

### Chapter 32

Christian groans as I look down into my lap, intuiting that he's hurt my feelings, and then he scootches closer to me. "Don't look like that, Iris," he murmurs, putting a warm hand on my shoulder, "you're breaking my heart."

"I don't want to be a burden to you, Christian," I sigh, looking down into my lap. "Honestly, if you don't want me in your world, you can just... leave me here for months, or whatever. Until it's safe for me to go. If you don't want to spend time with me -"

"I never said that -"

"So what?" I say, genuinely confused now, "you'll spend time with me, but I can't know anything about your life?" I tilt my head, letting him see just how stupid I think that is.

"Don't you see that I'm trying to protect you?" he says softly, shaking his head.

"Don't you see," I counter, staring at him, "that I'm already involved?" I wave a hand around at the mafia apartment that I'm living in, that I've given up my entire life to inhabit.

He sighs, shaking his head again. "Fine," he murmurs, "you win, Daisy. I can't say no to you anyway."

I smirk a little. "It's not me, it's logic."

"No," he murmurs, letting his hand fall from my shoulder and slide down the length of my arm. "It's you. So. What do you want to know?"

I take a moment to consider it before I make my choice.



"Tell me about when you were a kid," I say quietly, thirteen years' worth of curiosity welling up in me now. "Where...where did you go?"

He sighs and nods, closing his eyes and maybe turning back on memories he'd rather not revisit. As he does, he gives me a long moment to study his face – his high cheekbones, his square jaw. I bite my lip a little, sitting on my hand to deny the instinct to run my fingers across his tanned skin, the line of stubble starting on his jaw.

"They came for me," he murmurs, opening his eyes, "in the middle of the night. I knew nothing. I thought I was being kidnapped, Iris, it was horrible." A shudder passes through him and I feel my stomach drop, suddenly horribly guilty for making him talk about this.

God, why am I so dumb? Of course he only has bad memories of that day.

"It wasn't until I actually arrived at my father's house that anyone explained anything to me," he says, his eyes distant. "They brought me before my father and he told me who he was, who I am to him. Told me that my mother took me away as an infant, so that I wouldn't be raised in this world." He sighs, shaking his head. "They let me talk to her, about a week later, because I was inconsolable. She confirmed it all. Told me that she was...sorry, ultimately, that she failed."

"Christian..." I murmur, shaking my head, reaching for his hand, which I wrap in both of mine. To my surprise, he lets me.

"It wasn't all bad," he murmurs, raising his eyes to mine, but I sense that he's...just trying to cheer me up. "I got four brothers, who beat the crap out of me until I could beat them right back. But we had a pool." He shrugs, like it's a perk that makes it all worth it.

I give him my best smile, trying to make myself cheerful for his sake. "

Do you like your brothers?" I ask quietly.

He laughs, shaking his head and running his free hand through his hair. "As you know, brothers are complicated. But Elio, he's the baby – he's great."

"You're not the baby?" I ask, confused.

"I'm the middle child," he says, looking at me significantly. My mouth drops open, confused.

"I know," he says, laughing and sitting up straighter now. "The five of us have three different moms. Dad...got around. He likes himself a wedding."

"Wow," I say, shaking my head. "So, your new step-mom..."

"Bianca is fine," he murmurs. "She's very calm. She...likes her Xanax. A lot."

I grin at this, seeing him smile first. But then he sighs and hangs his head, I think already exhausted by this teeny tiny confessional. Christian, I'm guessing, doesn't talk about himself a lot – either for lack of opportunity or because he's been trained not to. Or both.



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