

Chapter 42

When I wake up the next morning I...have no idea what to do.

I mean, the penthouse is totally quiet – you'd honestly think that I was here alone. But...I was ordered to my room.

Am I allowed to...leave it?

I spend about five minutes wondering and then I huff a frustrated sigh, tossing my blankets off and making a quick trip to the bathroom to clean up before I stride for the door and grab the handle. When I turn it, I'm frankly surprised that it's not locked.

My leftover anger giving me courage, I stride out into the beautiful main room of the penthouse and plant my hands on my hips, glaring around, ready to face Christian again and resume our argument. 📖

But...he's not here. It's just Nico, sitting on the couch with a cup of coffee on the table before him, reading the newspaper.

"Finally up?" he asks, not raising his eyes to me, his voice sarcastic like I slept a thousand hours. I glance at the clock and scowl – it's only seven in the morning.

"Where is everyone?" I ask, ignoring his question.

"Where is Christian, do you mean?" he asks, raising his eyes to me now, a smirk on his lips.

"And Frankie," I retort, though...honestly, he's right. I wasn't thinking about Frankie at all.

"Out," Nico says, his word clipped and brooking no invitation for further questioning on that point.

"Well," I huff, crossing my arms now, "did his highness leave any further instructions about what I'm supposed to do today? Considering my mind and my actions aren't my own to direct."

"Look at you, fancy language," Nico says, smirking at me. Slowly, patiently – probably because he knows it gets under my skin – he folds his paper and places it on the couch. "And as a matter of fact, his highness did leave instructions for you."

"Well?" I ask, pissed.

"Well, have breakfast," Nico says, gesturing towards the kitchen. "And then I'll tell you."

"Just tell me, Nico," I growl, resisting the urge to petulantly stomp my foot.

"Instruction one was to make sure you had breakfast," he counters, leaning forward towards me. "So go eat, Iris."

I glare at Nico again, honestly wishing Frankie had been left instead, even if I did watch him callously snap someone's finger last night. But, given no other real option, I head into the kitchen and pour myself a cup of coffee before rifling through the cabinets and scowling to see that the only thing to eat is breakfast cereal, though there's no milk. Frustrated, I just grab a stale churro off the counter – honestly, nobody bothered to put these away last night? – and turn towards the living room.

But Nico's already behind me, seated at the counter, and making me jump at his sudden closeness.

"How are you so quiet?" I ask, annoyed that he was able to sneak up on me so easily.

"Stealth training," he says with a grin, and then he pulls a phone from his pocket and slides it across the counter towards me. "Here."

"What's this?" I ask, snatching it before it falls to the floor.

"It's a phone," he says, like I'm an idiot, and I raise my eyes to glare daggers at him.

"Something about this," I say, gesturing between us with the phone in my hand, "is going to have to change, Nico. I've given you no reason to be so nasty to me all the time –"

"You're the reason I'm stuck in this penthouse all day babysitting, Iris –"

"Christian is the reason for that, not me. If I'm the one in charge, you can go," I say, throwing a hand towards the door.

We glare at each other for a long, long moment before Nico scowls and glares down at the counter for a second. "Fine. Truce. For now, until you start being annoying again."

"I'm not annoying," I sigh, "I'm a god damn delight and you know it." Nico looks up at me, quizzical, but I just come around the counter and put my coffee down, sitting next to him and holding out the phone. "So? What's this?"

"You're supposed to text your friend and your brother," he says, a little chagrined, I think, to tell me news that's going to make me happy. And it does just that – I sit up straight with an excited gasp.

"Really?" I ask.

"Yes," he replies, looking at me and holding up a finger, "with qualifications."



I nod, letting him know that I'm listening.

"First, I read every message before you send it. Yes?"