

Chapter 33

We sit quietly for a long moment and I let him have his space, studying the top of his head, his thick dark hair, while he stares into his laps and processes...whatever it is he's processing.

Suddenly, he starts. "Hey," he says, raising his head with interest. "Do you remember what we used to get to eat at Delgado Five and Dime, whenever we found a spare quarter in the street?"

I gasp, my eyes lighting up. "Churros!" I half-shout, clapping in excitement at the memory. "God, they were so good," I murmur, delighted, "how did he make them so cheap?"

"I have no idea," Christian laughs, shaking his head. "But...do you want to make some?"

"What?" I gasp.

"Seriously, I got the recipe," Christian says, already standing up. "I was thinking about them a couple of months ago – couldn't get it out of my head – and I asked the chef to try them out. I think he left everything here we need to make them..."

Christian heads eagerly into the kitchen, peering into the back of the cupboards and starting to take out ingredients.

"Wait, seriously?" I laugh, grabbing the wine and following him in. "Do you actually cook?"

"Well, no," he says, glancing at me and laughing too. "But you do, right?"

"Why would you assume that!?"

He pauses in his search, giving me a long glance over his shoulder. “You had three easy-bake ovens as a kid, Iris,” he murmurs. “You learned the location of everything in my penthouse kitchen today when I was gone. You fed my bodyguards their dinner and you didn’t make them lift a finger. You...know how to cook.”

I laugh again, shoving him to the side. “Fine, you got me, but if you don’t know how to cook, then please get out of my way.”

Christian just grins, obliging me as he sets the flour, sugar, butter, cinnamon, and oil on the counter. Then, as I start sorting through his pots and pans for something to fry churros in, he pulls out a piece of paper from one of the drawers with a lot of ingredients and instructions crossed out and corrected.

“Francisco got pretty close with this batch,” he says, placing the recipe before me. “We can start there, see if we get any closer. At least I won’t be the only taste-tester this time.”

I pause, taking up the recipe and nodding as I read it. “I can do this,” I murmur before grinning up at him.

We get started then, Christian mostly relaxing against the counter as I work – which, honestly, is my preference in the kitchen. He helps, of course, when I need him to get me some stuff off a high shelf, but in general he lets me take control.

As soon as fifteen minutes later, I’m pipping the first batch into the hot oil. “These will be curved,” I murmur, “since we don’t have time to freeze them...”

“We’ll survive,” Christian sighs.

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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