

Chapter 22

"Christian!" I shout again, pulling the door shut behind me. He spins at the end of the hall by the elevator, worry all over his face as I hurry towards him.

"Iris!" he says, putting a hand around my waist and tugging me close protectively, look around for whatever is attacking, "what's wrong!?"

"What the hell!" Frankie shouts, yanking the apartment open and storming into the hall after me, Nico on his heels.

"Can we please," I say through gritted teeth, crossing my arms and glaring up at Christian, "have a moment alone?"

It takes Christian about half a second to realize that nothing's wrong, that I just chased him out here to have a word in private. He sighs, holding up a hand towards Nico and Frankie, who stop dead in their tracks – even if they don't look happy about it.

"You have until this elevator comes," he seethes at me, clearly not pleased with my antics. But he lifts his chin towards his bodyguards, sending them back inside. They do as they're told, both glaring at me as they shut the door behind them.

"Christian," I hiss the moment they're out of earshot, "are you seriously leaving me here alone with two strangers!?"

He just looks at me like I'm crazy.

"I don't know them, Christian! They could be anyone! And I know enough about this world to know that men here are...well, it's a rough world, Christian, isn't it?"

I look up at him, my mouth set, stubborn.

He works hard to keep his features straight, I think hiding a smile. "This heightened state of security won't last long, Iris, but you'll have to endure it for a bit. After all, your safety is my top priority, and Frankie and Nico are my top men. One of them will be at your side at all times." 1

"But...alone?" I say, pushing it. "Even when I like...take a shower? I'm worried about..." but I bite my lip, not wanting to say out loud that I'm worried about being sexually harassed. Frankie seems nice enough, but Nico? Nico slapped my ass coming out of the club and both of them saw me stripping yesterday.

I have no idea, really, what they think of me and of my relationship with Christian.

I mean, do they think that he just liked my performance? That I'm just some...girl, some hooker who got caught up in all of this?

And if they think that...will they take liberties!?

"Iris, Frankie and Nico aren't going to touch you," Christian says as the elevator dings and the doors slide open. "They're very loyal, and I trust them with my life every day. Besides," his voice lowers as he steps into the elevator, "if they did touch you? They absolutely know what the consequences would be."

Christian presses the button for the parking structure below, but he keeps his eyes on me, looking me slowly up and down with a gaze that scorches with...

God, I don't know what it is. All I know is that while Christian's gaze drifts down my body from my head to my toes, I see a distinct pleasure –

even a greed in his eyes. Like I'm some great hard-won treasure he's going to jealously protect.

My lips part a little as I stare at him, shocked by the intensity of it.

Neither of us say a word as the doors squeeze shut.

And then I'm alone in the hall.

For a split second, I consider pressing the button and calling the carriage back. But then I notice the key-card receiver next to the elevator buttons, which means I'd need a card to make it work. My eyes shift to the fire escape, but it's alarmed, and there's no way I'd get far before Nico heard it go off and caught me.

Shit. I really am captive here.

So I sigh, and head back to the apartment, and push open the door.

Nico just glares at me from the kitchen, but Frankie pats the couch next to him, shaking his head at me in disappointment even while he calls me to his side.

"Don't do that again," Frankie murmurs to me, handing me the controller to the video game again. "Or Nico will put restraints on your ankles so you can't run."

I gape at him a little. "You guys have, like, chains?"

He raises his eyebrow at me with a smirk. "Do you really want me to answer that, Bambs?"

I sigh deeply and snatch the controller from his hand.

Christian is gone all damn day.

Frankie and I kill probably every alien in the universe, and even he gets sick of it after a few hours. Then he turns the game off and the TV on and the three of us sit in silence, watching game shows and eating stale caramel corn that Frankie found in the back of a cabinet. Nico does indeed escort me to the bedroom for a shower and to change into my post-club clothes, sitting outside the bathroom door the whole time. When we come back to the living room, I order some clothing basics with the iPad Christian gave me – just stuff I'll need to sit around the house for a few days. ¹

Because, apparently that's all I'm going to be doing anyway.

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