
Chapter 1

“**F**inally!” Becka sighed in relief from where she waited, lounging on the gray sectional wrapped around the huge TV mounted over her father’s mantle. “I’m starving.” She turned her striking blue gaze to the archway leading into the kitchen and called out, “Dad, Cam is here! Can we eat now?”

Cam rolled her deep green eyes and tied her long strawberry blonde waves up into a messy bun, as she kicked her shoes off and entered the softly lit living room. “I’m maybe ten minutes late. Chill. You guys shouldn’t have waited for me. I never asked you to do that.” She took a moment to take a deep inhale of the heavenly scent of Mr. Quinn’s renowned mostaccioli and felt a dreamy smile spread across her face.

Rebecca tossed her chic black bob of hair before shooting back a playful jab. “Hey, it’s not my idea. I have no problem starting without you.” She shot her a cheeky grin before tossing her a pair of pajama pants. “The fleece ones, as requested.”

Cam caught them as she rounded the corner to the front of the couch. “You’re the best.” She wriggled out of her pencil skirt quickly, unabashedly undressing in front of her childhood friend, too grateful to step into the soft fleece to care about the view of her round ass or thick thighs she flashed towards the kitchen as she changed. A throat cleared and startled her. She pulled the waistband quickly over the lace of her panties in a panic as Mr. Quinn stepped into the room, still dressed in his slacks and button-up shirt from work, with a tray of three bowls of pasta. Embarrassment set her cheeks aglow and she hoped he hadn’t seen too much.

“What have I told you girls about stripping in the living area?” he teased. “Please, let’s have *some* decorum in my home, Miss Winters. I’m aiming for easy-going bachelor pad, not den of sin.”

“Sorry.” The red in her cheeks deepened and she scrambled to be of use to her host, plucking a bowl from the heavy tray to hand to her friend still lounging like an empress against the couch cushions. “Don’t worry, Becks, I got it,” she bit off sarcastically.

“I know,” Becca answered, welcoming the bowl of mostaccioli with outstretched hands.

As the three of them settled in for their weekly Thursday movie night, Becca stretched out on the chaise lounge, Cam cross-legged in the center, and Mr. Quinn seated on the end, Cam asked curiously, “Is that true?”

Mr. Quinn looked up with a mouthful of pasta, his dark brown eyes confused from beneath his black brows. “What’s that?”

“You’re turning the house into a bachelor pad now that Becca is moving out?”

He nodded modestly. “It seems like the right time, now that the kid has flown the coop. I thought I’d throw my hat back in the dating ring.”

Becka made a mock gagging sound.

“Oh shut up,” Cam defended. “Good for you, Mr. Quinn. You deserve to have someone nice to spend the rest of your life with.”

“What’s left of it,” Becka snickered.

“Would’ve been earlier if *someone* had moved out a little sooner.” He shot a playfully judgmental glare his daughter’s way.

“Look, it was a tough market to get into. Let’s just all be grateful I finally did and get to move out at all.”

“At the ripe old age of twenty-six,” her father added.

Becka stuck her tongue out before returning to her pasta.

“Camellia, you moved out of your parents’ home at what age was it?” he asked.

She looked down at her food embarrassed. “Um, eighteen, but obviously I went down a different career path than Becka. I think it was great you let her keep living here while she got her degree. I’m sure that was so helpful. Sometimes I wish I had gone that route.”

“Well it’s never too late,” he reassured. “And if anything ever happened and you needed somewhere to stay, I hope you know you’re always welcome here.”

“I appreciate that, but I think I’ll be all right.” She laughed nervously. “You already got me the front desk job at your company, you don’t have to worry about where I live too.”

He shook his head. "You're family. Rebecca and I will always have your back."

"Besides," Becca chimed in, "her home decorating thing is starting to take off, right, Cam?"

"That's right." Mr. Quinn smiled. "How's Winter Designs doing? Somebody I worked with recently mentioned his wife was wanting to redecorate and I passed along your name."

"Thank you, yes, they called me and mentioned you. I'm meeting with them in a couple weeks, actually. Do you know them well? Any inside tips would be great so I can go in and really wow them."

"Jesus, you two Chatty Cathies." Becca let out an exasperated sigh. "How about we watch this movie and you two catch up later?"

Cam rolled her eyes. "Well you brought it up, Becks."

"And I regret it. I was just trying to say you're more than capable of taking care of yourself. Dad doesn't need to rescue you from the streets like a wayward cat or streetwalker."

"I didn't think that." Cam laughed, giving Mr. Quinn a sympathetic smile. "Your dad is just being the nice guy he's always been. You're really good at taking care of people, Mr. Quinn. Don't listen to your brat daughter."

He chuckled and set his empty bowl on the coffee table. "Greg," he corrected. "You don't need to call me Mr. Quinn anymore, dear. You're not kids."

Rebecca shot them a sarcastic sideways glance. "Neat. Be a pal, Greg-o, and start the movie, please."

"You know, it's not child abuse anymore if I kick your ass, little girl."

“Put ‘em up, old man. I’ll knock you out of your orthopedic slip-ons and into next week.”

Greg choked on his drink with a deep laugh, responding in between coughs, “Fuck you.”

“Now, children,” Cam declared, swallowing her own laughter, “behave and let’s watch this movie already, before Greg sundowns and has to be locked away for the night.”

Becka let out an uproarious fit of giggles and pointed at her father with, “Somebody get this man some aloe, because he just got burned!”

He shook his head, hiding his own smile. “And I thought you and I were friends, Camellia. I’ll remember this.”

She laughed along with Becka, but a part of her suddenly worried she had gone too far and offended him. Becka’s dad had always been down to goof around with them since they were girls and hanging out here after school. It was true that where other friends’ parents had felt like jail keepers or simply the swift hammer of justice waiting to come down on them at any moment, Mr. Quinn – Greg – had always had a warm and friendly presence, great snacks, and R-rated movies no one else would let them watch. Perhaps as a single dad he had simply been trying to make up for the fact that his daughter had already gone through more than most of her peers with her mom walking out on them and needed some extra fun. Whatever the case, the tradition had continued well past their school years and though other friends had come and gone, Cam still found herself coming over regularly to hang out at the Quinn household, Greg now becoming just as much of a friend as his daughter. With Becka’s new job and the prospect of moving out into her own apartment soon, it felt like the end to an era. It just

wouldn't feel like movie night unless it was on this couch in this house.

Cam had trouble focusing on the B disaster flick as she reflected on these things. A new chapter of life was beginning, for the Quinns at least. Cam was still deeply entrenched in the rut she had been stuck in for seven years now. Greg had given her a glowing recommendation to his company when a receptionist position had become available and she had been working there ever since, chasing her dream of home decorating and starting her own business through networking on social media. She had gained a sizable following finally, but the jobs that trickled in were not consistent work or enough to justify finally quitting her day job. Anticipation tingled inside her though as if she were just around the corner from finally hitting a big break and taking off. She clung to that dream desperately, despite her own parents' criticism and even Becka's occasional concerns.

Greg's cell chiming broke her from her thoughts and everyone's attention from the meteor hurtling towards earth on the TV.

He grunted as he checked the message. "Sorry, ladies. That's work, and at this hour it can't be good. I might be holed up in my office the rest of the night." He rose from the couch, towering over the two girls at his full six-foot-something height. "I'll finish the movie on my own another night."

"Sorry, Dad. That sucks."

"Sorry," Cam chimed in.

He waved his hand. "Technology breaking in the middle of the night is what paid for this house." He smiled at his daughter. "And your college. So, it's worth it."

They lapsed back into silence after he left the room to climb the stairs to his office on the second floor. Cam's phone buzzed on the cushion next to her and she unlocked her screen to find a new match on the dating app she had been using.

"He looks fun," Becca commented, leaning over to peek at the screen.

She sighed heavily. "Fun, or the kind of douche to demand I blow him in the bathroom before our meal is even finished? Because that's how my last date went."

Her dear friend cringed. "Well, why don't you try a more vanilla dating app? Of course you're getting weirdos when you use those freaky sites and apps."

"Because I don't want a vanilla guy. I've already been down that road. I went through a lot to figure out who I am and what I want."

"I don't see what the difference is between that and finding a nice regular dude at the coffee shop and just asking him to choke you occasionally."

"Because it's not just choking occasionally." Cam let out a deep breath, trying not to let herself get frustrated from the same conversation they had already had twenty times before. She didn't know how to get her friend to fully understand what it was like to be a submissive or to need a Dom to lead and care for her. To Becca, the relationship looked anti-feminist at best, abuse at worst and she could not fathom why Cam would want someone telling her what to do all the time or suffering what she thought was needless degradation. Becca had been open to the lighter side of things, like a little hair pulling and rough sex within the bedroom, but when Cam had shared things like bed times, chores, or orgasm control, that was when the poorly veiled look of judgment began to scrunch her friend's face.

“I know, I know. It’s more than just bedroom stuff to you.”

Cam nodded.

“I guess just be safe at least. These guys, these ‘fake Doms’ as you call them, sound dangerous sometimes.”

“I think some are or can be. I’m being careful though. They don’t get any of my personal information and I always meet in a public place. It’s just hard to find someone who isn’t just looking for a twenty-four hour ego boost and actually gives a shit about what the submissive needs.”

“Isn’t that basically what it all is?” She snorted sarcastically. “You give these pricks everything and follow all these rules and do everything they say and call them Master and shit. How is that not just twenty-four hour ego stroking?”

“I mean kind of, but it’s not, because a true Dominant understands it’s more than that, they have a responsibility to care for their submissive’s needs and to cultivate that desire to keep on serving, like,” she paused reflectively. “Well, like your dad.”

Becka’s face puckered skeptically. “Eww.”

“No, I mean how I know that after this movie you’re going to load up the dishwasher for him, like you always do, because he went out of his way to cook for us. He poured some care into us and our needs and comfort and so it makes us care about making sure he doesn’t have to worry about dishes in the morning.”

“I guess I kind of see what you’re saying, but...” she trailed off, her face still twisted in disapproval at the connection drawn to her father.

“My point is there’s caregiving that goes into it too, not just chains and whips, but all these arrogant little fuckboys think they can take advantage of submissives and use them to fix their own insecurities. It’s pissing me off.”

Becka shrugged defeated. “I don’t know what to tell you. I can’t even find a nice regular guy. All I want is someone who wants more than a one night stand. It’s so hard to find somebody who cares as much about the future as I do. I’ve worked really hard to get where I am. I don’t want to be someone’s sugar mama, you know?”

She nodded. “Boys our age suck. That’s why I’ve always liked older men. Maybe you should try dating someone older too.”

She laughed. “Maybe like in their thirties, if I’m feeling particularly adventurous, but wasn’t one of your dates like in his forties? You may as well date my dad.” She gagged theatrically at the suggestion.

“Fuck you. Maybe I will. Your dad is kind of hot and he’s got this great house and a stable job.”

“Oh gross! No!”

“Come on, Becks, I thought you told me to find a nice vanilla guy to settle down with. Do you think your dad would choke me occasionally if I asked?” Cam reached towards her friend’s neck with bouts of laughter that brought tears to her eyes as she watched her cringe and hide under her blanket.

“Fucking disgusting, Camellia! You’re fucking nasty! Stop it! What if he hears you?” She glanced towards the staircase in the hallway.

Cam lurched towards her again, then started in a fresh round of giggles at her friend’s repulsed reaction.

“All right, that’s enough,” Becka frowned sternly. “Shut up about my dad before I kick you out.”

“I believe this is Greg’s *bachelor pad* now that you’ll be leaving. So...”

“You make it so hard to be your friend sometimes.”

“You love me.” She shot her bestie a winning smile.

Becka rolled her eyes. “Yeah yeah.”

THE ROOM WAS DARK. The TV was off and the only sound in the living room was the gentle night rain hitting the windows and the periodic hum of the air conditioner switching on to keep the house cool during the unusually warm spring night. Footsteps on the floorboards in the hall pulled Cam out of a deep sleep, but her eyes did not open until she felt the blanket tugged away from her shoulder.

“Camellia,” Greg’s husky voice called gently to her as his hand touched her shoulder.

Cam rubbed her eyes as she slowly sat up on the couch, where she had clearly been sleeping for some time. “I’m sorry. I must’ve fallen asleep at the end of the movie. I should head home now.” She looked up and saw him standing over her, changed into a comfortable set of pajama pants and old t-shirt. She was struck by how different he looked outside of the professional attire he usually donned at the office. He seemed more approachable like this and less like the figure of authority he was in a tie. The idea of Greg-the-friend seemed easier in a t-shirt.

He shook his head. “Absolutely not. It’s the middle of the night. You’re not going anywhere.”

She looked past him to the other side of the couch where a rumpled pile of blankets and throw pillows lay where her friend used to be. “Where’s Becks?”

“She abandoned you for the guest room upstairs, or that’s what it’ll be when she finally moves out.”

Cam smiled. “Well, I’m fine on the couch.”

“Not in my home.” He shook his head. “Come on.” He flitted his fingers for her to follow him.

Untangling herself from the blanket she had snuggled under during the movie, she quietly followed him down the hall and to the right to the master bedroom. Her eyes widened as she entered. This room had always been off limits. No matter how fun of a parent he had been, he had always made sure there was one place in the house reserved just for him. In all the years she had been coming to this house, Camellia had never actually stepped foot in this room. It was a modest size, dominated by a king size bed tastefully decorated in warm tones with simple geometric lines. Everything felt well decorated, yet still masculine, and she found herself quite impressed and wondering if he had decorated it himself.

“This bedspread is gorgeous,” she commented softly as if her whisper might somehow travel all the way upstairs to wake Becka.

“I pulled a lot of inspiration from your Instagram account actually. Your tips and tricks. So, in a way, you decorated everything.”

“You follow me?” She grinned surprised, warmed by his support.

“Of course. As soon as Rebecca mentioned it.” He pulled the decorative pillows from the bed and stacked them neatly on the bench at the foot of it.

“Oh my god, and you stack your pillows?”

He looked at her confused. “Have I done something wrong?”

“No. I just didn’t know men like you existed.”

His musical chuckle was low and held a deeper rumble to it than normal. “There are men who enjoy a well decorated room.”

“Yeah, but in my experience they usually prefer the company of other men who enjoy a well decorated room.”

He pulled back the duvet and top sheet before turning back to her. “I definitely prefer women.” His eyes seemed black in the dark room and the way he looked at her made her heart inexplicably quicken. “I insist you take the bed. I’ll take the couch tonight.”

She looked up at him in shock. “What? No! No, I couldn’t ask that of you. We have work tomorrow and you were up late working. You need your rest.”

“You didn’t ask and neither am I,” he responded sternly. “Bathroom is the door on the right. Left is the closet. Please don’t mix that up in the night.”

She smiled, though confused by his suddenly firm generosity. “O-okay. Thanks.”

“Sweet dreams, Camellia.”

“Good night, Greg.”

When the door clicked shut, she gingerly slipped into the sheets and bit her lip from their softness, tempted to shed her clothes

and sleep naked wrapped in their high thread count. She snorted to herself at the shock and embarrassment that would await her in the morning if Greg returned to find her curled up naked in his bed and thought better of it. The only thing that would be worse than that is if Becka were to find her like that. As she closed her eyes to the sound of the rain on the windowpane, she wondered with an amused grin if maybe she should date Becka's dad.