Summary

Ben learns that he and Quinn have more in common than he thought.

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Authors: Lady_Saddlebred (cdelapin@yahoo.com)
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“Ben,” Quinn said thoughtfully, as he carefully stroked the straight-edge razor along his neck. “Do you realize I have never seen your apartment?”

Ben glanced up from checking his email on his smart phone and grimaced. “What’s your point?”

“No point, just making conversation.” Quinn rinsed off the shaving cream, then turned and re-entered the bedroom. Moving to the dresser, he pulled out clean underwear and socks. “It simply occurred to me that we’ve spent virtually all our time together here,” he indicated the bedroom. “I was just curious about where you lived.” He dressed quickly in his usual weekend khakis and open-necked shirt, then slipped into a pair of tasseled loafers.

“Quinn, believe me, you’re not missing anything,” Ben said uncomfortably. “I have a dinky little one-bedroom apartment, three flights up. The building doesn’t even have an elevator. It’s nothing to write home about.”

“Well, what more do you need, after all?” Quinn said agreeably. “You live alone. You don’t own a car, though how you get around without one is beyond me. I’m sure it’s perfectly suited to your needs.”

“It’s perfectly suited to my budget.” Ben glanced around the comfortable master-bedroom suite with its king-sized bed, thick wall-to-wall carpeting and books stacked precariously on nearly every available surface. It made his place seem even shabbier by comparison, and he frankly had no desire to have Quinn – or anyone else -- see it. “Not everybody’s a tenured department chairman, after all,” he said defensively.

“True enough.” Quinn started down the steps and Ben glumly followed. “But then neither was I at your age. And I certainly didn’t start out living here. In fact, I only bought this place a few years ago.”

“Why are you so interested in seeing my apartment, anyway?” Ben asked, as they reached the main level.

Quinn raised a quizzical eyebrow. “I just thought it would be nice to see where you lived.” He frowned, seeming to belatedly recognize it was a sore point. “This is a problem for you,” he said quietly. It wasn’t a question.

Ben sighed. “It’s just… my place is tiny and crowded, in an older building, in a not-so-great part
of town and, besides, why would Professor Donovan visit my apartment? I mean, think about it, Quinn. How would you explain that?"

“Simple.” Quinn grinned. “You’re tutoring me in computers. Dragging poor benighted Professor Donovan into the 21st century, kicking and screaming.”

Ben gave a sardonic snort. “Yeah, right. *You’re* learning to use computers. And why, pray tell, would these “tutoring lessons” be at my apartment instead of in your office? Or *my* office?"

“Because by mutual necessity, the lessons must be scheduled after hours and you were kind enough to invite me to your home, where you have all the obligatory equipment,” Quinn explained patiently.

“Quinn,” Ben said desperately, “please, my apartment is… it’s-”

The older man held up both hands in surrender. “All right, Ben. You win. My goodness, one would think the constabularies were going to show up on your doorstep. I’m sorry I mentioned it.”

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To Ben’s relief, nothing more was said on the subject, and he hoped it wouldn’t come up again. Somehow, the sight of his minuscule apartment depressed him even more when he got home Sunday night, so much so that he found himself irrationally kicking his living room futon, causing the pillows to fall to the floor.

He’d tried to ignore the shrouded disappointment in Quinn’s eyes. But shit, it was easy for Quinn to play lord of the manor with his big brownstone full of antiques and his vintage Jaguar. He’d never had to eat Spam, or go without laundry money to pay for things like rent and student loans. Hell, his parents had probably paid cash for their brilliant son’s Academy tuition and never thought twice about it!

Then he caught himself, ashamed. Quinn was the very soul of generosity, and had never commented on their disparate lifestyles before now. He’d bought that gorgeous green silk robe just because he’d thought Ben might like it. And he’d cheerfully drunk the Chianti Ben had brought to their first dinner together, when it had probably been about as appetizing as vinegar to his refined palate. Money simply didn’t matter to him.

Must be nice.

Nevertheless, Ben was not about to let Quinn – or anyone else – “keep” him. He paid his own way and proudly went without as needed. Big-ticket items such as stereo or computer equipment were carefully saved for, or put on layaway until they could be paid off. Quinn didn’t need to buy his affections, and frankly, if he had even tried, Ben would have broken it off, albeit with more than a little regret.

Depressed all over again, he wandered into the tiny kitchenette, reheated a slice of leftover pizza in the microwave and tried not to think any more about Quinn Donovan.

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The work week passed with little more than the usual crises, most easily taken care of. Ben stayed busy, but couldn’t stop thinking about his and Quinn’s contrasting lifestyles and wondering how long it would be before they’d have to face the situation head-on. He dreaded the idea of hurting Quinn’s feelings, but lines would have to be drawn, and soon.
He was more than a little relieved when Thursday evening’s mail included a familiar mottled tan envelope with an invitation to Saturday lunch, if he had no prior plans. The wording, however, seemed uncharacteristically diffident, and Ben found himself reading between the lines, looking for clues. Not dinner, as usual, but lunch. Was Quinn suggesting they shouldn’t worry about being seen together in the daytime, or did it mean Ben was *not* invited to spend the night?

Quinn smiled as he opened the door. “Ben, come in. Glad you were able to make it. Let me take your jacket.”

“Thanks.” Quinn *seemed* happy enough to see him, yet made no attempt to kiss or touch him. He waved Ben into the living room, where a fire was laid, but not yet lit. Bernini, Quinn’s golden retriever, was in his usual spot before the hearth and thumped his tail in casual greeting.

“Sit down. Make yourself comfortable. Something to drink?” Ever the perfect host.

“Um, sure, anything’s fine, thanks.”

As Quinn left the room, Ben’s attention was drawn to a large leather-bound book lying on the coffee table. It looked as if it had been well-thumbed. Another antique art book, maybe. He knew Quinn’s love for art and art history and his aversion to anything modern, such as a television. Frankly, Ben was surprised Quinn even deigned to read a newspaper, though that particular medium had been around for more than a century.

Quinn returned with a pitcher of iced tea on a tray, complete with long-handled spoons, sugar, a crystal jar of honey, even a small plate of mint sprigs, contrasting colorfully with the lemon slices next to it. The glasses clinking together gave off a pleasant bell-like tone as he set the tray on the coffee table. “Help yourself.”

Ben was pleased when Quinn folded his long legs and sat down beside him on the sofa, rather than in his oversized leather armchair across the room. Maybe things were looking up after all.

Quinn sipped his tea, then placed the glass on the end table next to him. “Thank you for coming, Ben. I hope I didn’t take you away from some amusing entertainment.”

“Sure,” Ben said, still confused over the conflicting signals. Quinn’s tone was cordial, but disappointingly lacking in any real intimacy. It was as if he was holding himself in check, much as he had the night of the Halloween party. Ben wanted badly to reach out, to make Quinn look him in the eye, to reassure himself that things were still good between them, but restrained himself. After a long moment, Quinn drew a deep breath, then leaned forward and dragged the big book toward him. “I’ve been giving last weekend a lot of thought. If I inadvertently gave offense by asking to visit your home, lad, I am truly sorry. I suppose, in hindsight, it *was* rather forward of me. I can only attribute it to a natural curiosity, to wanting to get to know you better.”

Ben nodded silently, waiting for Quinn to continue. He clearly had something he wanted to get off his chest.

“After some consideration, it occurred to me that you might be interested to know a bit about my growing up.” The slight upward lilt in the voice made it a question.

“I’d love that, Quinn. Is that what this is?” Ben asked, gesturing to the book. “Let me guess, heraldic coats of arms? Pictures of the Donovan baronial estate?” He said it jokingly, but was taken aback when Quinn visibly winced and turned away, reaching for his glass. Uh oh…

“Quinn, hey, I’m sorry,” he said hastily, “that didn’t come out right. I-”
Quinn shook his head and smiled reassuringly. “No need to apologize, Ben. But I do think it’s important to ‘clear the air,’ so to speak.” He opened the book and beckoned Ben closer. “This *is,* in fact, something of an ancestral history.” He gestured to the ornate family tree at the front. “This is my mother’s family line. She was born and raised south of London, part of a long line of well-heeled aristocrats, somewhat reminiscent of the Crawleys of ‘Downton Abbey’ fame.” The blue eyes crinkled appreciatively at Ben’s wide-eyed recognition of the reference to the popular BBC television show. “Her maiden name was Quinntrell. Lady Genevieve Sophia Anjanette Quinntrell.”

Quinn chuckled wryly. “Long story.” He turned a few pages and showed Ben a picture of a lovely dark-haired young woman in a pastel chiffon gown, seated stiffly on a divan. Ben recognized the clear blue eyes he loved in her son. “When my mother was barely seventeen, she had the remarkably bad taste to fall in love with an Irishman, one Joseph Patrick Donovan, who had been hired to catalog the estate’s extensive art collection. Her steadfastly Royalist father, Lord Archibald James Whitfield Quinntrell, was, predictably, somewhat less than pleased at the idea of a ‘paddy’ (Quinn grimaced and held up two fingers on each hand to denote this was a direct quote) for a son-in-law, and threatened to disinherit his only child and heir if she didn’t toe his line. The saucy wench told him to go right ahead, and the row that followed is the stuff of family legend. Two days later, the couple eloped to County Antrim in Northern Ireland, where I was born about a year later.”

“Unbelievable,” Ben murmured. “He must have been a real son of a bitch, your grandfather.”

“Indeed,” Quinn affirmed grimly. “Looks the very part, doesn’t he?” He pointed to a picture of a glowering man of about 60 years old, rigidly erect in formal dress. Ben would have bet he’d never smiled in his life. Small wonder Quinn’s mother had wanted out.

“I remember you telling me you grew up in… Ballymena, wasn’t it?” Quinn nodded. “So when did you come to the States?”

“After I graduated from what you would call high school. In the UK, you finish secondary school in your 16th year, and then you can either continue on to higher learning or enter the work force. I would have liked to continue my studies, but it was simply too expensive. Me da worked very hard, but he had a wife and my two younger sisters to support. And after he ‘stole’ (again the air quotes) my mother from her home and family in England, my grandfather used his not inconsiderable influence to limit Da’s prospects, in hopes that Mum would come to her senses and return home. Thankfully, she was every bit as stubborn as he, and very much in love.” He paused to sip his tea. “So I found work as a lab assistant in Belfast and began my love affair with the natural sciences.”

He chuckled self-deprecatingly, and Ben grinned. “Love affair” was an understatement – obsession was more like it. Then it hit him: Quinn graduated secondary school and started working the same year he, Ben, was born! He’d never given much thought to their age difference until that moment. He forced himself to concentrate on Quinn’s story and to stop imagining himself in Quinn’s arms wearing nothing but a diaper.

“Shortly after I turned 18, I received a letter from my grandfather’s solicitor, informing me that the old man had generously set aside funds for my education, contingent upon my attending university *outside* of Ireland. It seemed he’d been secretly keeping tabs on me.” Quinn smiled mirthlessly. “The pompous little sycophant made it abundantly clear that *Lord Quinntrell* (aka He Who Must Be Obeyed Without Question) would personally guarantee my admission to any institute of
higher learning in England, which of course meant I would not only be forever in his debt, but also under his thumb, much as Mum had been. Sensitive to my parents’ feelings, I refused his offer, even though they both urged me to accept.”

“That sounds like you, Quinn,” Ben said, laughing. “Out-stubborning the old man.”

“Yes, it does rather run in the family. Mark Winters and I have had some knock-down drag-out rows in the past, when one of us has dug in his heels on some issue or other. Ah well, perhaps I shall outgrow it one day.” His bemused expression suggested that was unlikely.

“Go on,” Ben urged, now thoroughly engrossed. “So what happened?”

Quinn snorted. “The bloodsucking parasite came to visit me in person! Said it was his solemn duty to impress upon me the magnitude of His Lordship’s largesse and my utter foolishness in turning him down. I can still see the smarmy little pissant, all puffed up with his own importance. I took an instant dislike to him. But then I was inspired to beat the auld bastard at his own game. The offer stipulated only that I attend school outside of Ireland. Knowing, of course, that the old man *intended* me to study in England, I perversely applied to several American universities instead.”

Ben couldn’t help laughing out loud in admiration. The idea of 18-year-old Quinn Donovan with his “Irish” up, dueling with his wealthy, titled grandfather over schooling was the stuff of Edwardian novels. The balls on this guy… “I’ll bet he nearly had a stroke.”

Quinn’s craggy features abruptly morphed into an aristocratic sneer. “His Lordship insisted that my choices were ‘utterly plebian’ and that I must attend an institution ‘properly suited to the dignity of the Quinntrell family name.’” He gave a short bark of a laugh. “So I facetiously suggested the Academy.”

“And?”

A sigh. “The wily auld bastard called my bluff. He would pay my tuition and stipend on a semester-by-semester basis, provided I made the Dean’s List each and every time. If I failed to do so, even once, then not only would he immediately cut off all funds, but I must also transfer to a university of *his* choosing in England, where I would be expected to comport myself as befit Lord Quinntrell’s grandson *and* to pursue a course of study *he* would design for me.” Quinn gave a fatalistic shrug. “I found myself hoisted by my own petard. I didn’t know whether to laugh or put my fist through the wall.”

“But I saw your diploma in the study,” Ben said, puzzled. “You graduated summa cum laude.”

“Damned right I did,” Quinn replied, with a grim smile. “I was determined the tight-fisted prick – you should excuse the expression, but it’s the God’s honest truth – would not be able to hold that over my head. I made straight A’s every semester but one, and argued a ‘B+’ on an economics paper my senior year until the professor agreed to raise it to an ‘A-,’ a difference of exactly one point.” Quinn’s eyes gleamed. “Of course, it went on the books as an ‘A.’”

Ben chuckled appreciatively. “Been there, done that.”

Quinn poured them both more tea. “My point, Ben, is that we’re not that different, certainly not where it counts. I lived in an apartment hardly bigger than the linen closet while I attended the Academy. You couldn’t, as me ole da would say, ‘cuss a cat’ in it, it was that small. The building isn’t even there anymore; they condemned it a year or so after I graduated. Good riddance, too; it was a deathtrap.” He gave another dark chuckle. “Of course, the old man never knew I spent the bare minimum on housing and sent the balance of the stipend each semester back to Ballymena.”
Ben grinned inwardly at the thought of his larger-than-life, ultra-fastidious lover surviving for four years in a run-down, cramped bachelor apartment off campus. He gazed around the comfortable living room, with its long multi-paned windows and big stone fireplace, the eclectic antiques, the framed artwork and first-edition books. *This* was the real Quinn Donovan, no matter what it had taken to get here. “So, then after you graduated, you did your post-graduate work at Cambridge, right?”

“That’s right. I became rather fixated on botany as an undergraduate, and thought to attain my doctorate and go into research. My thesis on untraceable botanical poisons during the Renaissance, while obscure, was extremely gratifying. It did not, however, augur well for a career.”

“I’d love to read it. Do you have a copy of it on your computer?”

Quinn’s eyebrows rose in disbelief. “My dear boy, may I remind you that this was over twenty-five years ago, when computers were hardly as prevalent as they are now? I wrote it in longhand and paid a fellow student a few pounds to type it for me.” He shrugged. “It’s probably buried somewhere in my study.”

“How, whatever was I thinking?” Ben teased. “But you know, you really should at least put it on a CD or something and preserve it. For future generations, and all that. Or better yet, have it published in a scientific journal.”

“As you say,” Quinn agreed absently, flipping pages in the book. “Maybe I can find it.” He leaned back against the sofa and solemnly regarded his guest. “Ben, I didn’t grow up with titles or money. I had a modest but happy upbringing, with parents and sisters whom I love, and who love me. That was – and is – far more important to me than the old man’s money. And I’d do it all over again, in a heartbeat. Mum would as well. Do you understand?”

“Sure,” Ben said quickly, ashamed of his less-than-complimentary earlier view of Quinn’s social status. “But I still want to know how you ended up back at the Academy.”

Quinn shrugged. “Not very interesting, really. I needed a job, and found I missed the States. Remaining in England after I achieved my doctorate was *not* an option, as I felt a burning desire to prevent the old man from dictating any further part of my life. And believe you me, he tried while I was at Cambridge, though I managed to evade his reach most of the time. However, research positions were hard to come by, and I eventually contacted to my old Academy mentor, who offered me a teaching position in the Biology Department. I theorized that I’d be able to take my time finding something more suited to my interests. To my surprise, I found myself enjoying my new role. The rest, as they say, is history.”

“I guess it was just meant to be,” Ben smiled, leaning in for a kiss. Quinn’s lips welcomed his, and an arm around Ben’s shoulders invited him closer. He slid the book back onto the table and they sat quietly for a few minutes. Bernini snored at their feet.

“Your grandfather must be pretty proud you’re heading up the Bio Department, right?” Ben asked.

Quinn shook his head. “He and my father both passed away about five years ago. Ironically, within a few months of each other.” He sighed. “But imagine my surprise when that sniveling, pasty-faced peon of a solicitor contacted me yet again, summoning me to England for the ‘Reading of the Will.’ Turns out the auld man was a strong believer in primogeniture, or maybe he just thought to have the last laugh. He left me the bulk of his estate, conditional upon my returning to England and assuming the Quinntrell mantle. Needless to say, I refused, and there was a protracted legal battle. When the dust finally settled, Mum’s second cousin became Lord
Quinn, in return for which she and I each received handsome financial settlements. Mum now lives comfortably in Ballymena, happily playing grandmum to my several nieces and nephews. The blue eyes glittered for a moment, or maybe it was just a trick of the afternoon light. “We set up irrevocable trust funds for each of the grandchildren, that they might pursue their own dreams, no strings attached.”

Typical Quinn, Ben thought affectionately. Money means nothing to you, except as a way to make other people happy. “You’re a very nice man, Quinntrell Joseph Donovan. I hope your family appreciates you.”

Quinn smiled and rose to his feet. “I’ll just see about lunch, shall I? Back in a few.”

Ben strolled around the cozy room that so perfectly reflected the personality of its owner. As he studied the mahogany breakfront between the front windows, strong arms slid around him from behind and he leaned back into the embrace. Any lingering worries about whether he was welcome had by now completely evaporated.

“Feeling better?” came a whisper close to his ear.

“Mm hmm,” he affirmed, then turned his head to meet Quinn’s kiss. It was warm, pleasant, offering simple unfettered comfort and affection. Ben was reminded again of their first night together after the Halloween party. “You must have thought I was a real jerk, not wanting you to see my place.”

“Not at all, lad,” Quinn answered, stroking his hair. “But I wanted to set things right between us. I’d still love to see your apartment, but I’ll wait for an invitation.”

“Your mom’s still alive, right?”

“Unless something’s happened since the last time I spoke with her, yes,” Quinn smiled. “I’m sorry you couldn’t have met me da. He’d have liked you.”

“Even though I’m sleeping with his son?”

“Even so,” Quinn affirmed, with a warm smile.

“I love it here,” Ben said, turning to look around the room again. “This place is so beautiful. It’s… you.” He blushed as he said it, hoping it didn’t sound too weird.

Quinn nodded. “It *is* me, very much so. I was living on the Row when the old man passed. This place coincidentally came on the market shortly thereafter. One look and I felt as if I’d come home.” He opened a drawer in the breakfront and pulled out a small photo album. “This is how it looked back then. Bit of a fixer-upper, wouldn’t you say?”

An understatement: dusty, empty rooms, high ceilings. Scarred hardwood floors. Incredibly ugly wallpaper in the foyer. The living room was particularly jarring: no fireplace, just a blank wall with discolorations where pictures had hung. Quinn explained that the fireplace had actually been walled up at some point, and that only the presence of the chimney gave any hint that it was there. He’d sledge-hammered the wall, then added the stone front and bookshelves on either side to accommodate his burgeoning library. “Imagine my relief to not find a body -- or worse -- in there. It would have been a bit difficult to explain.”

“Tell me about the furnishings,” Ben asked curiously.

“The breakfront was actually in the manor house. Cousin Geoffrey – now *Lord* Geoffrey David Anthony Quinntrell, that is – offered it to me when we were tidying up the estate. I think he felt
obligated, seeing as how I was passing on any interest in that mausoleum to him and his line in perpetuity. Poor bugger’ll likely go broke on the upkeep. No central heating, antiquated plumbing and an absolutely horrendous décor. All those animal heads staring down from the walls, ugh.” He gave a dramatic shudder, reminding Ben of a big dog exiting a lake. “Jacobean is definitely *not* my period. Mum took a few sentimental pieces for herself. I got several interesting books and some ghastly crested silver, which I happily donated to Sydney Hall.” He shook his head. “Of course, Mark thinks it’s stunning, but his taste always was in his mouth.”

“Did the sword come from the manor house, too?” Ben asked, turning toward the fireplace.

“It’s a claymore, actually, from my father’s side of the family. He was born in Northern Ireland, but some of his ancestors migrated over from the Isle of Skye. Beautiful, isn’t it? He gave it to me when I graduated from the Academy.” Quinn ruefully rubbed his bearded jaw. “Adele used it to convince me to wear that damnable kilt the night of the party. The sly vixen appealed to my sense of family history; I’m afraid I went down without a shot.” He crossed back to the sofa and Ben joined him there, snuggling into the warm embrace. Reaching for his glass, he gently clinked it against Quinn’s, again enjoying the clear tone.

“Let me guess, Baccarat?” Deliberately baiting the older man, who reacted right on cue.

“*Out* upon you, you heathen son of an Orangeman!” Quinn’s accented roar booming through the room, startling Bernini. “It’s Waterford, by God, what else? And believe me, Mum and I had a right good laugh at the idea of *Irish* lead crystal in the old man’s breakfront. It was her housewarming gift when I moved in here.”

Ben chuckled, appreciating the absurdity of the situation. Quinn must come naturally by his quirky sense of humor, along with his honor and integrity. He couldn’t help but admire Lady Genevieve Sophia Anjanette Quinntrell (“She goes by ‘Jenny,’ Ben”) for standing up to her indomitable parent and marrying the man she loved. And for supporting her only son’s desire to fly free as well.

But, he reflected, he and Quinn were facing their own dragons. There were a lot of people out there who would undoubtedly take issue with their relationship. And here was a sobering thought: would Quinn’s kin back in Northern Ireland accept his being in a relationship with another man? Rejection would surely break his heart.

And how would Ben’s own family react when they found out? He’d like to think his parents’ love was absolute, but he’d never told them about the incident with Garth in college, or the pain he had endured for years as a result. Now he was romantically involved with Garth’s polar opposite, and he’d fight all comers to preserve their fragile happiness.

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The phone rang as they were finishing lunch, and Quinn excused himself to take the call. From the sound of it, he was going to be a while, so Ben took the opportunity to stretch his legs and explore. He played a game with himself, imagining the stories behind the various antiques and eclectic decorations. Knowing Quinn, they were bound to be entertaining.

Quinn’s study was at the rear of the house, and Ben half-guiltily recalled his first clandestine foray the morning after the Halloween party. The bulky computer monitor and (to Ben’s eyes) prehistoric dot-matrix printer contrasted oddly with the handsome leather-topped desk. Stacks of class projects and textbooks jockeyed for position on the drop-leaf table against the far wall. Quinn’s battered leather briefcase sat underneath. A threadbare Oriental rug neatly filled in the space between the two.
Ben closed his eyes and imagined the room after a technological makeover. The computer equipment was almost as old as he was, and its principal inhabitant really needed to be nudged into the modern era. It wouldn’t take much effort, if he could only figure out a way to suggest it without overstepping his bounds.

A few minutes later, he heard Quinn hang up the phone and start back toward the living room. He leaned out the doorway and waved and the older man moved to join him.

“Bit of a mess, isn’t it?” Quinn said, gesturing toward the study. “I really need to straighten things up in here a bit, but it’s easier to just close the door and pretend it’s somebody else’s problem.”

“I like it,” Ben replied. “These are your parents, aren’t they?” Nodding to a large framed picture on the wall.

“They are,” Quinn affirmed, with a fond smile. “That was from when I finished my graduate studies at Cambridge. Mum cried, and Da teased her about having to wring out his handkerchief every few minutes.”

“She was proud of you. Her firstborn, a doctor of biology. Pretty heady stuff.”

“Aye, it was at that, I suppose. My sisters decided one egghead in the family was enough. They both elected to get married and have bushels of kids instead. Took the pressure off me, bless their hearts.” He chuckled self-deprecatingly.

“And I bet Uncle Quinn spoils them all rotten, too,” Ben chuckled. Young Ani Walker was example enough of Quinn’s fondness for children.

“Oh, I give it a right good try, true enough,” Quinn agreed. “But I dinna get to see them all that often. There’s probably three or four more I haven’t met by now.”

One more reason to upgrade the fossilized computer in there, Ben thought. Wonder if he’s ever heard of Skype? “You don’t go over to visit?”

“Oh, aye, but probably not as often as I should. Mum stays after me to put in an appearance, but with class schedules and summer session…” He trailed off. “Ah well, maybe sometime this year, or next. We’ll see.” He gave Ben a smile. “Erin’s a bonny land, full of history and color. You’d like it.”

“I’m sure I would,” Ben agreed politely, though he couldn’t quite imagine it. “You’ll have to be sure to send me back lots of postcards the next time you go over.”

Quinn smiled. “Wouldn’t you rather see it for yourself, lad? Postcards hardly do it justice. I hear they even have electricity now. You’d be right at home.”

Ben rolled his eyes. “Well, no wonder you haven’t been back lately. Everybody knows Professor Fossil is terrified of electricity!” He danced away barely in time to avoid the good-natured swat aimed at his derriere.

“Imp,” laughed Quinn. “You’d fit right in, with all the leprechauns and pookas and fairies. They’d hold you for ransom, f’sure.”

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