

Chapter 19

"She's right here," Nico says, his voice a little angry. "She'll tell you herself."

"Anthony?" I ask.

"Oh my god, Iris," he gasps. "Are you okay!?"

"I'm fine," I say, all in a rush, "seriously, I'm fine, are you!?"

"I am – what the hell happened last night!? One second you're counting cash, then you're being accosted by thugs, and then you're being carried out of the club over the shoulder of some other mafia thug! What the hell?!"

Nico's eyes darken a little to hear himself referred to as a thug, but he doesn't say anything.

"Um," I say, looking up at Christian, who slowly shakes his head, silently telling me not to spill any secrets right now – not even to my friend. "Listen, Anthony, all I can say is that I'm fine –"

"Which is what you would say if you had a gun to your head!"

"I don't! I promise I don't! I'm literally having coffee in a very fancy apartment!"

Anthony goes silent for a second. We all wait.

"Fine," he snaps. "Prove it."

"What?" I breathe.

"Make a noise with the coffee cup, now! Before you whoever has you can



fake it!" I lean over and quickly grab a spoon off the counter, tapping it on the ceramic mug.

"Can you hear it? A spoon, on a mug..."

"Now stir it!" he demands. I sigh, doing as I'm told and holding the mug close to the phone so that he can, absurdly, hear me stirring a spoon in the coffee. "Fine," he says, with a heavy, relieved sigh. "Okay, fine, I... believe you. A little bit. Now, why are you calling me from your kidnapper's apartment?"

"Anthony," I say, eager. "Did you take my bag?"

"How did you know that?" he breathes, shocked. I beam at the phone and then up at Christian.

"Did you really?" I ask, laughing a little. "With all my stuff in it!?"

"Yes," he sighs, "you messy bitch, I grabbed your bag after you got hauled off by that hot guy – seriously, who was that? Is he there!? If so, I am leaving you to your fate..."

Nico's face instantly brightens.

I roll my eyes and open my mouth to reply, but Christian nudges me with his elbow, showing me a post-it note on which he's written "tell him you're sending someone to get it."

I do as I'm told, giving Anthony the details and then hanging up the phone after thanking my friend profusely and assuring him I'm okay, and that no one's going to come to his house and kill him. As soon as Anthony's even slightly on board, Nico hangs up his phone.

"Messy bitch?" he says, raising an eyebrow at me with a smirk.



"He was talking about you," I say, crossing my arms and giving him a little glare.

Frankie, of course, laughs while Christian tells Nico to hit the road. Nico sighs, clearly unhappy to be the one playing delivery boy, but he heads for the door and grabs a set of keys from a basket as he goes.

"So, do you believe me?" I ask, looking up at Christian. "That I have no idea why they're chasing me – what they want?"

"That all depends," he says, turning his head and glaring down at me. "On what's in the duffle bag."

I sigh, staring at him and shaking my head. "Honestly, Christian," I say, my voice soft. "After everything we've been through? You seriously don't trust me?"

He takes a long moment before he replies. "I want nothing more in the world than to trust you, Iris," he says. "But after everything I've been through? I've learned that even the people you love the most in the world can turn on you when the incentives are high enough."

My heart aches for Christian even as my mind turns, wondering what on earth he could have faced in the past thirteen years that turned him so cold.

And honestly, to turn him into the man who stands before me? Honestly, it must be so bad that I'm not sure I want to know.