that what I’m doing?” Bailey asked, slowly exhaling as she placed her hands on the table and sat down.

“Open the laptop,” Jess said firmly while Bailey sat there wondering how she’d missed the signs.

Jess had always been...*Jess*.

From the first day that she’d met Jess, she’d always had a warm smile on her face, was always there for her, and kept her sane by sneaking her coffee from across the street when Nathan wasn’t looking. She was one of her best friends and part of her family and this just didn’t make any sense, Bailey thought as she pushed the can of Coke in front of her aside and reached for the sleek laptop that would have normally had her fingers twitching with the need to explore but only filled her with dread at the moment.

“You want to tell me why you’re doing this?” Bailey asked as she opened the laptop and felt her stomach drop when she saw the login page for the personal server that she’d set up years ago with her login already typed in the box.

“You really have no idea what you took from me, do you?” Jess asked, sounding amused as Bailey’s gaze flickered to the woman who was breaking her heart.

“And you have no idea how much I loved you, Jess. You were one of my best friends,” Bailey said as she searched Jess’s green eyes, looking for any sign that the Jess that she knew was still in there somewhere. “You don’t have to do this.”

“Start typing,” Jess said, shifting the gun to the right so that the gun was aimed directly at her chest.

“No,” Bailey bit out as she thought about everything that happened over the past year, the attacks on their server, on her and just how easily someone that she loved could have been caught in the crossfire. “You pushed me in

front of the bus, didn't you?"

"Yes," Jess said with absolutely no hesitation. "And jammed the lock on your office door and arranged for the inspector to remove several vital bolts on the fire escape."

"And the break-in?" Bailey asked, wondering just how far Jess was willing to go.

"Was bad timing," Jess said with a heavy sigh. "You were supposed to be in a meeting, but instead, Quinn showed up and my guy had to improvise. I'll admit that I wasn't happy when I found out that Nathan hired Quinn to take over security, but then, I thought about all the possibilities. With that security system alone, I was able to move more freely throughout the building, allowing my men to come and go as they pleased and keep an eye on you."

"You hacked into the security system and used an old feed to trick Quinn's men," Bailey guessed, watching as Jess's lips twitched.

"It made my life easier," Jess murmured as her gaze flickered back to the bedroom door.

"The condoms?" Bailey asked as she thought about everything.

"A distraction," Jess said, shrugging it off as she shifted her focus back to her.

"The attack on Haven Technologies when I came back from Georgia?" Bailey asked, struggling to wrap her mind around everything.

"A little misdirection to force Quinn's hand," Jess said, making her frown.

"You wanted me to leave again," Bailey mumbled with a frown and-

"My laptop. You needed me to log into my server so that you could gain access," Bailey said as she thought about the virus on Quinn's iPad.

Nodding, Jess said, "And you left it behind."

"And you were hoping that by framing Kelly and Quinn that I would come running back, thinking that it was all over," Bailey guessed.

"But you never believed that they would betray you, did you?" Jess murmured, looking thoughtful.

"Not even for a minute," Bailey bit out.

"So loyal..." Jess said with a pitying look.

"Which is why I never saw any of this coming," Bailey said, realizing just how incredibly foolish she'd been.

"You really don't remember me, do you?" Jess asked, watching her curiously for a moment.

“Meaning?” Bailey asked as she sat there debating the odds of being able to send a message to Nathan before Jess could pull that trigger only to decide that they probably weren’t very good.

“When I showed up for the interview, I was sure that you would recognize me, but you had no idea who I was,” Jess said, shaking her head in wonder.

“And that worked for you,” Bailey guessed.

“Yes, it did,” Jess murmured in agreement.

“And how did we really meet?” Bailey asked, swallowing hard as her gaze flickered to the gun aimed at her.

“You destroyed my life,” Jess simply said with a careless shrug.

“And how did I do that?” Bailey asked as her gaze shifted back to the login page that confirmed that she’d been watching her for a while now.

It also let her know that Jess hadn’t installed any spyware on her laptop until recently, otherwise, she’d already have her password. The fact that she’d waited this long to do it told her everything that she needed to know.

“This is about the game,” Bailey said as her gaze flickered back to Jess in time to see her nod approvingly.

“You owed me a game,” Jess said with another pointed look at the laptop, making Bailey frown until she said the magic word.

“Jonathan.”

“You’re in this together,” Bailey said, shaking her head in disgust only to once again find herself frowning in confusion when Jess said, “Not exactly.”

“The thumb drive?” Bailey asked, needing to know why someone that she cared about could hate her this much.

“Would have solved a lot of problems if you’d used it,” Jess admitted with a soft sigh before shaking her head and continued. “Other than doing what I told him, he had nothing to do with this. He owed me a favor for not taking him down with me when you completely fucked me over by deleting that game.”

“That had nothing to do with you,” Bailey bit out.

“It had everything to do with me. I put everything that I had on the line for that game, my reputation, my career, and everything that I had to make that work and you destroyed it because you didn’t like how the real world worked,” Jess said with a pitying look that only pissed her off.

“It was my game,” Bailey reminded her.

“And it was my life,” Jess returned with a look that told her just how

much she hated her. “When you deleted that game, I lost everything that I’d worked so goddamn hard for and was forced to start over, biding my time and when I found out what you were planning with this game...” Jess said, shaking her head in wonder as she let her words trail off.

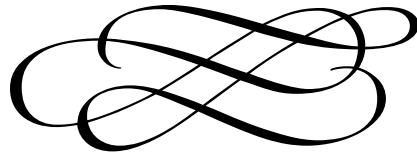
“Why are you telling me any of this?” Bailey demanded.

“I thought you had a right to know,” Jess said with a careless shrug as dread slowly crawled up Bailey’s spine and-

“You’re not planning on letting me leave this room alive, are you?”

“No, I’m not.”

CHAPTER 57



“Stay here,” Quinn bit out as he unlocked Casey’s handcuff and-

“What the hell are you doing?”

-pulled her arm closer so that he could snap the other cuff around Nathan’s wrist before he could stop him.

“Un-fucking cuff me!” Nathan bit out, moving to yank his hand back only to curse and stop moving his arm when the move tore a pained wince from the woman currently trying to pry the cuff off her wrist.

Ignoring him, Quinn focused on the small woman that he hoped like hell wasn’t about to fuck them all over. “Go get help,” he said, leveling a look on Kelly that told her that she better not fuck this up.

Kelly opened her mouth only to close it and jerkily nod her head as she quickly stood up and made her way towards the door. With a slight nod, Tristan followed her as Quinn made his way to the back stairs, ignoring Nathan’s demands to be released and moved his ass.

By the time that he reached the second floor, Quinn was pulling his gun free from its holster and letting years of training take over, knowing that he didn’t have a choice. He couldn’t think about Bailey, how fucking much he loved her or the fact that he was terrified that he was about to lose her.

She was just another client.

He kept telling himself that as he made his way past the stairs, where Tristan quietly joined him. As one, they made their way down the rest of the long hallway to the last bedroom on the left, praying every step of the way that they were wrong. Without a word, they took up positions on either side of the door and after a shared look, Tristan reached over and wrapped his

hand around the doorknob.

Slowly exhaling, Quinn reached over and pushed the door open only to immediately forget how to breathe when he spotted that 9mm pointed directly at Bailey's chest. He was going to spank her ass after this was all over, Quinn promised himself as he raised his weapon and took aim while he stepped into the doorway. He forced himself to keep his gaze locked on Jess, knowing that if he looked at Bailey right now that he would lose his fucking mind.

"Leave your weapons outside the door," Jess said, sounding completely relaxed as his gaze flickered to the hand holding the gun pointed at Bailey and noted the steady hold that she had on the weapon, letting him know that she was in complete control.

"He has nothing to do with this," Bailey bit out as Jess considered her for a moment.

"He has everything to do with this," Jess murmured softly as she gave the laptop in front of Bailey a pointed look while Quinn quickly took in the scene before him, from the Coke and the laptop on the table to the black backpack on the floor by Jess's feet.

When he hesitated, Jess said, "Put your weapons down or I'll shoot her and end this now."

"And if I shoot you before you get the chance?" Quinn drawled as he made the mistake of looking at Bailey and-

He couldn't fucking lose her.

"Let's find out," Jess said, raising the gun so that it was aimed at Bailey's head.

"Get out of here, Quinn," Bailey said, grabbing onto the edge of the table as she forced herself to stay still as she leveled a glare on the bitch that wasn't leaving here alive.

"This isn't going to end well for you," Quinn pointed out as he stepped back into the hallway and placed his gun on the floor, knowing that he didn't have a choice.

Any other client and he would have stood his ground, but with Bailey...

"So, I've been told. Don't forget the one at your back and the ankle holster," Jess said as Quinn reached for the gun attached to his ankle before reluctantly grabbing the one holstered on the back of his pants and placed them on the hallway floor.

"Tell your friend to get rid of his guns and join us and while you're at it, take off your vests," Jess said as he pulled his vest off and dropped it on the

floor before he stepped back into the room with Tristan by his side.

Once they were in the room, Jess focused back on Bailey and said, “Nathan and Casey?” making Bailey frown in confusion.

“Most likely still trying to get their handcuffs off,” Quinn said as his gaze flickered to Bailey before settling back on the woman who did an amazing job getting past their men.

Jess Richardson, born July 1, 1990 in Orlando, Florida to George and Sarah Richardson and graduated high school with a 3.98 GPA before attending college in California, where she earned a degree in programming before returning to Orlando and working for Haven Technologies. She didn't have any arrests, driving violations, evictions, or even a fucking parking ticket. She paid her bills on time, lived in a one-bedroom apartment five minutes from Haven Technologies, was never late to work and had clearly played them all so fucking well.

“Who the hell are you?” Quinn asked as he moved to take another step only to go still when she said, “That's far enough.”

“Where's Kelly?” Jess asked, ignoring his question.

“Getting help,” Quinn said as Tristan shifted behind him to the right to block her view of the doorway and-

“Step back away from the door,” Jess said, her gaze never leaving Bailey as Tristan reluctantly stepped away from the door, his cold gaze never leaving her as he moved. “I have cellular signals blocked for two miles and I left a device hidden by the driveway, effectively killing every engine and ensuring that no one leaves before this is over. By the time that she manages to get help, I'll be long gone.”

“I wouldn't bet on it,” Quinn said, watching as Jess's lips twitched with amusement.

“Start typing,” she said with a pointed look at the laptop, drawing his attention to find Bailey sitting there, the backs of her knuckles turning white as she held on tightly to the edge of the table.

“Go to hell,” Bailey bit out as Quinn moved to take a step closer and-

Felt the air rush out of his lungs when the sound of a gunshot echoed throughout the large bedroom as Bailey flinched and a pained cry was torn from her lips seconds before she grabbed onto her arm and-

“That's the only warning that you're going to get,” Jess said casually, her gaze never leaving Bailey. “Move back against the wall, both of you.”

Jaw clenching, Quinn kept his gaze locked on the bitch while they moved

until their backs touched the wall.

“I’m not going to ask you again, Bailey. Start typing,” Jess said as she shifted back in her chair to get more comfortable.

“Let them go,” Bailey bit out between clenched teeth as Quinn was forced to stand there, watching the blood slowly trickle over her fingers.

“Bailey, give her what she wants,” Quinn bit out, beyond fucking terrified that he was about to lose her.

“No,” Bailey bit out hoarsely.

“Maybe we’re going about this the wrong way,” Jess murmured, sounding thoughtful as her gaze flickered to him.

“Hurt him and I’ll destroy everything,” Bailey said as she pulled her trembling hand away from her arm and placed her fingertips on the keyboard.

“You’re not going to do that,” Jess said with a smug little smile playing on her lips.

“You have no idea what I’m willing to do,” Bailey bit out coldly as she slowly tapped her fingertips against the keyboard, all while she glared straight ahead.

Jess studied her for a moment before she said, “Get against the wall,” when Nathan stepped into the room, only to release a curse and was forced to grab hold of Casey and pull her back when the small woman moved to beat the shit out of Jess.

“Quinn?” Casey mumbled softly, putting everything into that one word and letting him know just how fucking terrified she was as she took in the blood trickling down Bailey’s arm. With a slight nod, Quinn shifted his weight to his left leg and watched Jess, waiting for her to fuck up, hesitate, any-fucking thing that would give him a chance to put a stop to this before it was too late.

Looking really fucking amused for some reason, Jess watched Bailey for a moment before she said, “You put a trigger password on the account.”

“And if I hit return, it will destroy everything,” Bailey promised as she shifted one trembling finger to the right side of the keyboard and left it hovering there.

“Are you really willing to risk your life over a game?” Jess drawled, sounding nervous for the first time since he’d entered the room.

“According to you, I’ll be dead as soon as I give you what you want, so what do I have to lose?” Bailey said, shrugging it off like she wasn’t scaring the hell out of him right now.

Slowly nodding, Jess seemed to think that over before she asked, “How about your sister?”

“I don’t have a sister,” Bailey said as Jess reached down and pulled an aged envelope out of her bag.

“Don’t,” Casey said, moving to break free from Nathan only to go still when Jess shifted the gun slightly to the left so that it was once again pointed at Bailey’s chest.

“Read it,” Jess said, tossing the envelope to her.

After a slight hesitation, Bailey reached for it, making sure to keep her finger hovering above the button that would end everything. It took a few minutes, but she eventually managed to pull the letter from the envelope with one hand while Quinn was forced to watch as blood continued trickling down her arm and slowly pooled on the carpet beneath her. He was going to fucking kill Jess, Quinn thought as he watched Bailey read the letter only to frown seconds before she swallowed hard.

“This is fake,” Bailey said hollowly.

“Is it? Maybe we should ask your sister?” Jess asked, sounding thoughtful as she glanced at Casey.

“Pam?” Bailey asked hoarsely, keeping her gaze locked on Jess.

“I believe she goes by Casey,” Jess said as she suddenly moved the gun in Casey’s direction. “How about it? Will the long-lost sister be enough incentive to get you to do what I want or would you prefer the brother that adores you?”

“How about me?” came the question from the doorway, drawing their attention just in time to watch Kelly walk into the room and-

“Shit!”

-tossed a gun in Tristan’s direction as Jess swung her arm to cover the move while Nathan grabbed Casey and turned around, taking her to the floor just as the first gunshot went off, hitting the wall right above their heads.

Within seconds, Tristan had the gun aimed at Jess as Quinn moved his ass. He was across the room in seconds, taking Jess out as she moved to turn the gun on him and fired, barely missing him as another gunshot went off. She released a pained cry as he took her to the floor, and just like that, it was all over.

He pulled the gun from her limp hand and tossed it aside, absently noting the gunshot wound to her left shoulder before he rolled her over onto her stomach and yanked her arms behind her back. When Tristan moved to take

over, Quinn released his hold on her and quickly shifted his focus to Bailey only to fucking sigh when he spotted her sitting at the table, typing away, the rest of the world completely forgotten. She really was a pain in his ass, Quinn thought, sighing heavily as he took a knee by her side so that he could take a closer look at her arm.

“I’m fine,” Bailey said, not bothering to look up as she absently grabbed the Coke off the table and took a sip before she went back to typing.

“Where’s her phone?” Casey asked as she quickly made her way across the room and grabbed Jess’s backpack.

“No clue, but we need to figure out how she’s jamming everything,” Bailey said, taking another sip of Coke. “I’m assuming that it was your program that protected Haven Technologies?”

“She left herself wide open with that delivery system,” Casey said with a pitying shake of her head as she searched through Jess’s backpack.

“How soon before you can get us back online?” Tristan asked as he finished securing Jess’s hands behind her back and pulled her off to the side while Nathan made his way to his sister’s side and-

“I’m fine,” Bailey said, earning a glare.

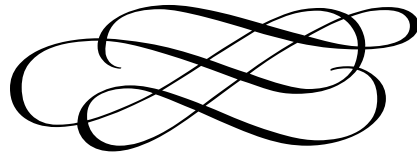
“You really are a pain in my ass,” Nathan said, sighing heavily as Quinn ran his fingertips beneath the wound, noting that it was just a flesh wound and would probably only need a few stitches.

“Got it!” Casey said as she pulled a black cellphone out of the bag while Quinn glanced back at Jess to find her watching Bailey with a smug smile on her face and-

“I keep my promises,” Jess said as the sounds of the can of Coke hitting the table drew his attention to find Bailey turning pale as she grabbed onto the table with trembling hands and a weakly mumbled, “Something’s wrong,” as she stood up and-

Lost his fucking mind when she stopped breathing.

CHAPTER 58



“Try not to panic,” came the words that, of course, left her with no choice but to panic, especially since she was pretty sure that she was dying.

God, everything hurt, Bailey thought, moving to swallow only to rethink that decision when the move sent fire down her throat. Why did everything hurt so much, she wondered as she watched Casey open her mouth only to close it on a heavy sigh and follow that up with a muttered, “Of course, you’re going to panic,” that had Bailey nodding since talking really didn’t seem like an option at the moment. Having absolutely no idea what else to do, Bailey settled for lying there in what she assumed was a hospital bed, staring helplessly at the woman who looked completely lost while she struggled to figure out what she was supposed to say.

After a few minutes, Casey gestured absently to the door behind her with a weakly mumbled, “Everyone’s fine,” and a hopeful smile that quickly died away with a muttered, “I have no idea what the hell I’m still doing here.” When Bailey could only lay there, staring at her, Casey dropped down in the chair by the door with a heavy sigh.

“I honestly have no idea what I’m supposed to say to you right now,” Casey admitted while Bailey thought about everything that happened as she ran her eyes over the small woman who’d lied to her, taking in everything from her dark brown hair to the blue eyes that matched her own and-

She had a sister.

“Do...” Casey began, only to lick her lips nervously before she continued, “Do you remember me?” After a slight hesitation, Bailey shook her head as Casey sighed and mumbled, “Of course, you don’t,” once again

looking at a loss for words.

Swallowing hard, Bailey managed to get out, “What happened?”

“Jess took advantage of your caffeine addiction and put insulin in that Coke, which led to you to stop breathing, scaring the hell out of us, and forcing me to put my skills to the test and destroying that program that was blocking our cellphones in record time so that Nathan could scream at the 911 operator while Quinn and Tristan put the first-aid skills that they’d learned in the Marines to good use and managed to get you breathing again before the paramedics arrived,” Casey explained as she absently toyed with that thick watchband that she always wore.

“Once they had you stabilized, they transported you to the hospital, where you decided to scare the hell out of everyone again before slipping into a coma,” Casey added with a sad smile that had Bailey’s breath catching in her sore throat.

“H-How long?” she managed to get out on a hoarse whisper.

Meeting her gaze, Casey swallowed hard before she said, “Ten years,” while Bailey lay there, struggling to remember how to breathe.

That is, until she saw it, the slight twitch of the traitor’s lips.

Narrowing her eyes on the cruel woman who should know better than to toy with her emotions at a time like this, Bailey bit out roughly, “You are the worst sister ever!”

Chuckling, Casey got up with a satisfied sigh and headed for the door as she said, “You’ve been passed out for two days, but the doctor said that you’re going to be fine,” with a teasing smile before adding, “I’ll go see what’s taking Nathan so long.”

Grumbling incoherently, Bailey watched Casey go until she grew bored and found herself focusing on the man who’d been glaring at her since she opened her eyes. “How long are you planning on glaring at me?”

“That depends,” Quinn drawled as he pushed away from the wall.

“On?” Bailey asked, doing her best to bite back a wince when she rolled over onto her side so that she could focus on the man who looked like he’d been through hell.

“On how long you’re planning on scaring the hell out of me,” Quinn said as he carefully took her left hand in his, drawing her attention to the bandage wrapped around her arm. At her questioning look, he said, “You got shot because I fucked up,” as he leaned down and pressed his lips against her forehead.

Frowning, Bailey said, "That wasn't your fault."

"Yes," Quinn said as he pulled away just far enough so that he was looking into her eyes, "it was. I never should have let her near you."

"You didn't know it was her," Bailey said, reaching up to run her fingertips along his jaw, needing the comforting movement right now to let her know that he was really okay.

"That's no excuse," Quinn said softly as he leaned into her touch. "God, you scared the hell out of me, Bailey."

"I have the unfortunate tendency of doing that to people," she said, nodding solemnly as she slid her hand behind his neck and pulled him down so that she could brush her lips against his and-

"I pushed the button."



"What the hell are you talking about?" Quinn asked hollowly as he stared down into baby blue eyes that he never thought he'd see again.

"I pushed the button," Bailey repeated as she slowly exhaled. "She pulled the trigger and I pushed the button."

"Bailey..." Quinn said, swallowing hard as he watched her as she followed that up with a firm nod, cleared her throat and was forced to bite her bottom lip when it began trembling.

Nodding, Bailey mumbled, "Sh-She pulled the trigger and I pushed the button. I deleted the game, Quinn."

"Oh, Christ," he said, feeling his stomach drop as her words slammed into him.

She'd just lost everything.

"Bailey, I-"

"It's fine," Bailey said with a wobbly smile that broke his fucking heart. "As long as she didn't gain access to Haven Technologies' server, all the parts should be there. I can piece it back together."

"And how long will that take to put back together?" Quinn asked as he cupped her face in his hand and gently caressed her cheek with the pad of his

thumb.

“A really long time,” Bailey mumbled sadly with a snuffle and the saddest fucking pout that he’d ever seen.

“What do you need me to do?” Quinn asked, leaning down and kissed her forehead.

“I could use a little worshipping,” Bailey mumbled with a little snuffle that had his lips twitching against her forehead.

“I suppose I could do that,” Quinn said as he stood up and took in all of the wires and tubes attached to her while he debated his options.

“It would make this easier,” Bailey said with another snuffle as he made his way around the bed and carefully climbed in behind her, and once he was there, he wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer.

“Better?” he asked as he pressed his lips against the back of her neck.

“What happened to Kelly?” Bailey asked as she settled back against him, letting him know that she needed a change in subject.

“She came to Tristan’s house thinking that you needed her help, and once we realized just how badly we’d fucked up, I released her and told her to go get help. When she couldn’t get her car to start, she came back into the house to grab Nathan’s keys and made her way to the second floor. When she heard Jess threaten to shoot Nathan, she picked up one of the guns that we’d left outside the door and decided that it was time to make up for all those times that she’d made your life a living hell,” Quinn explained, trying not to think about what could have happened if she hadn’t showed up and-

Just thinking about losing her nearly fucking broke him.

“She shouldn’t have done that,” Bailey mumbled sleepily, letting him know that the medication that the nurse injected into her line before she woke up was starting to work.

“No, she shouldn’t have,” Quinn said as he entwined his fingers with hers.

“What happened to Jess?” Bailey asked after hesitation.

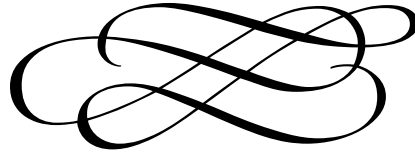
“She’s where she belongs,” Quinn said, trying not to think about the bitch that almost took the only thing that mattered to him away. She was two floors above them and currently handcuffed to a stretcher awaiting transfer to the local jail and it was taking everything that he had to stay where he was when all he wanted to do was make the bitch pay for what she put Bailey through.

“What happens now?” came the weakly mumbled question that had him closing his eyes as he pressed his lips against the back of her neck as he

savored the feel of her in his arms.

“Now, you close your eyes and go to sleep, knowing that I will never let anyone hurt you again.”

EPILOGUE



**One Year later...
Roman Palms Hotel**

“**Y**ou’re *pouting again*,” Nathan pointed out from the comfort of her office ten miles away.

“I’m not pouting,” Bailey mumbled sadly as she lay helplessly on her side across the insanely comfortable duvet that felt like a cloud as she did her best to look pathetic, hoping beyond hope that her brother would take pity on her and give her the distraction that she needed.

“*Then, what would you call it?*” Nathan asked, not bothering to look up from whatever he was doing.

“Making it easy for you to take pity on me so that you’ll tell me what I want to know,” Bailey said, debating between a heartfelt sigh and a sniffle only to decide to go with a combination of the two and-

“*There’s nothing to tell*,” Nathan said, still not bothering to look at her.

“Why must you lie to me?” Bailey asked with a heartfelt sigh as she reached back and helped herself to one of the many pillows stuffed behind her.

“*What makes you think that I’m lying to you?*” Nathan drawled as his gaze flickered to her.

“Because I know you,” she assured him with a solemn nod even as she debated ordering something to nibble on while she waited.

“*Uh-huh*,” Nathan murmured absently as Bailey took this opportunity to reach over and grab her phone off the nightstand and peruse her food delivery

options.

“Have you talked to Casey lately?” Bailey asked as her gaze flickered to her iPad just in time to see that muscle in Nathan’s jaw twitch, which it did every time someone mentioned her sister’s name.

“No,” he bit out through clenched teeth as she was forced to bite back a smile.

“Oh,” Bailey said absently as she made a show of looking at her phone as she added, “Because I talked to her today.”

“*Don’t fucking care,*” Nathan said, sounding adorably pissed.

“Understandable,” she murmured, making sure to sound bored as she continued scrolling through her phone, taking in everything from burgers to Chinese food.

When he didn’t say anything else, and she really didn’t expect him to at this point, Bailey shifted her focus to her sandwich options and waited a few minutes before she looked back at her iPad to find her brother glaring at her. Knowing that it was only a matter of time before he broke, Bailey debated between a bacon cheeseburger and a-

“*You really are a pain in the ass,*” Nathan said as he rubbed his hands roughly down his face before gesturing for her to get on with it.

“I don’t really feel like it’s my place to say anything,” Bailey said with a sad shake of her head and a heartfelt sigh as she took an obscene amount of pleasure in watching his eyes narrow as that muscle in his jaw started throbbing again and-

“What are you doing?” she found herself asking as she watched Nathan grab his phone.

“Wondering why you’re trying to piss me off,” Nathan drawled as he shifted his focus to his phone and began typing something.

“Because it entertains me,” Bailey said, wondering how much longer she would be able to torment her brother before he broke. Probably not long, she thought, watching as that muscle in his jaw continued twitching.

He’d barely spoken to Casey since everything happened, but he’d watched her whenever she walked into the room, devouring her with his eyes until he realized what he was doing and tried to pretend that he wasn’t aware of her. And Casey...

Was everything that Bailey could have ever asked for in a big sister.

Casey was a smart ass with a caffeine obsession of her own without her unfortunate tendency to react badly, was laid back, an incredibly talented

programmer, and loved to torment Nathan, which honestly just made her day. She loved having Casey around, loved having a sister who adored her and loved tormenting Nathan.

It was honestly more than she could have asked for.

“What did she tell you?” Nathan demanded with a glare that told her that she would pay for this as soon as she was allowed to come back to the office.

“Tell me about what?” Bailey murmured with a satisfied sigh as she noted the murderous glare that Nathan was sending her way.

She-

“What are you doing?” Bailey found herself asking as she watched her brother shift his focus to his phone seconds before a chime sounded behind her.

Nathan didn't say anything, but then again, he didn't have to, not when she felt the bed shift behind her, followed by the sounds of a heavy sigh as a large tan arm wrapped around her, careful of the large swell of her belly, and gently pulled her back. Swallowing hard, her gaze shifted back to her iPad to find her brother smiling smugly as he shot her a wink and-

“You really are a pain in my ass,” her incredibly understanding husband murmured sleepily as he reached over and ended the call.

“You knew this when you married me,” Bailey reminded him as he pressed his lips against the back of her neck.

“Yes, I did,” Quinn said as he placed his hand back on her belly. *“You're supposed to be sleeping.”*

“I was sleeping, but Nathan missed me,” she pointed out, hoping beyond hope that he was willing to overlook the fact that she'd lied, especially since she'd promised that she would be on her best behavior so that he would let her tag along tomorrow.

Now that he was taking over for Tristan, he was set to expand the business with the help from one of the men from his old unit. He was meeting with Hunter O'Mallery, CEO of Shadow Security and the man who was currently supposed to be on house arrest and-

“I don't think the meeting's going to happen,” Quinn announced, making her frown in confusion, that is, until he added, *“I saw Hunter drag his assistant out the back door and into a limo earlier.”*

“Really?” Bailey asked, wondering if that had anything to do with the crazed woman screaming at the convention earlier. She opened her mouth to ask, only to close it with a wince at Quinn's next question.

“And the laptop?” he asked, drawing her attention back to the laptop that she may have promised not to touch between the hours of eight p.m. and eight a.m. while she was pregnant.

Clearing her throat, Bailey said, “I have no idea how that got there.”

“I have a theory,” Quinn said, pausing to kiss the back of her neck. “Would you like to hear it?”

“Does it have anything to do with the fact that I’m a pain in the ass?” Bailey asked as she turned over and carefully got to her knees with her husband’s help, of course. Once she was assured that she wasn’t about to fall onto her side, she gestured for her husband to get on with it. With a heavy sigh, Quinn dutifully rolled onto his back and reached for her, and since that worked for her, she allowed him to pull her onto his lap.

Once she was there, Bailey shifted to get more comfortable, cleared her throat and once again gestured for him to continue. With a mock glare, Quinn drawled, “It might have something to do with it,” as he placed his hands on her large belly while she watched his lips pull up into that tender smile that was reserved solely for their baby girl.

“What are you up to?” Quinn asked, his gaze flickering up to her as he gently caressed her large belly.

“What makes you think that I’m up to something?” Bailey asked as she placed her hands over his.

“Besides the fact that I know you?” Quinn asked as he entwined his fingers with her.

Nodding, Bailey said, “Besides that.”

“I saw the look on your face when you found out that the digital copy of your game was being released early,” Quinn said with a teasing smile as he leaned up so that he could brush his lips against hers.

Blinking, Bailey said, “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” while she did her best not to glance at the laptop only to go for a hopeful smile when a chime let them both know that she had a message. When he narrowed his eyes on her, Bailey let that smile slip from her lips, cleared her throat and mumbled, “Excuse me,” as she pulled her hands free and leaned over so that she could see what Casey sent to her only to find herself sighing with relief when she saw the first review.

Worth the wait. Only on level two right now and this game is amazing! Never seen a game like this before!

“Thank God,” Bailey murmured, unable to help but smile.

They did it.

She still didn't know how Nathan managed to pull it off, but he'd somehow managed to convince everyone to extend their contracts. They'd been left with an insane amount of work, but thanks to Casey, they not only managed to put the game back together in time, but they were able to create the program that they needed to pull it off and now...

Bailey had everything that she could ever want and so much more.



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Thank you for reading *Never Again*. I hope that you enjoyed reading Quinn and Bailey's story as much as I enjoyed writing it. I truly appreciate the time that you took to read their story. If you have a moment and want to spread the word about *Never Again* or any of my other novels that you've read, I would truly appreciate it. Thank you!

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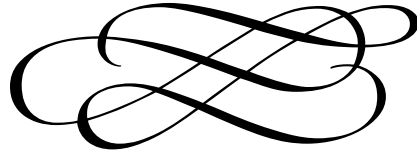
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A SNEAK PEEK AT DEVASTATED

An Anger Management Novel

DEVASTATED'S PROLOGUE



“Please tell me that you didn’t really tell Judge Peters to go fuck himself,” Ryan said with a forlorn sigh as he leaned back against the other side of the cell’s locked door, acting like this surprised him.

“Fine. I won’t,” Hunter said, trying to get comfortable on the paper-thin mattress before finally giving up on the lost cause and sat up.

“Why do you insist on keeping me on retainer if you’re not going to call me when you get arrested?” Ryan asked as he flicked an invisible piece of lint off the cuff of his expensively tailored suit.

Hunter shrugged it off as he raked his fingers through his hair. “Because it wasn’t a big deal.”

“It wasn’t a big deal?” Ryan repeated back slowly with a dry chuckle before going into one of his lectures, “You’re facing destruction of property, assault with a deadly weapon-”

Hunter couldn’t help but frown at that. “I didn’t have a weapon.”

“-public endangerment,” Ryan continued as though Hunter hadn’t spoken, “assaulting a police officer, and my personal favorite, resisting arrest.”

“I didn’t have a fucking weapon!” Hunter shouted, pissed that they were trying to fuck him over for something that should have been written off as a simple misdemeanor.

Ryan simply nodded. “They’re classifying your hands as weapons. Of course, if you’d called me, I probably could have fought that,” he drawled before explaining, “they’ve decided that with your extensive military record, and let’s not forget the surveillance video of you beating the shit out of

everyone in that bar, that your hands should be considered a dangerous weapon.”

Hunter snorted.

“Thankfully, Nancy, you remember Nancy, don’t you? The pretty young thing with great legs that works as a clerk at the courthouse. She gave me a call two hours ago. It seems that she remembered you from last year when you were up on charges for, surprise, surprise, assault. I, being the good friend that I am, left in the middle of my very important meeting to come rescue your sorry ass.”

“Is that what you call fucking your secretary over your desk now? A meeting?” Hunter asked dryly.

Ryan waved it off. “It’s a meeting of the minds. Anyway, I used my charm to get a private meeting with Judge Peters and the Prosecutor that you told to suck your dick this morning, and I saved your sorry ass once again,” Ryan announced, sounding a little too smug for Hunter’s liking, but what the hell. If the man managed to get him out of these bullshit charges, then he could dance around in a pink tutu for all Hunter cared.

“What’s my fine and how many hours of community bullshit do I have to complete?” Hunter asked, getting to his feet and biting back a wince when his arms and legs shouted in protest. He was getting too fucking old for this shit, he reminded himself as he walked over to the cell door.

“None,” Ryan said with a sheepish smile that Hunter didn’t like, not one fucking bit.

He narrowed his eyes suspiciously on his oldest friend. “What do you mean by ‘none’?”

“What I mean is that you can’t exactly perform community service seeing how you’re going to be on house arrest for a year,” Ryan explained as he took a healthy step back and out of reach of the bars while Hunter digested his words.

“You better be fucking joking,” Hunter finally said, wrapping his hands tightly around the bars, wishing that it was Ryan’s neck instead.

“It was either house arrest or staying locked up in a cell.”

Hunter nodded, taking that in as well. “Let’s get back to something for a minute here. You call a year stuck in my house, saving my ass?”

“Yes,” Ryan said with absolutely no hesitation whatsoever.

“Uh-huh,” Hunter mumbled thoughtfully. “I think there’s just one little problem that you may have overlooked,” he said, only to pause as he pursed

his lips up in thought before adding, “Actually, make that two problems.”

“And what’s that?”

“Maybe the fact that I live out of hotels and don’t have a fucking house? Or I don’t know, maybe the fact that I run a fucking company has something to do with it? How the hell do you expect me to run a company that employs twenty thousand people around the world while I’m on house arrest?” he demanded, not liking the smug smile on his friend’s face.

“We already came to a solution for both problems. The first is that you’re required to buy a house in this county,” Ryan explained. “And two, you’ll work from home.”

“First off,” Hunter bit out, “I don’t want to buy a house in Hicksville, Florida-”

“Ah, it’s actually Maryhale,” Ryan pointed out, but Hunter ignored him simply because he didn’t care.

“-and secondly, how am I supposed to run a company from a house?”

“You’ll have to hire an assistant,” Ryan explained in a tone that let Hunter know that the little shit clearly expected him to be in awe of his greatness.

“Fine,” Hunter said, waving dismissively for Ryan to leave, “go to Hooters. Make sure she’s blonde, has double D’s, and doesn’t talk much.”

When Ryan didn’t move to leave, Hunter narrowed his eyes on the little bastard that he should have beaten the shit out of when they were kids.

“What else?” Hunter demanded through clenched teeth, already knowing that he wasn’t going to like what Ryan had to tell him.

“The thing of it is, in order to get this deal for you, I had to negotiate a few things and-”

“Get to the fucking point!”

“Well, the court decided since having a live-in-”

“Live-in? Are you out of your fucking mind?” Hunter demanded, wondering just how badly Ryan had fucked up this case for him. He couldn’t live with a woman. It was one of the many reasons why he would never get married. He simply couldn’t stand them. As far as he knew, they were only good for sex and keeping him company at all the boring dinners that Ryan forced him to attend.

“-could be seen as a benefit, that the D.A.’s office should be allowed to choose the most qualified candidate whom they would trust to make sure that you didn’t abuse the situation.”

Hunter stared at him for a moment.

Finally, he said, "Please tell me that you're kidding."

"I'm afraid not, and before you tell me that you're just going to fire her, I should probably tell you that if you do that, then you'll have to finish your sentence in jail."

"What if she quits?" he asked slowly, already running ideas through his head on how to get rid of some unwanted pain in the ass.

"Then you go to jail."

"That's bullshit!"

Ryan simply shrugged. "That's the deal."

"So, I'm going to be stuck with someone who can hold jail over my head?"

"Do you really think I'm that stupid?" Ryan demanded, actually having the balls to sound offended.

"At the moment? Yes."

"I made it a condition that she didn't know."

Hunter shook his head in disgust. "I can't believe you fucked me over like this."

"Hold that thought," Ryan said, taking another step back.

"*What else?*" Hunter demanded through clenched teeth.

"You also have to see an anger management therapist while you're under house arrest," Ryan added when he felt that there was enough space between him and the bars to keep him safe.

For a moment, Hunter could only stare at the man he planned on killing with his bare hands. Then finally, he decided to set him straight.

"Are you out of your fucking mind? I don't have a fucking anger management problem!"

DEVASTATED'S CHAPTER 1

February 17th.

“This can’t be right,” Kylie murmured as she pulled to a stop in front of the large two-story brick house that looked like it belonged in an *Animal House* movie instead of the affluent neighborhood that it was smack dab in the middle of.

Frowning, she looked back down at the address written on the thick yellow envelope that the Prosecutor’s office had sent over three hours ago and frowned. The address matched, but this couldn’t be the right house. There was no way that this was Hunter O’Mallery’s, C.E.O of Shadow Security, house.

This had to be a mistake, Kylie realized just as the convertible filled with scantily clad women behind her laid on the horn, demanding that she get out of the way. No, this definitely wasn’t the right house, she thought, deciding that perhaps she was on the wrong street. She drove to the end of the street and frowned when she saw that it was, in fact, the right street.

Deciding that they gave her the wrong address, Kylie looked for a parking spot, and after a few minutes, she found one, the only one left, which happened to be a half-mile from the party house. Once she was parked, she called the Prosecutor’s office. After ten minutes of being put on hold and five minutes of being forwarded to a half-dozen offices, she discovered that the address was indeed correct.

As much as she wished that she could put this off, she couldn’t. She had a job to do, one that would guarantee her future. If everything went according to plan, she wouldn’t have to worry about anything for the next year. For that

alone she could handle absolutely anything, Kylie reminded herself as she stepped out of her car. After a slight pause, she decided to come back for her bags later.

This really was a very nice neighborhood, Kylie mused as she walked down the unmarred cement sidewalk and admired the perfectly manicured lawns and intricate designs in the metal gates that surrounded the elaborate homes that lined both sides of the street. It was definitely a step up from the small studio apartment that she'd been renting for the past two years.

Then again, a cardboard box in a Wal-Mart parking lot would have been a step up from that apartment and probably a lot safer. At least she wouldn't have to shell out a hundred bucks of her own money to have new locks placed on her door and window. She also probably wouldn't have to worry about coming home and finding one of her neighbors searching through her stuff either. Definitely not a bad place to spend a year, Kylie thought with a smile as she looked at the houses that looked more like mansions.

As she continued the long walk towards what could only be described as an out-of-control frat party, she mentally berated herself for not doing a little research on her new employer. She only knew a few basic details about Hunter O'Mallery and that was only because she'd taken thirty seconds out of her busy morning to skim the face sheet attached to the thick file that she'd received while she'd admittedly been in a rush to follow the nice police officer's orders and get the hell out of her apartment before things got ugly.

Okay, *uglier*.

Normally, she liked to know everything there was to know about a potential employer, company, and position before she agreed to take a job, but she hadn't been given the opportunity to conduct any research before she'd accepted this position. The only thing that she knew about this job was that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with great pay and benefits and that it was a live-in position that required a yearlong commitment.

When the DA approached her about this position three days ago, she'd quickly realized that they weren't going to answer any of her questions. She had to admit that it had been a little unnerving interviewing for an unknown employer. After she'd received the phone call late last night letting her know that the job was hers if she wanted it, she'd almost turned it down. If it hadn't been for her neighbor choosing that exact moment to put his fist through her wall, she probably wouldn't have accepted the job. But as Big Daddy, as he liked to be called, pulled his meaty fist back, leaving a huge hole in her

bedroom/living room/dining/kitchen wall, she'd decided that this live-in position, what little she knew about it, sounded perfect.

After an hour-long argument with her landlord where she'd begged him to be released from her lease, she'd packed all of her possessions into her car and caught three hours of sleep before the messenger from the DA's office woke her up bright and early at six this morning with the packet containing the details of her new employer and position. She only had a few minutes to look over the cover sheet before Big Daddy did something that upset the police, again. That was right around the time that she was escorted from the building, interviewed, and sent on her way, which in retrospect was probably a good thing since Big Daddy had set the building on fire, and she couldn't return there even if she wanted to.

She really didn't want to.

So, now Kylie was starting her new job by crashing a party thrown by her new boss's kids, and she wasn't exactly sure how she felt about that. She really wasn't thrilled by the idea of living with teenagers for a year. She didn't hate kids, but she wasn't exactly in a rush to go out and have one of her own, either. Then again, spending a year under the same roof with a spoiled brat might destroy any aspirations of having a family of her own one day.

After a slight pause, Kylie realized that she was okay with that and continued on, stepping over a puddle of fresh vomit, and through the large cast-iron gates welcoming anyone and everyone. She didn't date much, didn't care to, and if this gave her the excuse that she needed to focus on her job, then that was more than fine with her, Kylie absently decided, choosing to pretend that she didn't see the used condom on the ground.

"Watch where you're going!" a woman with too much makeup, not enough clothing and who was obviously intoxicated, snapped as she stumbled past Kylie.

With a sigh, Kylie continued towards the large two-level brick house, wondering if she was going to end up dealing with the police twice in one day. As she stepped over one of the bodies, hopefully just passed out, lying on the front steps, she couldn't help but wonder if this job came with hazard pay.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

New York Times Bestselling author, R.L. Mathewson was born in Massachusetts. She's known for her humor, quick wit and ability to write relatable characters. She currently has several paranormal and contemporary romance series published including the Neighbor from Hell series.

Growing up, R.L. Mathewson was a painfully shy bookworm. After high school she attended college, worked as a bellhop, fast food cook, and a museum worker until she decided to take an EMT course. Working as an EMT helped her get over her shyness as well as left her with some fond memories and some rather disturbing ones that from time to time show up in one of her books.

Today, R.L. Mathewson is the single mother of two children that keep her on her toes. She has a bit of a romance novel addiction as well as a major hot chocolate addiction and on a perfect day, she combines the two.

If you'd like more information about this series or any other series by R.L. Mathewson, please visit www.Rlmathewson.com

Thank you,
R.L. Mathewson