

Chapter 40

Christian puts everything together in an instant – where this grate leads, what, precisely, that noise he just heard was. I give another panicked squeak and push myself away – but I'm unbalanced now and can't quite push myself back to the dresser on my exhausted arms. I gasp, looking down at the floor in panic as I try to stand up straight –

But suddenly the door to the room flies open, and Christian is striding towards me, his face livid. Just as I lose my balance, plummeting straight for the floor, he grabs me and pulls me out of the air so that my weight falls on him and I'm able to put my feet on the ground. I mean, it's not the most graceful landing –

But I didn't fall on my ass.

Still, none of that matters as I look up into Christian's furious face, my chest and stomach still pressed firmly to his side.

"What the fuck are you doing, Iris!?"

I just shake my head, because – I mean, obviously he knows what I'm doing. I'm distracted, though, by the scent of blood – and as I look down at his shirt I see the man's blood there – still bright red, and warm, and smelling of iron –

Suddenly, I gag. The scent, and the sight of blood splashed across a man's chest – it's just too familiar. I squeeze my eyes shut, turning away from the memories of my childhood – those horrible days...

"God damn it," Christian growls, setting me hard upon my feet and grasping my arm, giving me a shake. "Get in the bathroom, Iris!"

"I won't look again, I promise!" I shake my head, my eyes still closed.



His hand tightens on my arm.

"The. Bathroom. Now." I open my eyes, looking up to see him speaking the words between his teeth. Quite suddenly, I know that now is not the time now to defy him. I nod once, and head immediately for the bathroom. Christian follows me, slamming the door shut behind me. I turn to stare at it, at the perfect white paint, the solid wood, as I hear the lock click from the outside.

I exhale all at once as my knees go a little weak, my hands starting to shake with the shock of it all, the intensity. Without thinking of what I'm doing, I sink to the bathroom floor and press my hands against the cold tiles, letting my head hang as I take deep breaths through my nose and out my mouth.

Christian – my kind friend.

I can't believe it – can't believe that this is where his life has taken him. I mean, I knew the Mafia King has a reputation for horrible acts, and I knew that Christian is that Mafia King, but still, I didn't quite...put it together.

The sight of him ruthlessly punching that man, and threatening his children, and then cutting his face...

God, is Christian just as bad as the man who wanted to make me work in his cathouse to pay off Steven's debts? And if Steven owed money to Christian instead...would I...would I be in danger as well?

The fact that I can't instantly say "no" to this idea is so horrible that tears start to fall down my cheeks, dragging over my chin to splash on the plain white tiled floor. I shake my head, not understanding it, not able to put the pieces together.



The boy who called me daisy because it made me smile...how did he grow to be this man? This cold, ruthless man?

I don't know how much time passes – I completely lose track of it as I just stare at the floor, rifling through my memories, trying to deny the images that flash through my brain – both of Christian now, and of my father when I was a child...

But when the door opens again, my hands and my legs, where they're pressed to the floor, are very, very cold. I lift my head to see Christian standing there, his arms crossed over his chest, glaring at me.

Neither of us say anything for a long, long moment.

And then he sighs, stepping forward and holding a hand out to me.

