

Chapter 18

"Christian," I say, pressing my hands to my chest and willing him to see the truth in every ounce of me, "I swear to you, I have no idea what you're talking about. I am not intentionally keeping something back – if there's something I'm missing? I don't know what it is."

"Think hard, Iris," Christian says, still staring down at me. "What is it that you know? About your boyfriend, or his debt? Why would they still be chasing you?"

I stutter through all of it then – everything I know about Steven's debt, what they showed me on the video last night, what Steven said on the Facetime, even the little scraps I know about Steven trading crypto. But honestly, even as I say it, I know that it's nothing.

Christian continues to clench his jaw, shaking his head down at me as the pieces fail to come together. He opens his mouth to demand something new, getting angry now – but then Nico, of all people, interrupts.

"What if it's not something she knows," he says, and both Christian and I snap our attention to him. "What if it's something she has?"

"What are you talking about?" Christian snaps.

"Well, she obviously doesn't know shit," Nico says, rolling his eyes a bit. "This Steven guy really did a number on her," he continues before shifting his eyes to me, "though you were kind of an idiot for just handing him your paychecks without asking any questions about this debt you were paying off –"

"Enough," Christian growls, his voice low.

Nico puts up his hands in a gesture of peace and moves on. "But,



seriously, if she doesn't know anything, maybe she has something."

I stare at him for a second and then gesture at my body with my hands. "I think we established last night that I came here with nothing."

"Here with nothing," Nico says, tilting his head to the side and holding my gaze. "But what did you bring to the club last night?"

My eyebrows go up and Frankie stands up straighter next to Nico, looking at him, impressed. "A bag," I say, turning back towards Christian. "I brought my black duffel, like I always do. In it is my phone, and my clothes for after the shift, and some of my books so I could study between sets."

My head whips to Frankie when he suddenly laughs. What?

"That's just so geeky for a stripper," he says with a shrug and a smile. "Seriously, do you do like, a sexy teacher act? A geeky stripper could seriously sell --"

"Frank!" Christian snaps and Frankie works very hard to wipe his face of his glee. But he fails, just a little bit, so instead he turns his face away so Christian can't see it.

I look back up at Christian, who is shaking his head, staring up at the ceiling. "No, it doesn't make sense," he murmurs. "If there was something in your bag, they'd have recovered it. Even after we took you, Bonetti would have had his guys combing the place."

I bite my lip, thinking, and then I go still as I realize something. "Unless... someone grabbed it for me," I whisper.

Christian reaches out and grabs my arm – not hard, or cruel, but certainly full of demand. My eyes go wide and my stomach fills with



butterflies because...

Well, damn it, because I kind of like it, when he grabs me that way, all bossy. God, what is wrong with me?

"Who?" he demands, his brows low over his eyes.

"Anthony," I whisper, nodding. "If he could, he would have taken it on his way out. We watch each other's backs like that"

"Number?" Nico says, pulling out his phone, and I turn towards him even though my arm is still held in Christian's. Anthony's number easily falls from my lips.

"Why do you know that by heart?" Christian asks softly as Nico dials and lifts the phone to his ear, stepping a few feet away. I hesitate and then slowly look up at Christian. The corner of his mouth turns up in a sad smile. "That boyfriend – he wouldn't have liked seeing another guy's name in your phone, would he?"

I blush, ashamed, and lower my eyes as I shake my head.

Christian doesn't say anything, and both of us turn our attention to Nico as he talks quite quickly to someone on the phone. Suddenly he looks up at me, gesturing me to come forward, and takes the phone from his ear. As I walk over, he puts it on speaker.