

CHAPTER 004: Torture Devices

Author: Elysian Sparrow

So this is the infamous Knox.

I’ve heard stories. Finn talks about him the way you’d talk about a stray wolf that occasionally shows up to your campfire, steals your food, and disappears back into the woods. Wild. Unpredictable. Maybe even a little unhinged.

Now that I think about it, he does resemble Finn—same sharp bone structure, same annoyingly perfect mouth. But where Finn is sunshine and charm, Knox looks like he crawled out of a lifestyle magazine for sophisticated gangsters.

“How do I know you’re not a kidnapper?” I ask, tilting my chin up. “You’ll have to provide proof that you’re who you say you are.”

“Like an ID card?”

“That would work.”

“I don’t have any.”

“See? Kidnapper vibes,” I say.

“Why don’t you call Finn and confirm?”

I cross my arms. “He’s not answering. Why do you think I’ve been standing here for an hour like an abandoned dog?” I glance at the car. “And you showing up in an aggressive-looking muscle car that screams ‘mafia boss’ isn’t exactly helping your case.”

“Are you getting in or not? I have places to be, young lady.”

“Young lady? Did you really just belittle me?”

Knox sighs, a long-suffering sound that suggests I’m testing what little patience he has. “Get in, Sloane.”

I stare at him, deadpan. Then I sigh, because clearly, I have zero self-preservation instincts. I’ve already agreed to help Finn crash his ex’s wedding. Getting into a car with his potentially murderous brother isn’t even the worst decision I’ve made this month.

“Open your trunk,” I say.

Knox pops the trunk from inside, and I toss my bag in, muttering to myself about how this is how women end up on true crime podcasts.

When I slide into the passenger seat, Knox doesn’t move.

“Why aren’t you driving?” I ask, glancing sideways at him.

“Your seatbelt.”

Oh.

A safety-conscious potential kidnapper. That’s… unexpected.

I snap it in place with a click, and he guns the engine, pulling out of the airport pickup zone and onto the highway with a smooth acceleration that pushes me back into my seat.

The moment we hit the open road, he speeds up, the Shelby Mustang roaring beneath us like a beast unleashed.

"Whoa, slow down!" My hands instinctively grip the edge of my seat.

"Wanna get out?" he asks.

“No. But you’re moving too fast. I can’t even see the city.”

"Asheville? There’s nothing to see."

“Easy for you to say. You’ve probably lived here all your life and traveled the world. I hardly leave New York. When I do, I like to… fill my eyes.”

It sounds poetic when I say it out loud, almost embarrassing. But it’s true. I collect moments, images, sensations. Store them away for the lonely nights when my apartment feels too empty and my thoughts too loud.

"You think I live in Asheville?" he asks.

I turn to him. "You don't?"

"Nope. New York."

Wait a damn minute.

“You’ve been in New York all this time,” I say.

“You sound shocked.”

“It’s just… Finn’s never mentioned that. Ever. How do you both live in the same city and never cross paths?”

“Finn and I have a… complex relationship.”

The way he says it makes me drop the subject.

We drive in tense silence for a while, until Knox suddenly swerves off the main road with no warning, the car taking a sharp turn that has me clutching the door handle.

He parks in front of a dimly lit building with neon red letters that read:

SENSUAL DELIGHTS.

“Umm… Is this your parents’ house?” I ask, knowing full well it isn’t.

Knox smirks. “Sensual Delights? Really? Does it look like a house to you?”

The place is exactly what you’d expect an adult store to look like. Dark windows. Shady alleyway.

“A sex shop?” I ask.

“Bingo.”

My brain short-circuits. “Why are we at a sex shop?”

“Need to grab a wedding present.”

“For who?”

“My friend and his bride.”

I hesitate, swallowing hard as the pieces click into place in my mind. “Wait… your friend is Hunter? The groom?”

“Yep.”

“Delilah’s fiancé?”

Knox grins wickedly. “Yep.”

Oh, for God’s sake.

Finn’s brother is a friend to Delilah’s fiancé?

Why has Finn never mentioned any of this? It’s like I know nothing about my own best friend.

This is just a time bomb waiting to go off.

“Would you like to wait here or come inside?” Knox asks.

I glance at the building, then back at his face.

Screw it.

I unbuckle my seatbelt and step out of the car, awkwardly adjusting my glasses and smoothing imaginary wrinkles out of my top.

“Let’s go buy some torture devices in Delilah’s name,” I say, not the least bit joking.

Knox chuckles. “Alright, ma’am. But I must warn you, some girls do enjoy being tortured.”

We’ll see about that. I’m going to get something with enough voltage to zap Delilah’s fake, cheating ass right off the face of this Earth so she doesn’t get to ruin Finn anymore.