



## Chapter 9

Iris – she had been astonishingly sexy. She had had the kind of power on stage that brings men to their knees. But the naïve way she handled it?

Christian has to assume that Iris has no idea what she really has going on.

After all, Iris had always been cute, but she'd always been a little too chubby and dorky to ever be sexy.

God damn it, did she grow into herself though.

God damn it.

The elevator dings, the door popping open.

Christian takes a deep breath as he walks out of the elevator, Nico moving ahead and Frankie falling behind, as they always do, heading for the door at the end of the hall.

When Christian had seen those two guys grabbing Iris behind the bar, he'd almost been too late. He'd spent too much time negotiating with Ben, who had lain bleeding on the floor, shouting about how Christian was going to pay for this.

So, Christian had almost missed those two assholes harassing Iris until she had shouted, and then he'd instantly been moving towards the bar. He'd lost her again when the bartender had used the champagne to distract the guys – clever move there.

But when the two guys had disappeared through that curtain and down the hall, Christian had only taken a moment to give Frankie and Nico orders, and then he'd grabbed his gun, squeezing two bullets into the air, wanting the chaos it would incite.



Then he'd moved, watching Bonetti's henchmen as they rushed down the hall with that manager. Christian hadn't panicked, though, because he knows Iris in a way those other guys don't.

Christian, after all, had played hours of hide-and-seek with Iris when they were kids – and he knew she always preferred to hide in a tight, dark place, rather than run. So, when he'd seen the closet halfway down the hall?

He knew instantly she was in there and ordered Nico to go get her.

But even though Christian knew, in that moment, that taking Iris was only going to cause trouble for him?

He has no choice.

He'll gouge out the eyes of anyone that tries to hurt Iris Smith. Damn the consequences – she's his responsibility now. After all, he owes Damon Smith his life.

But even as he thinks it...Christian knows that this goes far beyond that childhood debt.

Frankie enters the code into the door's lock and pushes it open, moving swiftly into the penthouse suite and flicking on the lights, checking the corners and calling clear as he moves into the master bedroom. Nico does the same, moving swiftly to the other rooms of the apartment as Christian kicks the door shut behind him.

"Do you think you can stand on your own now?" Christian murmurs to Iris. "Or, I can just take you to the couch –"

"I can stand," she says softly. "Or at least, I can try."



Christian nods and slowly lowers her feet to the floor, her plastic shoes clicking on the floorboards.

Slowly, a little unstable, she straightens her legs.

"Nicely done," he says, his voice teasing, which makes her raise her eyes to glare at him, just a little. Daisy had never liked being teased, which always made it more fun. "You're earning your stage name today with those wobbly legs, Bambi."

This earns him an eye roll and a swift turn away, which brings a smile to Christian's mouth. Iris, she's definitely coming back to herself. She starts to walk slowly to the couch and Christian follows her, watching her look around.

"Bambi," she murmurs, sinking into the cushions of the expensive beige sofa and looking out the wall of windows at the very wide, very expensive view of the city. "God, I'm so embarrassed. If I could wipe that memory from your mind right now, I'd do it."

"I wouldn't," Christian replies easily, standing next to her. He goes still, though, when she flicks her eyes back to him and he realizes what he just said.

Because this girl clearly has...absolutely no idea how sexy she actually is.