

Chapter 6

"You're a little different than I expected you to be, all grown up," Christian says, smirking as he glances down at my stripper outfit, which is honestly not much more than skimpy underwear. I blush a sudden, horrible red.

"Oh my god," I murmur, hunching my shoulders and pulling myself closer to him, thinking that if I get closer he'll have trouble seeing my entire body.

Not like he didn't get a really good look at it earlier tonight. I groan in embarrassment.

"No, seriously!" Christian laughs, pulling back so he can see my face. "You look good, Iris. I'm glad to see that you still dance, even if...well, even if I imagined you in the national ballet, not the Glass Slipper."

I sigh a little, shaking my head as I stare at him.

"Looks like we have a lot to catch up on, Chris," I say, my voice still shaky.

"Don't worry," he murmurs, tucking my hair back behind my ear. "We've got time for that."

Christian shifts me to the middle seat, still keeping an arm protectively around me as Frankie pulls our battered SUV into the parking garage in a high-rise apartment building. As Christian leans forward to direct Frankie where to park, I study his face.

Christian... the Mafia King? Honestly, how had I never put it together before?





I mean, I haven't paid a ton of attention to our city's politics and the mob wars that are raging right now – I haven't had time for it.

But, like everyone else, I'd seen photographs of the young Mafia King who taken such control of the Romano crime family in the past few months. It's kind of a mocking title the media is using to suggest that he's overthrown his father, though Antonio Romano is far from out of the picture.

As Frankie winds downwards through the levels of the parking garage, debating with Christian about how to hide the car so it won't be seen, I wonder how I've been so stupid I mean, now that Christian has revealed his identity to me, I can't not see it.

But how is it even possible? My brother Damon and I were devastated when Christian moved away in the middle of the night. But his mom said that he went to live in Canada...

"We're here," Christian murmurs, startling me out of my reverie. He glances over at me as Frankie pulls into a spot on a mostly-empty lower level. Christian pitches his voice louder to the two guys in the front seat. "You guys do a sweep, all right? Make sure we weren't followed."

Frankie and the other one – I didn't catch his name yet – murmur their assent and get out of the car, moving away into the parking garage.

Butterflies twist in my stomach as I realize that I'm alone with my childhood crush, who doubles as the Mafia King. I mean...how am I supposed to talk to him now? Is he my old friend or the violent crime lord?

"Are you all right?" Christian murmurs, leaning away for a moment and doing his best to look me up and down. I curl up again, still embarrassed



to be so naked in front of him. "Did they hurt you in there?"

"I'm okay," I say with a little shrug, even though my arms ache where those guys grabbed me.

"Where does it hurt?" Christian asks, reaching for me.

"Christian," I breathe, brushing his hand away and looking up into his face. "How...what the hell is going on? How are you the Mafia King?"

His lips twist a little with chagrin. "I wish you wouldn't call me that," he murmurs, and my anxiety twists anew. "That nickname is doing nothing good for the rivalry between me and my brothers –"

"Brothers!?" I cry, looking at him wide-eyed. "Christian! You're an only child!"

A smile spreads over his face, crinkling his eyes in that way I remember. "I forgot how much you don't know," he sighs, running a hand through his brown hair, which naturally lightens at the ends. "Seriously, you never put it together, after seeing me on TV and in the tabloids?"

"No," I breathe, shaking my head as I stare at him. "Also, you have a different name –"

"It's not that different," he says, frowning at me.

"Cristian Romano is very different from Christian Allen," I say, tilting my head at him like it's obvious.