



Chapter 17

"How much do you need?" he asks, his words quick.

"What?" I ask, tilting my head.

"How much?" Christian pushes, narrowing his eyes at me. "My people found out your address, Iris. I know where you've been living, what your rent is. I also know how much money a girl like you pulls in at a club like that. Your credit check says you have student loans, so you don't need that kind of cash to pay for school – not right now. So? What do you owe, Iris?"

I blink at him shocked – where on earth did he get information like that overnight!? "Wha- " I breathe, "how...?"

"I'm a powerful man," he murmurs, leaning close and letting me feel the power basically radiating off of him. My heart starts to beat faster, and not – I realize – because I'm scared of him. "I have people for whom finding out these kinds of details is ridiculously easy."

"So, you already knew, then," I say, putting my cup of coffee down and crossing my arms. "That I lived with my boyfriend, if you knew where I live and what my rent is."

"Yes," he says instantly, his eyes still narrow, letting me see plainly he was testing me to see whether I'd tell him the truth.

"Then why did you –"

"How much," he snaps, his voice louder now, shaking me a bit, "do you owe, Iris?"

"Nothing!" I snap back, glaring up at him now, starting to get pissed at



his mafia techniques that are trying to scare the answers out of me. "I don't owe a dime, all right? It was all Steven – he owed the debt, I think to Bonetti – maybe to others. And I was helping him, and he sold me, okay? To pay it off. I just found out about it last night when those jerks tried to take me."

I cross my arms, defensive, and look down at my bare feet, standing so close to Christian's in what look like thousand-dollar shoes.

Christian is silent for a long moment and then I hear him loose a long, unsteady stream of curses – maybe of surprise, or anger, or...maybe he's ashamed of me? I don't know. I don't look up, ashamed of myself.

Before he can say anything else, though, his phone rings. Christian doesn't move for a second, letting it ring, and then I watch as his feet turn away from me, walking out into the living room. I look up, watching him go as I hear him answer the phone.

He murmurs some responses into it, his face furrowing in frustration, but I can't tell what's going on.

As I watch, Frankie and then Nico come out of their rooms, likewise dressed in very posh suits. Nico glances at Christian before coming over to me, Frankie following.

"Who's he talking to?" Nico asks, his eyes still on his boss.

"I have no idea," I murmur.

Frankie settles onto a stool as Nico nods and leans against the counter. Nico is quiet for a moment before a side-long glance at my coffee. "You going to drink that?"

"Yes!" I snap, snatching it away. Honestly, if Frankie had asked for it I'd

probably have given to him. But Nico? I take a long sip of the drink, glaring at him over the edge.

As Nico scowls at me, Christian hangs up the phone and turns to us. "What the fuck else is going on, Iris?" he snaps, striding over to the three of us.

My eyebrows immediately go up. "What?" I ask, looking up at him. "I – I have no idea what you're talking about –"

"It doesn't add up," he says, his glare intensifying. Frankie and Nico watch quietly, carefully.

"Explain," I say, staring hard at Christian and squeezing the word through my clenched teeth. Honestly, he's my oldest friend, but he is starting to piss me off.

"You're not the first girl to be sold to a cat house to settle a debt," he says, his words fast and angry, though I don't notice Frankie's eyebrows going up in scandalized surprise. "But if that's all they had on you, they'd have just have gone back to your asshole boyfriend and told him that his payment didn't go through – that he'd have to find another method."

"So..." I say, taking a second to put the pieces together. "That's...not what happened?"

"No," Christian snaps, looking me up and down. "They're still pursuing you. Which means you've got something else, Iris, that they want. So," he says, leaning against the counter and glaring at me, "what is it that you're not telling me?"

And I go completely cold because...I have no idea what it could be.