A dangerous man stops a thief.

Notes

Inspired by a graphic my friend Merry sent me, of Liam Neeson in his "Taken" role and wearing a Santa hat, and Ewan McGregor, looking cheeky, and also wearing a Santa hat. My thanks to Merry for her quick beta.

The mall parking lot was a hellish place at Christmastime in Quinn's opinion, full of bad drivers and people wandering around blindly, trying to remember where they'd left their cars, their view obscured by the packages cradled in their arms. Mandy wasn't waiting outside, so she must be stuck in a check-out line. Quinn began searching for a parking spot, managing to snag one at the very back of the lot, deftly maneuvering his Porsche in before an SUV could claim it. No wonder his ex had been so gracious as to allow him to pick up their daughter. She had claimed she wanted them to have some visiting time before the party, but he guessed her main aim was to avoid the traffic.

Thankfully, the weather was fairly mild, his black leather jacket enough to keep him warm, but he snagged the Santa hat on the passenger seat and put it on his head. His daughter knew his work was dangerous and occasionally regarded him with a certain amount of trepidation. He was determined to be joyful and reassuring.
He spotted her as he approached the front of Macy's, late to their rendezvous but finally waiting for him as promised. She was perched on the edge of a planter, a pile of packages on the ground by her, her purse on top. She was chatting on the phone, paying no attention to her surroundings, or to the young man surreptitiously drifting closer to her. The young man also wore a Santa hat, but more likely for camouflage than in the spirit of the season.

Quinn started running just as the young man made his move, grabbing her purse and taking off. Mandy yelled at the fellow and started after him, but Quinn caught up to her, and ordered, "Stay!" At her scared glance, he knew he must look murderous. So much for joyful and reassuring.

The young man was fast, but he was shorter than Quinn, his stride nowhere near as long. When Quinn was close enough, he launched himself in the air, tackling the thief and bringing him to the concrete ground. Subduing people was one of Quinn's many special skills. Despite the man's struggles, he was soon under Quinn's control, held down by Quinn's superior weight and strength. A passerby picked up Mandy's purse, which had skittered a few feet away. For a second, Quinn wondered if he was going to have to chase another person, until the passerby dropped the purse by their bodies and hesitantly asked if she should call the police.

"I've got it under control, thank you," he said, and as was his general experience, the person responded to his authoritative tone by obeying, continuing toward the mall entrance.

"Now, let's see what we have," Quinn said, raising up enough to expertly flip the man onto his back, and pinning his hands over his head. What he had was gorgeous, a young man with beautiful blue eyes, with hints of gray and green. The Santa hat had stayed on his head, obscuring most of his hair, but a few strands escaped. Like his eyes, his hair looked variable in color, like it might be brown or blond or red, depending on the light. His face was set obstinately, and he was older than Quinn had imagined, early 20s rather than late teens.

"Go ahead, call the cops. Lock me up for the holidays."

Quinn felt a rush of desire at the lad's appearance, and tried to suppress it, focusing on other facts than his good looks. Whatever his history, he obviously wasn't in the best of situations, not if he was stealing purses at the mall. He appeared intelligent and had a strong backbone. Anyone who could defy Quinn wasn't a shrinking violet.

"Oh, no," Quinn said, standing and yanking the man with him. "You are way too perfect to waste spending time in jail for petty theft."

"Perfect?" the young man asked in a bemused tone.

"Perfect," Quinn confirmed.

Three Years Later

The mall parking lot was still hellish, but Quinn found it less annoying with Benjamin in the seat next to him. His lover and partner was dressed in a dark suit with a light-colored shirt, a Santa hat on his head. Quinn also wore his Santa hat, though he needed to twist the bobble toward the back, as it kept dangling in his peripheral vision.

"There she is," Benjamin said, pointing to Mandy, waiting for them outside Macy's, once again talking on her phone. Her packages were on the ground, but between her feet, her purse hanging from her shoulder and firmly tucked under one arm. "She's beginning to take your lessons to
"Not as well as you have," Quinn noted. Benjamin had indeed been perfect for Quinn's line of work: agile, intelligent, efficient. He couldn't be quite as ruthless as Quinn, but that ability would come with more experience. It always did, if one survived.

Though sometimes Quinn wondered if his own personality was softening rather than Benjamin's hardening. Benjamin had a humanity and charm of character that kept the grimness of their work at bay.

"I had a lot more hands-on training," Benjamin said, with a grin that brought up memories not of handling weapons and martial arts, but the nights Quinn would introduce Benjamin to all the sensations his body could feel, and how he could be turned into a quivering wreck before being put back together again. Quinn loved those nights.

The car in front of them stopped to let shoppers stroll from the mall to the parking lot, and Quinn had to take advantage of the pause to lean over and kiss Benjamin deeply, the bobbles on their Santa hats brushing against their cheeks.

"I knew when I first saw you that you were perfect for me."

"We're perfect for each other. I know that now, even though I'm sure I was a pain, considering how long I fought that realization."

"That's why I'm the master and you're the apprentice," Quinn said with satisfaction, as a honk from the car behind them made him realize he was now the one holding up traffic. He started driving again, anticipating the evening ahead. First, a pleasant visit at his ex's annual Christmas party, spending time with his daughter, catching up and exchanging gifts. Then he would take Benjamin home for their own personal celebration.

The two of them, together.

~ the end ~

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