

Fated
LOVE

The title 'Fated LOVE' is centered. 'Fated' is in a cursive script, and 'LOVE' is in a bold, serif font. Two interlocking wedding rings are positioned between the 'F' and 'L' of 'LOVE'.

by
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CHAPTER ONE

Quinn Maguire stopped just inside the sliding double glass doors of the emergency room. It was only the second time she'd been there, but it already felt like home. Hospitals everywhere were very much the same—the same drab tiled floors, the same muted color schemes in bland institutional shades, the same stark undercurrent of loss and despair, perceptible beneath the thin veneer of hospitality and welcome. With a brief glance, she swept the admissions area to her left, noting the solitary clerk with her head bent over a computer screen and two patients, both of whom looked to be half asleep, waiting in the unadorned area beyond. A television, perched high in one corner with the volume turned down low, was tuned to CNN.

Hitching up her leather backpack and mentally squaring her shoulders, Quinn walked down a corridor that was just wide enough for two stretchers to pass. She nodded to a lone man in khaki work clothes who was buffing the floor with an electric polisher and turned into the nurses' station that occupied the center of the emergency room proper. Despite the fact that PMC, the Philadelphia Medical College, was one of five major university hospitals in the metropolitan area and the only one in the Germantown-Mount Airy section, the emergency room had an abandoned air at just after six on that Monday morning.

The few hours on the cusp between the end of the weekend and the beginning of the workweek tended to be the quietest time of all in the ER. The night nurses were finishing their paperwork and getting ready for the change of shift, the residents were running down lab and x-ray results before turning over their patients to the incoming teams, and the attending physicians were catching a couple hours' sleep in their on-call rooms.

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Quinn scanned the area to orient herself in the unfamiliar space. The patient cubicles were arranged in a U-formation around three sides of the central workstation, a large open area enclosed by waist-high counters. Inside were computers, fax machines, racks of patient charts, drawers containing all manner of forms, and nooks for the staff to complete paperwork. At the moment, the curtains were closed on several of the adjacent examining rooms, suggesting that there were patients inside awaiting final treatment determinations, and the faint beep of an EKG monitor marked time somewhere in the background. A lone resident—or possibly an older-than-average medical student—sat behind the counter making notes in a chart.

Quinn approached and leaned her hip against the edge of the long narrow countertop. The woman looked up, a question in her eyes.

“Yes?”

For just an instant, Quinn hesitated. The nearly ubiquitous emergency room uniform of scrub shirt and pants tended to reduce everyone to gender-neutrality, but not this woman. Nothing could diminish her singular presence. Her almost carelessly layered collar-length hair, a lustrous mixture of golds and browns and a whisper of red, framed a face remarkable for sun-kissed skin, deep brown eyes, and perfectly balanced features. Despite the attractive picture of delicately arched brows, finely etched cheekbones, and full, ripe lips, it was the sharp intelligence in the inquisitive gaze that captured Quinn’s attention and drew her in.

“Can I help you?” Honor Blake asked again, her eyes quickly scanning the woman’s open-collared pale blue cotton shirt and jeans as she attempted to place her. Not a patient—she would have remembered. Certainly the chiseled features, blazing blue eyes, and jet-black hair formed a visage not easily forgotten, but Honor drew a blank. She suddenly found herself being boldly appraised, and that not only surprised but annoyed her. “I’m sorry. This is a restri—”

“I’m Quinn Maguire,” Quinn said quickly, extending her hand with a grin. “A new ER attending. Maybe you can show me the locker—”

Before she could finish her sentence, a shout from the hall caught the attention of both women. They turned as two EMTs careened into the ER pushing a gurney.

“GSW to the chest, pressure’s 40 palp,” the first EMT yelled.

Rising quickly, Honor pointed. “Put him in trauma one.”

“Where’s your attending?” Quinn demanded sharply as they sprinted behind the stretcher.

“I—”

“He just lost his pulse,” the second EMT announced breathlessly. “Shit. He’s flatline.”

“Never mind,” Quinn snapped to the resident as she grabbed sterile gloves and a mask from a cart just inside the procedure room. She tied on the mask, ripped open the package of gloves, and pulled them on. “Just find me a thoracotomy set and open it.”

Two nurses and a wild-eyed medical student ran into the room, pulling on gloves, and instantly began the choreographed trauma routine without need of instruction. One nurse immediately cut off the patient’s clothing, the other hung a fresh bag of normal saline and ran it wide open, and the student collected blood specimens in multicolor, rubber-topped vials.

“Can you handle tubing this guy?” Quinn asked, sparing the other doctor a quick glance as she poured Betadine directly from the bottle onto the patient’s chest. “Or do you want me to? You need to be quick.”

“I’ve got it,” Honor replied evenly. She picked up the curved laryngoscope, which resembled a thin flashlight with a right-angle extension, from a cart beside the stretcher, slid it deftly into the unconscious man’s throat, and followed with a plastic endotracheal tube that she passed between the vocal cords and into the trachea. It took her less than ten seconds to complete the maneuver and attach the breathing tube to a ventilator.

“Nice,” Quinn grunted.

“Linda,” Honor said to the nurse beside her, “get me some morphine and succinylcholine, will you?”

“Sure.” The nurse, a small trim blond, cast a curious look in Quinn’s direction and raised an eyebrow.

Honor muttered, “New attending.”

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“Ah,” was all the nurse said as she drew up the drugs and passed the syringes to Honor, who then injected them into the IV line.

“Pressure?” Quinn asked as she reached for the number-ten scalpel.

“Nothing,” one of the other nurses replied.

“Okay, then. Somebody call and get some blood down here stat.” As she spoke, Quinn placed her left hand on the chest with her fingers palpating the fourth and fifth ribs just below the man’s nipple and cut a long incision in the space between them directly into the chest cavity. She was about to ask for the rib spreaders when they appeared in her field of vision. “Thanks.” *Smart resident.*

“No problem,” Honor murmured as she peered over Quinn’s shoulder. “Linda, hand me the suction, please.”

Honor cleared the clots from around the heart and watched as Quinn used scissors to open the pericardium, the dense fibrous covering around the heart. She’d seen a lot of surgeons do the same maneuver and had done it herself, but she couldn’t remember ever seeing anyone’s hands move so quickly or so well. “Tamponade?”

Cardiac tamponade was a condition in which the heart was unable to pump effectively because it was being compressed by a collection of blood or fluid inside its own containing cover.

“Looks like it,” Quinn replied, gratified to see the heart start to beat. She slid her fingers underneath the left ventricle and carefully turned the heart. “And a big mother of a hole back here, too.”

“Pressure’s coming up,” a voice announced.

“Not for long, not unless we get this bullet hole closed up.” Quinn never took her eyes off the beating organ in her hand. She never looked away from the field when she was operating, because it broke her concentration and cost her several seconds of precious time to refocus on the wound. She held out her right hand and hoped to hell that someone there knew something about surgery. “I need a three-0 silk on a taper needle. That’s a—”

Miraculously, it appeared in her hand. *Very smart resident.* As she placed a purse-string suture in the muscle around the hole in the left ventricle, she heard the mellifluous alto voice behind her tell the nurses to call the OR and alert the chest surgeons that there was a patient coming up who might need bypass.

“Did it hit the hilum?” Honor asked, referring to the vessels behind the heart that supplied blood to the lungs. She noted the perfect placement of the sutures and the slick, economical way that Quinn handled the instruments. *She’s an incredible surgeon.*

“Don’t think so.” Carefully, Quinn tied down the suture, hoping as she always did at this point that the muscle would hold and not shred as the knot was tightened. “Can you get a chest tube in and hooked up to suction?”

“It’s ready to go as soon as you get that bleeding stopped.”

Quinn straightened and met the appraising brown eyes. Behind her mask, she grinned, flushed with success. “My part’s all taken care of, Doctor. Now let’s see how you do.”

Honor chose a spot one interspace above and just lateral to Quinn’s incision and made a one-inch incision of her own. She guided a blunt hemostat between the ribs and into the chest cavity, then pushed a thick, rigid tube through the opening she had made. The chest tube would create suction inside the thoracic cavity, allowing the lung to re-expand. While Honor worked, Linda hung the first unit of blood.

“He’s ready to transport,” Honor said as she connected the tube to the Pleur-evac, a canister designed to collect blood and fluid while removing unwanted air from around the lung.

The entire resuscitation had taken fifteen minutes. Quinn and Honor pulled off their gloves, lowered their masks, and walked out into the hall, while the nurses and the medical student prepared the patient and his various monitoring devices, lines, and intravenous bags for the trip up to the operating room.

“Well, now I really feel right at home,” Quinn said, rolling her shoulders to ease some of the tension. *Just like old times. Almost.*

But it wasn’t—not really—and might never be again.

She glanced down with a grimace, realizing that her jeans were soaked with blood. “I need to shower and change. Can you get me some scrubs?”

“Come this way.” Honor strode toward a connecting corridor. “I’ll show you where the locker room is. There are plenty in there.”

“Thanks.”

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As they walked, Honor took the opportunity to study the newcomer. She'd already seen her work, and the new attending was exactly as she had been advertised. Quinn Maguire, aged twenty-eight, was a fully trained general surgeon who had just completed a trauma fellowship in New York City. Her résumé had been impressive, and her performance just now matched her reputation. But of course, there hadn't been anything in her academic profile to suggest that she was, in addition to being an accomplished surgeon, a strikingly attractive woman—jet black hair, sapphire blue eyes, slightly above average height, lean and tight and boldly handsome. Cocky, too, as Honor had anticipated. Begrudgingly, she admitted that Maguire just might have reason to be. *She has magic hands.*

"Here it is," Honor announced, pushing open a door marked Staff. "Take any open locker, and check with Marty, the ward clerk, when you're ready. He'll give you a key."

"Thanks again." Quinn leaned her shoulder against the door frame and regarded Honor appreciatively. Beautiful, smart, and skilled. *Things are looking up.* "What year are you? You did a really nice job in there just now."

"So did you, Dr. Maguire." Honor extended her hand. "We haven't been properly introduced. I'm Honor Blake, the chief of emergency services."

"Oops." One dark eyebrow lifted and the corner of Quinn's mouth quirked into a grin again even as she realized that she'd just spent her first half-hour on the job treating her new boss like an underling. "Not a great way to start, I guess."

She shook Honor's hand, instantly struck by the warm strength in the long tapered fingers. The contact felt good, and she wondered if she was the only one to feel the slight spark of attraction. When she searched the brown eyes flecked with gold, she saw nothing but a polite greeting, and, reluctantly, she released Honor's hand. "I didn't recognize you. Sorry."

"No need to be," Honor said neutrally, ignoring the speculative look in Quinn's deep blue eyes. "What better way to get acquainted?"

I could think of any number of ways. Quinn tried hard not to stare at the soft swell of breasts beneath the dark blue scrub shirt or at any other part of Honor Blake's very attractive physique. She did

take note, however, of the thin gold band on Honor's left hand with a brief twinge of disappointment. *Well, that takes care of that.*

"Trial by fire, I guess. At least now I understand why you're so good...for a resident." Quinn tried for a bit of humor, but the ER chief merely nodded faintly, her expression impossible to decipher.

"Come find me when you're settled, and I'll give you a brief rundown of our operation." Honor turned and walked away. She had been opposed to hiring Quinn Maguire, but it had been a fait accompli before she'd even had a chance to cast a vote. She had not wanted a surgeon on her staff, especially one she didn't know anything about. Now she'd just have to make the best of it.

Quinn watched Honor stride purposefully down the hall, wondering at the hint of animosity she'd felt from the other woman. *Usually it takes me more than half an hour to piss someone off.*

Quinn sighed. This was not where she'd imagined herself being a year ago. But then, nothing in her life had turned out the way she'd expected. She was lucky to have gotten this position, and now she'd just have to make the best of it.



"So what's the story?" Linda O'Malley asked as she settled onto a stool next to Honor in the nurses' station.

"Huh?" Honor looked up blankly from the paperwork that she was completing on the GSW victim, presently known as UMW—unidentified male victim. "Story...?"

"Dr. Tall, Dark, and Gorgeous."

Honor stifled a sharp retort, uncertain as to why the question aggravated her. She'd known Linda for almost eight years, ever since they'd met when Honor was a medical student and could barely figure out how to start an intravenous line. She'd lost count of the number of times that Linda had bailed her out of difficult situations, and in the course of their professional association, they'd become close personal friends as well.

"I told you that we were getting a new attending," Honor replied, tapping her pen restlessly on the countertop in a completely

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uncharacteristic fashion. *Why am I so bothered? God, I hate feeling off balance.*

“Yeah, but she’s not the usual ER doc, now, is she?”

“No,” Honor admitted pensively, thinking about those talented hands, “she’s not.”

“How could you hire someone for my department while I was on vacation?” Honor was so incensed she could barely stay in her seat. “I never even had a chance to interview her.”

Mary Ann Jones looked honestly contrite. “It came up unexpectedly, and I knew that you had a position open. I had to make the decision quickly to get the salary approved for the upcoming fiscal year.”

“You could have called me to discuss it. Linda O’Malley knew where we were.”

“You know how these things go, Honor.” The chief of medicine shrugged. “The chief of surgery contacted me and asked me to interview Dr. Maguire that very day. Her credentials were impeccable, and...I owed Fillmore a favor.”

“Great. Politics,” Honor said in disgust. “I need a full-time ER doc, not a prima donna surgeon who probably can’t tell a heart attack from heartburn.”

“It won’t hurt to have a surgeon permanently on staff in the emergency room,” Mary Ann pointed out. “It will be very good for the residency program, and it will cut down on the number of surgery consults you’ll need to request. That will make the HMOs happy.”

“Did it ever occur to you to wonder why a surgeon would want to be an emergency room physician?” Honor shook her head. “What’s wrong with her?”

“Nothing that I could see. Undergraduate at Duke, med school and general surgery at NYU, and one of the premier trauma fellowships in the country at St. Michael’s.”

“I ask again, what’s wrong with her? A substance abuse problem, mental instability?” Honor leaned forward, her displeasure evident. “Come on, Mary Ann. No surgeon would take this position if there weren’t some kind of problem in their background. It doesn’t offer either the status or the salary of surgery.”

The chief of medicine lifted her shoulders helplessly. "I honestly can't shed any light on why she wanted this job. She comes highly recommended with absolutely nothing in her files to besmirch a stellar record. I was delighted to get her, and since she's officially a joint surgery and medicine hire, their department has to do all the work of credentialing her."

"More politics. I'm telling you, someone's hiding something." Honor stood, still furious. "As far as I'm concerned, she's on probation in my department. If she makes one mistake or steps out of line, she's gone."

"Of course," Mary Ann said. "I won't stand in your way if you have cause for dismissal. Just give her a fair chance."

That had been three weeks ago. In the interim, Honor had reviewed Quinn's CV and made a few discreet calls to friends from medical school and residency who had contacts at St. Michael's where Quinn had trained. Unfortunately, she didn't know much more about Quinn now than when she'd first been told to expect a surgeon as the newest member of her department. All anyone could tell her was that Quinn was rumored to be a rising young star, and if her star had burned out, no one knew why.

"If there *is* a story, I haven't heard it," Honor said with a sigh.

"She was slick this morning in that trauma," Linda pointed out mildly.

"Yes."

"And she's so hot the air around her sizzles."

"God, Linda, Robin shouldn't let you out of the house without a chaperone."

The small blond laughed. "After twelve years and two kids, Robin knows she doesn't have to worry. I was just *remarking*."

"You have drool in the corner of your mouth."

Linda started to raise a hand to her lips, then snorted. "Ha ha. And I suppose *you* didn't notice?"

Honor grew very still, disconcerted when Quinn's intense blue eyes and easy grin came instantly to mind. "No."

"Honor, come on," Linda said gently, resting her fingers on her friend's forearm. "Sooner or later—"

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Abruptly, Honor stood. “Let’s not go there again, okay? Please.”

“I’m sorry.” Linda rose and gave Honor a quick hug. “You know me, just can’t mind my own business.”

“It’s okay.” Honor forced a smile. “Now, which room did you put the guy with the chest pain in?”

“Number four. The EKG is by the bedside. The T-waves are peaked, but they’re not flipped, so I think it’s just angina.”

“Did he respond to that nitroglycerin?”

“Yep. Felt better in thirty seconds.”

“Good,” Honor said absently, glancing down the hall toward the locker room. “I’ll be in with him for a while. Keep your eye on Dr. Maguire. She might have good hands, but she probably doesn’t know anything about medicine. Don’t let her go killing anyone.”

“Yes, boss,” Linda murmured softly, wondering as she watched her friend disappear into one of the curtained rooms just what it was about Quinn Maguire that bothered Honor quite so much. She doubted that in the small world of the hospital and the intimate environment in which they spent much of their day that it would take very long for the answer to become apparent.