

## Chapter 25

Nico only gets up once, pouring a glass of wine and pushing it generously in my direction when I'm finished unloading the groceries. "Here," he says. "Thank you for organizing the kitchen. That is not...something that's precisely in our skill set."

I shrug, a little pleased to have made inroads with this man who was so clearly ready to be my enemy this morning. "I like to help," I say simply. "So..." I say, a little hesitant. "Christian's brothers don't...mind? That he seems to be the favorite?"

"Oh, they mind," Frankie says, reaching for a third slice of pizza with his eyebrows raised. "Especially because he's a half-brother. The other three – they sort of stick together, but it's undeniable that Christian is just better at this than them. Plus, Lorenzo – who should be the heir – he's got way too much of a fondness for the nose candy to be reliable –"

Nico smacks Frankie on the shoulder as I finish my salad and take a bite of pizza, watching them.

"What!?" Frankie protests, gesturing towards me with an open hand. "Half the hookers on the city's west side could tell you precisely how Lorenzo Romano likes his coke cut, and besides it's Daisy – she probably knows way more about Christian than we ever will."

"That's not true," Nico says, ruffled a little and turning his glare on me now. I'm surprised, a little, by his defensiveness. Is it important to him that he be closer to Christian than me?

"Maybe not the stuff since he turned fourteen," Frankie says with a shrug, talking another big bite of pizza. "But all of the stuff before? Yah."

Nico narrows his eyes a little at both of us. "No way," he says. "I grew up with him –"

"So did I!" I protest.

"Not like I did," Nico says, possessive.

"All right, Nic," Frankie says, grinning at him, a little wicked. "How does Christian take his waffles?"

"What?" Nico says, staring at Frankie, baffled.

"Bambi?" Frankie says, turning to me with a grin and flourishing a hand through the air, inviting me to answer.

"A little butter in every single crevice," I say instantly with a smug little grin. "And then syrup on the side for dipping, not on top."

"One for Daisy!" Frankie says, laughing.

"That's ridiculous," Nico says, crossing his arms over his chest, "that doesn't even matter – that's breakfast trivia –"

"Fine!" Frankie says, turning to him again. "Favorite Christmas movie?"

Nico scowls, looking away. "That is such bullshit," he murmurs. "He stopped watching Christmas movies like the rest of us, because we grew up."


"Bammmmmmbi?" Frankie says, turning to me with a grin and resting his chin in his hands, expectant. 1

"Trick question," I say quietly, a little pleased with myself. "He likes to watch *The Goonies* at Christmas, because Damon got it for him one year

be busy. So I fuss over the bodyguards a bit, laying out their salads on plates and listening eagerly as they answer my very basic questions about Christian's life.

The details that they spill – I mean, I guess what Frankie said is still true, they don't tell me anything I couldn't learn from reading the thousand newspaper articles that have been published about my old friend. But still – it's rather shocking.

My eyes are wide as I pop the caps off of beers and set them in front of Frankie and Nico, listening to them tell me about how Christian's father found the woman who ran away when she was pregnant and brought the preteen Christian back with him, refusing to let his son grow up outside the fold.

They tell me, too, about how good Christian is at this work, even though he wasn't raised to it for the first thirteen years of his life like his brothers were. But Christian – he's accomplished. Apparently, he has a knack for seeing through his enemies' lies, for staying a step ahead of their plans. His talents, Nico informs me, reflects his father's prowess in a way that his brothers did not inherit. 

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