

172 PUSH-UPS

by Scott Mullen

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SYNOPSIS: During the holidays, a young female soldier and an older veteran meet outside a bus station, where they find themselves clashing over their differences, before discovering that they might have more in common than they thought.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Outside a bus station.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 1 male)

TOM (m)..... 60s-70s; an aging man in a thin coat. *(47 lines)*

QUINN (f)..... 20s; just out of the army. Thin coat. *(54 lines)*

JENNY (f)..... 20s; Quinn's girlfriend. *(7 lines)*

PRODUCTION NOTES

The character of Quinn has often been cast with an actress of color, which adds some unspoken tension. But any of the characters can be played by a performer of any race.

SET

A bench, representing a bus stop.

PROPS

- ☐ coats
- ☐ bunch of flowers
- ☐ duffel bag
- ☐ cell phone
- ☐ engagement ring & ring box

AT START: *TOM sits on the bench with a bunch of flowers. QUINN comes in with a duffel bag, which she drops near the other end of the bench. She looks down the street to her left.*

TOM: Snow like this, it slows everyone down.

QUINN: Been a long time since I saw a white Christmas.

QUINN peers off to the left again.

TOM: Sit. Relax. You're making me antsy.

QUINN sits.

TOM: You just get off a bus?

QUINN: Yeah. From Nashville.

TOM: Ah. Country music?

QUINN: What?

TOM: You a singer?

QUINN: No. Do I really look like a singer?

TOM: Could be.

QUINN: I'm a soldier. Army. Just back from Afghanistan.

TOM: Combat?

QUINN: I saw a little.

TOM makes a face.

QUINN: What?

TOM: Never understood the whole "lady soldier" thing.

QUINN: Oh great.

TOM: Physically—

QUINN: Don't even say it. Did you serve?

TOM: Vietnam. Got shot in the leg, right here. *(Slaps his leg.)* Hurt like a mother. You been shot?

QUINN: No.

TOM: My buddy Jenkins dragged me to safety. You think you could have done that? Dragged me to safety?

QUINN: I would have carried you to safety.

TOM: Come on. I'm looking at you, I'm guessing you can do... maybe twenty-five push-ups.

QUINN: Twenty-five.

TOM: Maybe not.

QUINN: And I suppose you could do more.

TOM: I do twenty-five push-ups every morning, even now.

QUINN: Bet you're breathing heavy by the end of that.

TOM: When I was a soldier, I once did 150 straight. No break.

QUINN: Come on.

TOM: Hard-ass sergeant got mad at me one day, made me keep going. He thought he was gonna break me. He thought I was gonna throw up. I showed him. 150 straight.

QUINN: Wow.

TOM: I was hurting by the end, but I didn't let him see that. One hundred fifty.

QUINN: I did 172 once.

TOM: You did not.

QUINN: I did. We had a contest. Cocky guy named Burke, thought he could do more than me. Thought he could do twice as many as me. He collapsed at eighty-one. I kept going, just pumping them out, watching the look on his face the whole time. 172.

TOM: You're serious.

QUINN: I'm not going to let you feel my arm.

TOM: I don't want to feel your arm.

QUINN: But I could have carried you.

QUINN looks to the left.

TOM: You just home for the holidays, or are you out for good?

QUINN: I'm out. Done. Time to do something else.

TOM: WW2, they would have had a band here waiting for you.

QUINN: Did you get a band?

TOM: Nah. (*Rubs the bench.*) I remember when I came back. Forty-seven years ago today. The bench was different—it was made of wood back then. But it was the best day of my life. Because when my girl, Mary, came to pick me up, I gave her some flowers, and then I proposed to her. Got down on one knee, right over there. (*Points at a spot.*) She was so happy to see me, she would have

said yes to anything. But we were married for forty-two years. And it was good. I mean, there were some hard times. She... she couldn't have kids. But we were enough for each other, I think. And then she passed. More than four years ago now.

QUINN: I'm sorry.

TOM: Every year, on this day, I come here, I bring some flowers—same kind I had that day—and I sit here, and I remember the smile on her face. Her blonde hair. That cute little nose.

QUINN: She would have carried you. If she had to.

TOM: I think she would have.

QUINN: That's who I'm waiting for too.

TOM: Oh? Your fella?

QUINN: My girl.

TOM frowns.

QUINN: Brunette. Great smile. Not sure if her nose can really be described as cute, or little—but I love her nose.

QUINN pulls out her phone, and finds a photo. Shows it to TOM.

TOM: So you're—

QUINN: Yes.

TOM: And she's—

QUINN: That's how it works.

TOM looks away.

QUINN: You don't approve.

TOM: The Bible—

QUINN: Depends how you read it.

TOM: There's nothing wrong with the way I read it.

QUINN: You remind me of my father.

TOM: Tough?

QUINN: Devout. Stubborn. Inflexible. And yeah—tough.

TOM: Nothing wrong with being devout.

QUINN: I think God wants us to be happy. To find love. To carry each other. Or drag each other, if that's the only way.

QUINN tucks her phone away. Pulls out a box. Shows TOM the ring inside.

QUINN: I'm going to ask her tonight, at my parents' house. In front of everyone.

TOM: Your father going to be there?

QUINN: Yeah.

TOM: And he doesn't know.

QUINN: I knew I was gay when I was twelve, and I always figured one night I'd tell them I was gay, and they'd smile and tell me they knew that all along. But somehow we never had that conversation. So tonight, I think they'll be happy I'm home. And my mother's a great cook, and she puts out a huge spread, everyone will be stuffed and a little drunk. And when I pull this out, and they see the smile on Jenny's face... I think they'll be overjoyed. And that my father hugs me. That's my dream. Hey—after 172 push-ups, anything's possible.

TOM: You think Jenny will smile?

QUINN: I know she'll smile. That's the one thing I'm sure of in this world.

TOM: I think you'll ruin their dinner.

QUINN: Maybe. But I can't live life afraid of that.

QUINN looks to the left. Smiles.

QUINN: And there she is. Thank you for telling me your story. Don't stay out here too late—it's cold.

QUINN picks up her bag, starts heading off, then stops. Looks back. Puts down her bag.

QUINN: Do you have a place to go?

TOM: Don't worry about me.

QUINN: Where are you having dinner?

TOM: I'll fix myself a plate when I get home.

QUINN: Come with me. My mother makes way too much food for the holidays. When we're done, I'll bring you back here, take you home, whatever you need.

TOM: That's all right.

QUINN: When I was fifteen, my father told me if I ever had a friend who needed a meal to bring them by. I never needed to cash that in. Until now. C'mon.

TOM: I don't think I'd be comfortable.

QUINN: Because I'm gay?

TOM: I can't really wrap my mind around it.

Entering is JENNY.

JENNY: Hey, you.

QUINN and JENNY move toward each other. They embrace, hard.

JENNY: I missed you so much.

QUINN: I'm back. I'm decided—I'm staying. I'm not going anywhere.

JENNY: Promise.

QUINN: Promise. Jenny, this is...

TOM: Tom.

QUINN: Tom, this is my Jenny.

JENNY: Hi.

TOM nods. QUINN looks at him, and then pulls out her phone. Hits a few buttons—and hands it to TOM.

QUINN: Film this.

TOM: What?

QUINN: Just point and shoot.

And then QUINN is down on one knee, ring out.

JENNY: What are you doing?

QUINN: Marry me, Jenny. Make me the happiest woman ever.

JENNY: Yes. God, yes.

QUINN spins her. JENNY squeals, happy. TOM watches, moved. JENNY shows him her ring.

TOM: It's beautiful.

QUINN takes the phone.

QUINN: Did you get it?

TOM: I think so.

QUINN and JENNY look at each other again. TOM picks up the flowers, gets up... and gives the flowers to JENNY.

QUINN: I'm trying to get Tom to come to dinner. If I get drunk enough, I'll do some push-ups. Maybe not 172, but fifty.

TOM: Fifty? I could beat that.

QUINN: *(Honestly.)* I'd like to see that.

JENNY: Please come.

TOM hesitates. Looks at them. At JENNY'S big smile.

TOM: All right.

He picks up QUINN'S bag. And he leaves with QUINN and JENNY. Blackout.

THE END