

## CHAPTER 002: A Plane Ticket

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I feel my face flame. Who does this girl think she is?

"I'm not," Finn replies, not even pausing to think.

"Bummer." Amber pouts. "I do want to see her naked, though."

What's her problem? Is she mocking me? Making fun of the plain, awkward friend? Or is there something genuine in her interest?

Either way, I don't want to stick around to find out.

I turn and push my way through the crowd, heading for the restroom, needing space, air, silence.

Stupid, stupid, stupid, I chant silently. What did I expect would happen tonight?

In the bathroom, I lean against the sink, staring at my reflection in the smudged mirror.

"Get your shit together," I mutter. "This was your idea."

My brilliant plan to cheer up Finn has backfired spectacularly. Instead of distracting him from Delilah, I've pushed him into the arms of Amber. And now I'm hiding in a bathroom while they're probably exchanging saliva and phone numbers.

I splash some cold water on my wrists, reapply my lipstick, and steel myself to go back out there. I'm a grown woman. I can handle watching my best friend hook up with someone else. I've been doing it for a decade.

But when I finally brave the club again, scanning the dancefloor for Finn's familiar form, he's nowhere to be found.

The spot where he and Amber were dancing is now occupied by a group of college-aged girls taking selfies. Panic flares in my chest as I push through sweaty bodies, searching. He wouldn't leave without me. Would he?

I spot them just as they're slipping out the front door, Finn's arm wrapped around Amber's waist, her head thrown back in laughter at something he's said. They're leaving. Together. Without so much as a text.

I shove my way to the exit, ignoring the curses and glares thrown my way.

The cool night air hits me as I burst outside, just in time to see Finn fumbling with keys—at my keys—at my car.

"Hey, hey, hey. Where are you going?" I hurry toward them, my heels clicking on the pavement.

Finn looks up, startled. "We're taking the party home, Sloane."

"And you decided to take my car?"

He has the decency to look sheepish, a hand reaching up to rub the back of his neck in that familiar gesture I usually find captivating. But tonight, it just feeds my anger. How dare he stand there looking boyishly embarrassed while he was about to steal my car?

Amber just rolls her eyes. "Chill, Mom. You can Uber home."

"I will do no such thing." I snatch my keys from Finn's hand. "You two are drunk. Get in the backseat. I'll drive."

Amber's eyes narrow, but she slides into the car anyway.

Finn follows her, not quite meeting my eyes. I slam the door behind them harder than necessary.

The drive is excruciating. My knuckles are white on the wheel as I navigate the dark streets, trying to ignore what's happening in my rearview mirror. But it's impossible not to hear them—the whispers, the giggles, the wet sounds of kissing.

I turn up the radio, but even that can't drown out their murmurs.

"I want you so bad," Finn says.

"Take me right here, right now," Amber responds.

Her voice makes my skin crawl.

"Eww. If you have sex in my car, I'm flinging you both right out the window," I say, swerving slightly as I turn to glare at them.

They're tangled together in the backseat, Amber practically in Finn's lap, her lipstick smeared across his neck. Her hand is dangerously high on his thigh.

She catches my eye in the mirror and smiles. "Wanna join us?" Her tongue darts out to wet her lips. "It will be fun."

I nearly drive us off the road.

"What?" My voice comes out as a squeak.

"You heard me. I've always wanted to try a threesome."

Finn's eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror. He can tell I'm pissed. "Amber, I don't think —"

"Don't tell me you haven't thought about it, Finn," she cuts him off. "Your hot little nerd friend, all worked up and desperate. I bet she's wild under all that... restraint."

My face burns so hot I'm surprised the car windows don't fog. "You're drunk," I manage to say. "Both of you."

"Not that drunk," Amber purrs. "Just drunk enough to be honest. What do you say, Sloane? You, me, and Finn? I bet you've imagined Finn's hands on you a million times."

The car falls silent except for the hum of the engine and my own thundering heartbeat. Amber has spoken my deepest, most guarded secret out loud, thrown it into the air between us like it's nothing. Like it's just another drunken suggestion, not the thing that's kept me awake for countless nights.

I grip the steering wheel tighter, focused on the road ahead, afraid to look in the mirror again. Afraid of what Finn might see in my face.

"Amber, stop," Finn says. "You're making her uncomfortable."

"Am I?" Amber leans toward me. "Or am I just saying what Sloane is thinking? That's why you followed Finn here as his chaperone, isn't it? You want him."

I slam on the brakes, pulling sharply to the curb. "Get out," I say, my voice shaking. "Both of you. Get out of my car."

"Sloane, come on," Finn says.

"I'm serious. Get out. Take an Uber to your place. I'm going home."

Amber laughs, the sound like glass breaking. "Oh my god, I was right. You totally want to fuck him."

"Amber!" Finn hisses. "That's enough."

Is that all she thinks this is? Some base physical attraction? She has no idea what Finn means to me. No concept of the depth of feelings I have for him. She's reduced my love to something tawdry, something shameful.

My hands are trembling as I turn to face them. "Get. Out. Now."

Something in my expression must convince them I'm serious. Finn gets out first, then helps Amber, who's still laughing as she stumbles onto the sidewalk. I don't wait to see where they go. I pull away from the curb with a screech of tires, my vision blurred with unshed tears.

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For almost a week, I ignore Finn's calls.

My phone rings. I let it. It pings. I swipe it away.

I bury myself in work, hoping it will overwrite the humiliation burning through my veins.

But Finn Hartley is like a cockroach. He always finds a way in.

"Are you avoiding me, Sloane?" he asks from above me.

I look up from my monitor. He's there, leaning against the edge of my cubicle like he owns the building. His hair is a tousled mess, dark eyes smudged with sleeplessness. He looks... wrecked. Good.

"Who let you in?" I say.

"The receptionist has a crush on me, remember?"

"Finn, I'm busy." I turn back to my screen. "Can we talk later?" Hopefully never.

"I'm not going anywhere until you talk to me."

I glance around. My coworkers are openly gawking. Jenna from accounting literally just nudged Carla from IT. Fantastic. Now I'm the office drama spectacle.

"Will you keep your voice down?" I hiss. "People are watching."

He grins. "More like they're checking me out."

"You're so full of yourself."

"What's with the attitude? Is it... that time of the month or something?"

Oh. Oh, this motherfucker.

I swivel my chair toward him, eyes narrowing. "Did you really just—"

"I'm kidding!" he raises his hands in surrender. "Jesus, Sloane. What the hell is going on with you?"

What's going on with me? He's seriously acting like he doesn't know? Fine, let's play this game together.

I stare at him, throat tight. "What do you want, Finn?"

He reaches into his jacket and tosses something onto my desk.

"What is that?" I ask.

"A plane ticket to Asheville, North Carolina. I booked it for seven weeks from now."

I frown, not liking where this is headed. "Why are you giving me a plane ticket, Finn?"

"You and I are crashing Delilah's wedding."