

CHAPTER 007: The Bet

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I feel something break inside me. How does loving Finn make me miserable?

“Let me go, Knox,” I say, my voice trembling. “You might not be a good brother, but I’m a good friend. I’m not going to sit around and watch my friend be deceived again. I’m going out there.”

Knox doesn’t budge. His grip on my waist remains firm, his body immovable.

In a voice so calm it only fuels my rage, he says, “I can’t let you go out there, Kitten. I will physically restrain you if I have to.”

“Who the hell do you think you are?” I snap. “You don’t get to control me, Knox. Let. Me. Go.”

“I’m not controlling you. I’m preventing you from making a fool of yourself—again.”

If my hands were free, I probably would have slapped him by now. “I’m beginning to see why Finn almost never mentioned you in the ten years I’ve known him. You’re such an arrogant, infuriating douchebag who cares about nothing else but himself. You’d rather watch your own brother get his heart ripped out than actually do something about it.”

Knox’s eyes darken, and for a moment, I swear I see something wicked flash through them. “That’s the thing, Sloane. Finn likes getting his heart ripped out by Delilah. He likes her toxicity. He’s addicted to it. The only person seeing a problem between those two being together is you. Stop projecting your feelings onto Finn.”

“You can’t tell me what to do or feel, you brother hater.”

Knox grins. “Think whatever you like. But I want what makes Finn happy. Unfortunately for you, that’s Delilah. Always has been. Always will be.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“What exactly can you do about it, Sloane? Wanna lock him in a maximum-security prison somewhere offshore? Chain him up in your basement? Finn will always go back to Delilah. You think you’re the first person obsessed with ending their silly little love story? Let. It. Go.”

“I can’t.”

The words slip out before I can stop them. My chest is heaving, my face burning, and I’m standing there like an idiot with my heart bleeding all over the floor for a man who’s out there chasing someone else.

Knox tilts his head, studying me with the eyes of a predator who’s just found the weakest part of his prey. “How about we make a bet?” he says.

I narrow my eyes. “A bet?”

"If this wedding takes place between Delilah and Hunter, I'll let you be so you can chase Finn to the ends of the Earth if you feel like it. Follow him around like a devoted puppy. I won't lift a finger to stop you."

"And if it doesn't?"

A slow, dangerous grin spreads across his face.

"If the wedding goes to shit—which it will—I will violently pursue you, Sloane Mercer. There's no place in this world you can hide from me that I won't find you. I will crawl inside your head, your body, your soul. I will ruin you for anyone else. You won't be able to think, breathe, or sleep without feeling me everywhere. I'll make you forget Finn Hartley ever existed. The things I could do to you. The things I want to do to you..."

For some weird reason, I can't breathe anymore. I turn away from Knox, facing the window again, wondering why my body has gone live with electricity. It's hatred, I tell myself. Pure, undiluted hatred making my body react this way—not desire, never desire. Yet somehow I'm hyperaware of every inch of space between us, as though there's no clothing barrier separating his skin from mine.

I try to pull away, but he holds me close, his lips brushing against my ear. The contact sends a jolt through my system.

“All you need is something else to obsess over,” he says. “Something to channel all that obsessive energy of yours toward. Let me provide that for you. Let me give you a hobby, Kitten, a very pleasurable one.”

I want him to do it.

Good lord.

What is wrong with me?

This is Finn’s brother. I can’t be in love with one man and then become a hot mess around his brother. Yet my body is betraying me, responding to him in ways I've never responded to anyone.

"You can't do this," I say, not recognizing my own voice. "You're my best friend's brother. There's a code of conduct about these things."

"A code? Screw your codes," he says. "I see what I want, I take it. Unlike you, pining away in silence, letting your life pass by. That is something I'm going to teach you, Sloane Mercer, how to bend the universe's will and take what you want."

My breath hitches. "I don't need your lessons. Thank you very much."

He touches my hips, pulling me further into him, and I don't think I have a single bone left in my body to resist.

"I always get what I want," he says, his voice a dark promise. “And since what I want at the moment is you, you better hope that wedding takes place. There's nothing I want more than to tie you up and bury myself so deep inside you that you’d blackout.”

I swear my legs are about to give out. My skin is burning, my pulse hammering in my throat. I've never felt this kind of animal attraction before—this raw, primal need that overpowers reason, morality, loyalty. It's nothing like the sweet ache I feel for Finn. This is something darker, more dangerous, and infinitely more terrifying.

"Get away from me," I whisper.

"Take the deal, Sloane."

I'm trembling. My brain is screaming run, but my body is leaning into him like a traitorous little bitch.

In this moment, I hate myself more than I hate him, because despite everything—despite my feelings for Finn—part of me wants to see what would happen if I surrendered.

I swallow hard, desperate to put distance between us, to regain some semblance of control. "Fine," I say, turning to meet his eyes. “We have a deal. Wedding happens, I never hear from you again. If it doesn't... give it your best shot."

Knox's grin is pure sin. "Oh, Kitten. You have no idea what you've just done."

I’m pretty sure I’ve just signed my soul over to the devil in exchange for nothing.

“You know what this means, right,” he says. “I have a wedding to sabotage.”

“What? No. No. No. You said you were not going to sabotage the wedding.”

“That was before you took my deal. You think you can win by playing fair?”

“You're not sabotaging this wedding, Knox.”

“Wanna bet?”

“I’m done with you and your stupid bets. If you so much as breathe the wrong way throughout this event, I’m taking you down.”

He laughs. “Oh, it's on, Kitten. Let the strongest man win.”

Before I can reply, the front door bursts open, and Finn walks in, looking like he's been through hell. His hair is disheveled, his eyes red-rimmed, his shoulders slumped in defeat. The sight of him—broken, vulnerable, so clearly hurting—snaps me back to reality, reminding me why I'm here, what matters.

We both turn toward him, and the way Finn's eyes move between Knox and me—noting our proximity—makes my stomach drop.

Oh God.

"What are you two doing?" Finn asks, suspicion dripping from every word.

I step away from Knox like I've been burned. "Nothing."

Finn narrows his eyes. "Were you two... oh my God. Were you two making out?"