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QUINN'S  
COMEUPPANCE

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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Quinn Collins frowned as she pulled into the driveway of her house. Her house, that she found by herself and was buying by herself with the help of her friendly loan officer. That was her brother's car in her driveway, and that was her mower out on the lawn, but that wasn't her brother, Gavin, pushing it. Some stranger was mowing her lawn. If her brother hired someone to mow her lawn, she'd be pretty dang mad. Furious, in fact. Just because she, as she'd been told, way too often, looked like a delicate little flower, didn't mean a thing. Blonde hair and huge blue eyes belied the fact she had the temper of a fictional redhead. She'd known red heads and none of them could match her temper. Pulling in behind Gavin's car, she got out and slammed the door, heading over to see what hunk of strange man pushed her mower. He better have checked the oil, she fumed. Dang, he was hot, though.

"Hey!" She stood in front of him, causing him to start in surprise and shut off the mower. "Who are you and why are you mowing my lawn?"

"Quinn, this is my buddy, Zane and he's mowing because he

lost a bet.”

She whirled on her brother who was coming out her front door. Her front door! “Why are you here and why are you raiding my refrigerator?” Gavin had two beers in his hand and handed one to Zane then opened the other one. “I moved out to get away from you.”

“Is that the reason?”

Suddenly, she felt very short standing next to the two six-foot-something males. “Yes, that is the reason! And you know it.”

“Who knew someone doing her a favor would get her this worked up?” Zane drawled to Gavin and took a long sip of his beer. Her beer.

She turned to him. “Favor? What favor? I can mow my own lawn!”

“Why are you home so early? Did you get fired?”

“Fired? Why would I get fired?” Her brother was so aggravating. Putting her hands on her hips, she glared at him.

“Because you can’t control your mouth.” He grinned at her.

“I can too!” she wanted to stomp her foot, but she was an adult now, even though she often felt like a child around him. He just infuriated her and pushed her buttons like no one else. Because he treated her like a child and she was not. Being blessed with good looks wasn’t all fun and games. She called it the Barbie doll concept. Sure, Barbie had fifty some careers and never needed money because she worked, but no one took her seriously and no one treated her as if she had a brain in her head. Which Barbie did, and she did too.

“Today was an in-service training day but there was a water main break at the office, and the boss sent us all home.” She glared at him. “I was going to do some work from home, but someone is in my house.”

“What were you going to do? How does an occupational therapist work from home?”

“Well, for one thing, I was going to mow my lawn. My lawn,

with my mower, myself.” She was also going to do laundry and catch up on a bunch of paperwork that had piled up, while she watched *The Bachelor* that she had recorded. He didn’t need to know all that, or any of it. She could do whatever she wanted with her days.

“I could have had the front lawn finished by now.” Zane handed his beer back to Gavin, then looked at her and said, “But if you want to finish it, have at it.”

“I can’t mow in this! I need to change and you both can go home!”

She turned to flounce into the house, and heard Zane say behind her, “She’s a little firecracker, isn’t she?”

“She needs someone to blister her butt, is what she needs,” her brother said, and she stomped up the stairs.

As if! She needed no such thing. What she needed was to be taken seriously and left alone and treated like the grown adult she was, not a baby doll. Or a child. She was neither.

Going upstairs, she took her work clothes off and put them in the hamper, then pulled on jeans and a t-shirt and pulled her hair up. Slipping into sneakers, she started a load of laundry and headed down the stairs of her beloved little house. Laundry upstairs, was the best invention ever, next to a dishwasher, of course. She heard the mower start up again and frowned. Had they not left yet? What were they doing? She grabbed one of her own beers from her own refrigerator and headed back outside. Leaning against her front porch column, she frowned at Zane who was sitting on the step watching Gavin mow. “Why are you still here?”

Her brother mowed as if he owned her place. Her place. “We can’t leave. You parked behind us.”

Oh. Yeah, she had.

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said. “Your brother said he wanted to do you a favor and we made a bet over a ball game, and well, I either won or lost.”

“If you were mowing, you lost,” she pointed out.

“Or you can look at it another way. It’s a gorgeous Indiana afternoon and I got to be outside for a while, doing something productive and then got to meet Gavin’s little sister that he talks about all the time. That could mean I won.”

Quinn rolled her eyes and took a long drink. Dang, she had good taste in beer. But not brothers, not that she really had a choice in the matter. He was one of three of them and each was as annoying as the other in their own special way. All older, taller and irritating. No wonder none of them were married. Who would put up with them?

“I understand. Gavin is bossy and makes you do things you don’t want to do,” she said. “Hey! You missed a spot!” She pointed to the corner, then smiled at Zane. “If he’s going to do it, he needs to do it right.”

“That is a true fact,” he said. “You have a nice house here.”

“Thank you. I looked for almost a year before I found the one I wanted. I just love it. Do you live here in town?” Quinn sat down on the step next to him and they both watched Gavin mow, and he finished his beer while she sipped on hers.

“I moved here a few years ago for work, Gavin and I met in the ER.” With anyone else this would startle her, but her brother lived for his work at the ER. “Are you a nurse, too?” she asked.

“P.A.,” he said.

Quinn nodded. Everyone in her family and most of their friends were in the medical field in some form or another. That’s what happened when both your parents were doctors, she guessed. Gavin was an ER nurse and loved it, Noah was a family practice doctor and Toby worked in physical therapy. “I was actually the patient when Gavin and I met. Broke my leg jumping off a roof,” he said.

“Bet you don’t do that again,” she said. Her brothers were always doing stupid things. Why men did what they did, she had

no clue but apparently it always seemed like a good idea at the time. She no longer even questioned it.

"You never know," he said.

"Men." She rolled her eyes. "Gavin! Don't you run over my..." she shrieked and ran to where he was mowing. "Those are my sunflowers! Don't run over my sunflowers!" Unfortunately, he already had, and she let loose a stream of words that clearly expressed how upset she was.

"Quinn, what?" He stopped the mower and looked at her.

"My sunflowers! You ran over them!"

"They looked like weeds to me," he said.

"I didn't ask you to mow! Damn it, Gavin! Just go away. Quit trying to help me! I'm a grown-ass woman and I can do things for myself!" She'd been coaxing those sunflowers to grow for a while now and had been looking forward to the blooms later this summer. It was the first time she'd ever planted her favorite flower and now they were gone.

"I'm sorry, Quinn! I really thought they were weeds," he said.

She couldn't stop her eyes from filling with tears, which was ridiculous. There was nothing that could be done about it now, they were gone, just gone. She shook her head. "I'm moving my car," she said and marched into the house to get her keys. Where had she put them? Probably still in her room where she'd changed clothes. Stopping in the bathroom, she wiped her eyes and frowned at herself in the mirror. Suck it up, she told herself. It isn't the end of the world. Snatching her keys off her dresser, she didn't look at either of the men as she walked by them and to her car. Backing out of the driveway, she parked just down the street and waited for them to leave. She was so tired of men, boys, males. They always thought they were right and always tried to be the boss. Well, she was done and over that. No more nonsense from men. There was nothing she couldn't do by herself and just as good, if not better, than a man.

Gavin pulled up next to her and she gave him her best death

glare. “Quinn, I’m sorry, I was just trying to be nice,” he said.

“When are you going to realize I’m all grown up and can take care of myself?” she spat. She was so tired of her brothers treating her like a baby, she’d had all she could take.

“Good to meet you, Quinn,” Zane said from the passenger seat.

Yeah, she just bet it had been a blast for him. Giving them both a short wave, that could also be interpreted as talk to the hand, she pulled back into her driveway, parked and went to look at her sunflowers. Well, they were gone. Nothing could be done. She needed to just get over it, somehow. Acting like the baby her brothers thought she was over it, would not help. Sighing, she stood up and wiped the useless tears from her eyes, then finished mowing her front lawn. She’d do the back yard later this afternoon. She should go switch the laundry and thaw something for supper before she went back out.

Walking into her house, she smiled, on purpose, and tried to feel her usual happiness for being here. Here in her own house that she looked long and hard for, saved and scrimped for. Decorated and loved and dang, what was that? Water dripped down on her and she looked up. A puddle? On the ceiling? That made no sense. She ran up the stairs to see what was going on. Entering the laundry room, she stepped in water. What? No. How could that be? Had her washer overflowed or what happened? She looked at it, it was full but didn’t seem to be overflowing? What was happening? Without thinking, she pulled her phone from her pocket and dialed Gavin. “There is water coming through my ceiling and a puddle in the laundry room!”

He laughed.

The man laughed. “Oh? Is that so?”

“Gavin!”

“We’re coming right back, Quinn. Don’t get your panties in a wad.”

He was insufferable. Simply horribly insufferable. Why had



she called him? She could have, should have called a plumber. What had she been thinking? That her big brother would take care of her. Of course he would but she didn't want him to, so why was her first instinct to call him? What was wrong with her?

She opened the lid to the washer again and looked at it. Now what? Oh. It turned and water was coming in there from somewhere. She reached behind it and unplugged it. Ha! See. She could do this. Okay. The washer sloshed into silence and sat there while she felt around behind it. She couldn't feel anything. Where was it leaking from? Okay, she could figure this out. The drain? The hose? What drain? What hose? Grabbing the washer, she tried to pull it away from the wall. Full of water it was just a little heavy. But she was strong and in control. She could do this. Or not. How about her dolly? It was in the garage from moving. Okay. She would go get that and then move it away from the wall and unhook some pipe thing and see what happened. Yes. She had a plan. Frowning, she felt irritated she'd called her brother, but perhaps she could use his muscle if she couldn't get it moved.

Running down the stairs, she went out through the kitchen to the garage and found the dolly in front of some still stacked up boxes from her move. She really needed to sort those out and get them unpacked or just donate them soon. Grabbing the dolly, she hauled it into the house and up the stairs. Maybe this was why most people had their laundry room on the main floor, because of issues. She didn't want issues. Things should just work.

Once in the laundry room, she tried to tilt the washer up enough to slide the dolly under. Water was heavy, she told herself. Biting her lip, she put the side of her body against it and tried to tilt it again with her hips and shoulder.

"Stupid machine!" She kicked it once so it would know who was the boss.

"I don't think it can hear you, Quinn," Gavin said.

"Well, it needs to learn to listen!" She kicked it once more, just for spite. "I can't move it."

“Well, we can. Move over.”

Quinn fumed as Gavin and Zane lifted the machine and slid the dolly under it as if it were nothing. Sometimes she really disliked her small body. She felt as fit as she could be, but there were just limits and she didn't like it one little bit, especially today.

“I'm thinking there might be a clog in the pipe,” she said as they looked behind the machine.

“You unplugged it already,” Zane said, as if he were talking to himself.

“I did,” she said. “I would have gotten it pulled out in a minute, too.”

“Sure you would have,” Gavin said. “Got a wrench?” She did, she had an entire toolbox, which she ran down to the kitchen and grabbed from under the sink.

“Tell me what to do,” she demanded, grabbing the wrench.

“Just give it here,” Gavin said.

“Gavin.” Zane gave him some look she didn't quite understand.

“Whatever,” Gavin said, and stepped back.

“Get the wrench,” Zane told her. “We need to undo this band here and see if there's something caught either in the pipe or in the filter.”

Quinn grabbed the wrench and squeezed past Gavin to the pipe and flashed Zane a smile. Okay, she could handle this. Righty tighty, lefty loosey. She turned it left and felt a surge of warm wetness flood her hand.

“Ack!” she screamed.

“It's just water, chill.” Gavin started laughing as she and Zane were both getting soaked, from the pipe and he stood, dry, in the doorway.

“Make it stop!” Zane reached around her and moved the hose which was mostly empty now anyway. “I guess I know where the leak came from,” she said,

Zane unhooked the hose from the back of the washer and said, "Yeah, look at this. How old is this thing?"

"It came with the house, so I have no idea," she said looking where he pointed.

"The hose is bad, we need to replace it, and," he paused as he fished a sock from the drain. "This culprit looks like it's been there a while."

"Ewww! Throw it away!"

"Give me the hose," Gavin said. "I'll go buy a new one while you two already wet things mop up the mess."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Zane said. "Don't suppose you have a shop vac by any chance, do you?"

"I actually do!" Quinn tried to remember where it was. "In the garage."

"That will make this go a lot faster." He smiled at her and despite being wet and miserable and unhappy, she felt a little something. "Okay, you find towels and I'll go get the shop vac."

Okay, maybe men weren't totally useless, she thought, as she went to the hall closet. Never letting them know that, though, was a priority. She really could take care of herself, but no one knew everything, of course. It simply wasn't possible. But it was also extremely possible she could have handled this herself, so she needed to curb her instinct to call her brothers when something happened. So why did the sound of the shop vac coming on downstairs make her smile? Had nothing to do with the tall hunk of non-brother running it, she assured herself.

Should she change? Why? She was wet and would probably get wetter before this was over. She would make sure her cute little house was all dry and clean before she got all dry and clean. Priorities!

Forty-five minutes later, she, Gavin and a shirtless Zane sat in her kitchen, drinking her last three beers. It had turned quite warm in here, she decided. "Thank you, guys," she said, clinking

bottles. "I could have done it alone but thank you for helping me."

"You called me," Gavin said. "You could be a little more gracious. We missed a ball game to come help you."

"I was being gracious." She glared at him. "I said thank you and gave you my last beers!" And, okay, ogled his buddy, just a little.

Gavin rolled his eyes in a way that made her want to smack him. What was wrong with him? Getting up, she went upstairs to the dryer tumbling with Zane's shirt. Her clothes were once again sloshing in the washer tub, and she'd insisted on putting the new hose on herself. So far it seemed to be working. Next time, she told herself, she would not call her brother. He was cheaper than a repairman, true, but the grief she had to go through wasn't worth the dollars she saved.

Getting the almost dry shirt from the dryer, she took it downstairs, not wishing he'd taken his jeans off to get dried, too. Nope. She wasn't thinking that at all. "Where's my annoying brother?" she asked, coming back into the kitchen to toss his shirt at him. It was time for them to go. She had a date in a couple hours and wanted to get ready. Zane caught the shirt with one hand. Look at those abs. Don't look at those abs, she scolded herself.

"He ran to the liquor store down the street to replace your beer." Zane grinned at her. "Quinn, he is trying to be nice, just let him be. He thinks you are wonderful, you know."

"He does not. He thinks I'm a stupid little girl who needs someone to take care of her." She didn't mean for that to spew out, but it did, so she added, "And I am not. I'm a grown up professional with a good job and a house of my own and I don't need a man to hold my hand."

"Sometimes holding hands can be fun." Zane needed to stop smiling at her like that and put his damn shirt back on. "Walking down the street. In the movies. On a slippery sidewalk." He winked at her and said, "Sometimes I fall and need a hand."

"I wear boots with grip soles," she said, getting up and walking over to the sink to catch her breath. Damn, again.

"See how smart you are?" he said. She sighed dramatically and turned her back on his still shirtless self.

"I hate being condescended to," she informed him, running water in the sink, for what reason? Nothing to wash, they had not poured a glass.

"I'm pretty darn sure you take offense where none is meant," he said, and she started as he came up behind her, touching her shoulder and then turning her around, and looking into her eyes. "You're too pretty to be that prickly."

"My looks that genetics gave me, and I had nothing to do with, have nothing to do with the fact I can take care of myself."

"They also have nothing to do with the fact that you have people who love you and want to help you when you need it." He looked her in the eyes and she almost melted. Hazel eyes were adorable. His hazel eyes. "Just chill out a little."

She hated it when she was told to chill. She did not need to chill! She didn't know what chill even meant, generally, but she didn't like it. It was a stupid word. It's what you did to pudding!

"Maybe I'd be chill if people didn't treat me like an adorable toddler." She gave him her best death glare.

"Maybe if you didn't act like a toddler, you wouldn't be treated as one," he said. "Your brother is right, what you probably need is a good ass whipping."

"Excuse me!" She tried to take a step back, but she was up against the sink.

"One day," he said, then he let go of her shoulder and took a step back himself.

Thank you, she told him silently. He'd been way too close with his no shirt self.

Going back to the table, he shrugged on his shirt and said, "Glad your washer is fixed." As if he hadn't just said he was going to, well... you know. She knew. Whatever, she rolled her

eyes. Gavin always said that stupid figure of speech. Which was all it was, they all knew. Whatever made them feel like big strong men, she guessed.

“I’m glad my washer is fixed, too,” she said, and then added just a little begrudgingly, “I appreciate you taking the time to teach me how to do it, instead of just taking over.”

“You are very capable, but no one knows everything,” he said. “I’d have no idea how to do your job, or how to make those blanket things Gavin has in his apartment that he said you made.”

“Crocheting,” she said. “Does he really like them? I’m glad.” She was. She’d made all her brothers an afghan when they each graduated college. They’d all given her money when she did, but, by then, they were all employed. She appreciated the money, although it was gone, and they still had their afghans. Her grandmother had taught her how and it still soothed her to sit and crochet when she got stressed. Winters spent crocheting in front of her fireplace in her new house with a half-done afghan on her lap after a hard day’s work, was something she looked forward to, quite a bit.

“He does, like I said he’s very proud of you.”

“Nah, I think she’s an ornery little tagalong brat,” Gavin said, walking in with an entire case of beer. How much did he think she drank?

“That’s a lot of booze,” she said.

“My little sister deserves the best. Besides, we are all coming over Sunday afternoon for food, remember?”

Oh, yeah, she’d invited the family and some friends over for a cookout to celebrate her new place. She looked over at Zane. “You might as well come, too,” she said. “If you aren’t working.”

“Lame invite, but sure, I’d love to come, not doing anything else.” He smiled at her and her stomach did that little jumpy thing again and she frowned. No. Just no. “What can I bring?”

“Well, I already have beer, my lawn mowed, and my washer

fixed, so I guess just yourself," she said. "Steaks on the grill with all the fixings, it's a party!"

"Sounds like fun," he said, then turned to Gavin. "You ready to head out?"

"We better," he said. "Call me if you need me, Quinn."

She bristled but realized that was what she had just done. Called big brother, and she needed to double down on her determination to do this on her own. It was a slip up. Nothing more.

"Bye, guys," she said and walked to the door, opening it. "Thanks again, see you Sunday." Time to enjoy her afternoon!

Gavin ruffled the top of her head, as he walked out, and Zane just walked by her, but the way he did it, umm, did not give her shivers. Nope.

Shutting the door behind them, she looked around her little house that suddenly seemed quiet and not one little bit lonely. Shaking her head, she went to her desk and opened her laptop. She needed to plan a party!

Shutting the laptop an hour later, she'd rented a large grill, some outside tables, chairs and made up her mind what she was going to do this evening. She'd been putting it off too long, but finally had the motivation to do it. Did she want Keith coming to the party this weekend to meet her family and other friends? No, she did not. If she didn't break up with him tonight, he would have to be invited. He was the son of one of her clients, she'd dated him a few times and he seemed to think they were a thing. She did not want to be a thing with him or with anyone right now. She had life plans and he simply didn't fit in with them. She would do it, she decided. Coasting along in a blah relationship was not for her. He was nice enough, but she was nice too, so she should take the high road and set him free.

"Keith, this is Quinn." She began leaving a message when he didn't answer her call. "I know you were supposed to come over for supper tonight, but I had a leak in the laundry room. Can we meet at Earl's instead? Call or text me when you get a minute."

What did one wear to break up with someone? Khaki pants, a blue blouse and sneakers. Just in case she had to make a quick getaway. Her text dinged: *Running a bit late, see you at Earl's at six-thirty.*

*Okay.* She texted back and sighed. She was not looking forward to tonight, but she was looking forward to Sunday without introducing Keith to her family. She hadn't realized how much she dreaded doing that until she decided not to do it. It had been niggling at the back of her mind for a while now, and every day and every conversation with him, made her more convinced it was the time to do it. There was an hour until she had to be there, so she went to her guest, bathroom to unpack a few more boxes. Her bedroom, kitchen and TV room were all unpacked, and her bathroom off her bedroom set up the way she wanted it. That left the guest room, the guest bathroom, dining room and sunroom to get unpacked and decorated. Moving from a one-bedroom apartment to here had been a marvelous and expensive upgrade. The guest room was empty, but she had a goal to get it furnished in the next few months. Her mom and dad had given her a housewarming gift of furniture for her sunporch that should be delivered before the party Sunday.

Basically, she realized, she was looking forward to being done with Keith and being able to concentrate on her work and house. It was all she needed right now. Looking at the clock, she sighed and stood up to go and get it over with.

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ZANE WALKED INTO EARL'S, the last time he'd been here had been a few months ago. Michelle had broken up with him that night. Truth be told, he wasn't surprised, shocked or upset. He'd already heard from someone else in the hospital that she and one of the EMT's who brought patients in via ambulance were becoming more than friendly. He was just glad she did it, so he



didn't have to provide excuses to break up with her. Women always wanted excuses. Reasons. He was tired of players and was getting to an age where he wanted to settle down with just one, he thought about Gavin's little sister. He couldn't remember ever seeing anyone as beautiful as she was. Long blonde hair, huge blue eyes, an adorable little nose and even her ears looked like an elf or a pixie, whichever one didn't have the points on the top. However, she was just as prickly as a cactus. A man would have to be very careful around someone like her. Pushing her buttons would be way too easy and maybe way too much fun. Gavin had told him he had never known a more spoiled princess or someone more in need of a butt whooping than his little sister. Having met her, Zane grinned, Gavin was right. How much fun would that be?

Settling back to watch the game, half an hour later, he heard raised voices. Curious, he and everyone else at the bar, stared. Some man stood up, over a blonde woman and shouted. Then she stood up and said something he couldn't quite hear, but suddenly knew it was Quinn. He looked at the stranger next to him. "Wanna play knight in shining armor?"

"Darn right." They fist bumped and headed over to the table.

"Hi, Quinn, fancy meeting you here," he said when both of them stopped yelling to look to see who invaded their space.

"Hey, Quinn," the stranger echoed. "Everything okay over here?"

"No." She glared at both of them. "I just told him I didn't want to see him again, and he's throwing a tantrum."

Stranger reached into his pocket and pulled out a badge. "How about I walk you to your car, buddy? You aren't in trouble but it's time for you to go home." He looked at Zane. "You got the girl?"

"No problem, thanks."

Quinn crossed her arms and sat down. "I didn't need help!"

“Thank you, Zane, I’m sure grateful for you stepping in,” he said, sitting next to her. “So what’s going on?”

“None of your business,” she snapped, but he noticed tears filling her big blue eyes. He didn’t want to leave just yet, in case the officer was having trouble getting her now, he assumed, ex to leave.

“Can I buy you a drink?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No thanks.”

“You okay?” he asked.

“Of course I’m okay. I have a shouting match with an idiot male every night in a bar, don’t you?”

“That particular thing has never come up in my life,” he said.

“Not once?” she asked.

“Nope, never.” A roar from the crowd came up and he smiled at her. “Closest I ever got was just now.”

“Someone scored?” she said, and he felt pleased to see her eyes weren’t as teary.

“Yup, but it wasn’t me.” He sighed heavily.

“Will you walk me to my car?” she asked. “Not that I need it, but...”

He held out his hand. “You are very smart, Quinn Collins, to know when to ask. Oh, I know you don’t need it, but if he’s still out there, I can protect him from the wrath of Quinn.”

“He’d need someone to,” she said and walked out before him.

They made it to her car without incident. He saw neither her ex or the officer and figured they both headed out. “Take care, Quinn.”

“Please, don’t tell my brother about this,” she asked, suddenly seeming panicked.

Zane zipped his lip. “We will never mention it again.”

“Thank you. See you Sunday!” And with that she drove away, and he stood there watching, wondering where that lightning bolt that just hit his heart came from.