

Chapter 28

“Get in,” Christian told me and opened the door for me. I frowned at his demanding behavior and got into the car. Did he always have to be like that?

“No personal driver today?” I asked once he sat in the driver’s seat. “I think it’d be pretty embarrassing if my family knew I let you go to this special occasion with another man behind the wheel.” He spoke.

“So you think men have to be in control all the time?” I asked him as a joke, but his scoff told me he thought otherwise. “No, not all men but I do.”

“You know Serena, sometimes I just want to tape your mouth shut to stop you from asking too many questions!” He suddenly said. And there it was, mission one of getting rid of Serena after the baby was born. “Hey, that’s not a nice thing to say to your fiancée!”

For a second he smiled at my joke but had quickly replaced his smile with his usual poker face and drove away. The ride was quiet but not really awkward, rather peaceful.

The thought of meeting his entire family was still a bit uncomfortable to me because he had already prepared me for the worst.

“Don’t worry, I trust you’ll do great.” He tried to comfort me, but what he didn’t know was who he was dealing with. I was the same girl who did not know how to eat with my mouth closed or how to cut up meat with a knife and fork so the trust he had in me was extremely uncomfortable and made me even more nervous.

“You might be trusting the wrong person,” I told him truthfully so he knew what he had to deal with. “I trust you.” He spoke back while I looked at him in utter shock. Does he trust me? Well, he has a weird way of showing it.

“If I hadn’t, I wouldn’t even have brought you to my family’s house and would’ve done anything to come up with an excuse, but I didn’t.” He tried to reassure me. “Right.” I awkwardly spoke.

“You’re always the one asking questions, but I have a question for you.” He asked, taking me off guard. I was not used to him interacting with me unless he had to, and was nervous as hell. What would he even ask me?

Would it be something embarrassing and would he ask me something like ‘did you shower’ or ‘did you brush your teeth?’ No of course it wouldn’t, I smelled completely fine, right?

“You seem like a shy person, but somehow you managed the stripping, how come?” He asked. This particular subject was hard for me but it was the first time he had asked me a question and he sounded genuinely curious, so the right thing would be to answer.

“I faked it, all of it.” I had admitted for the first time. Who knew I would have this heart to heart conversation with him.

“I felt like I didn’t belong but I faked it because I needed the money, but I hated it. I don’t mind dancing, but I hated the people.”

For a second he turned around to look at me before focusing his eyes on the road again. “I’m listening.” He said as a way of telling me to keep talking.

“I grew up in a place where all the kids were very close so I never had to worry about getting bullied. The first few weeks at the club...I cried in the bathroom because these girls were laughing at me, pushing me around, called me names, told me to leave and go back to school— but Faith found me and boosted my confidence.” I told him with a smile on my face. I honestly had no idea how much longer I could’ve survived there without Faith and Luna.

“I don’t like bullies.” Christian suddenly spoke. I watched as he tightened his grip against the steering wheel. The subject of bullying seemed to hit him deeply.

“Do these girls still work there?” He asked and I immediately felt the need to protect them so shook my head. I held no grudges and did not want to be the cause of them receiving a scolding or even getting fired while they probably had bills to pay.

“Serena some advice for in the future, you don’t always have to be the bigger person and you don’t always have to protect everyone.” He told me. I felt embarrassed because I knew he was right, anyone else would’ve taken this opportunity to get them fired but I didn’t have it in me.

“You don’t have to give me their names, but for the time being you’re a Lamberti so if you want to fire them I will give you permission to do so.” He made clear. I felt bad for admitting it but he wasn’t all that bad. If only I tried to get to know him a bit more instead of judge him.

“When I called you a...stripping whore...I didn’t mean it, I never did. I was scared and tried to find a way out so I called you that but I would like to apologize for that.” He suddenly spoke. I did not know if it was the air in the car but I had not expected him to apologize, I never did although I had hoped he felt sorry.

“Did you get bullied?” I asked him. He laughed and shook his head at my question. So he can laugh, he just won’t.

“They tried, especially the people in my family but I wouldn’t let them. Sometimes when words don’t work you use your fists to tell them who’s the boss.” He spoke with a proud look on his face. The sob story I told probably made it seem as if I was weak, but that was definitely not the case.

“I know, I beat up half my school— but work is different and I didn’t want to get fired so I held myself back. Whenever I cry it’s usually not because I’m sad but because I’m angry.” I told him. “Then I guess we’re more alike than you think, except I haven’t cried in years.”

In years. It made me wonder about the people in the family he had mentioned. Gio, I could imagine— but I couldn’t even start thinking about the cousins who would have something against him for probably being the favorite of the entire family. Other than Johnny, I had never seen the Lamberti brothers talk about their cousins.

“You know, I never had a family so I wouldn’t know what it feels like.” I sighed and tried to sound cheerful, but was obviously failing. “I’m sorry.” Christian immediately apologized, making me chuckle.

“For? It isn’t your fault.” I laughed at the pitiful look on his face. It was no one’s fault. My parents probably had it difficult and if you can’t take care of someone it’s best to let it go, the only thing they would not know is that I never got the better life they probably wanted from me.

“When is your next appointment?” Christian asked me. If I could I would’ve jumped in the air out of joy, but I couldn’t so instead I turned my head with a big smile on my face. So he was interested.

“It’s in two weeks, do you want to come?” I asked him and he nodded his head. “We’ll find out if it’s a boy or girl then but I-“

“It’s a girl.” Christian interrupted me. “Huh?” I laughed at his sudden comment, wishing he would understand that not everything would go his way.

“I had a dream and it was a girl, she looked just as beautiful as me.” He spoke. He definitely had his way with his words, everything to fill his own ego. “We’ll see about that.”

“You know, I think you and I would make a great team. We will make great parents.” I told him, thinking about how everything could be like if we continued to communicate the exact same way we had been doing this entire ride. “How come?” He asked.

“Well, for starters you’re not the monster I made you out to be so that’s something.” I joked and saw how the smile on his face had slowly disappeared. Did I say something I shouldn’t have?

“If you really knew me you wouldn’t say stuff like that.”

The moment those words had left his mouth I immediately regretted my statement. He was right, I did not know him.

I knew about what kind of family the Lamberti’s were, but it was not something I ever thought or wanted to talk about because I would leave after the baby got here. We would co-parent and that’s it, but what’s co-parenting without really knowing the parent?

What kind of example did I want to be for the child?

What kind of example did I want him to be for the child?

The girls at the club lived for gossip and had always spoken about their mafia ties. The Lamberti’s had different clubs, restaurants, casinos and much more, and we all knew that there was more behind it. Drugs were acceptable to me but something like trafficking, kidnapping or thinking to have the right to execute people were absolutely not— so I tried not to think of it and looked the other way, because I wanted to believe that it wasn’t like that, but deep down I knew I was a hypocrite. I had to get to the bottom of this.

“Do you think you’re a monster because of that thing?” I asked him. Christian frowned his eyebrows. “What thing?”

“You know...the family thing,” I told him, not daring to say the word. I had already mentioned it a few times and the look he had given me afterward was something I wouldn’t forget. “Please enlighten me about this thing.”

I know he knew what I meant and that he wasn’t going to give me the satisfaction, but if we were going to raise the baby together, stuff like this would be important.

“Listen the mafia thing, do you traffic people or not?” I asked and watched as he burst out laughing. He cracked up and tried to catch his breath while I tried to take in this new expression. He was almost dying of laughter while I asked him a question, a pretty serious question.

“Traffic people, who do you think we are?” He asked again and continued laughing. His laugh sounded so contagious that I couldn’t help but laugh along. “Answer my question, yes or no?” I asked, causing him to only laugh even more.

“I need you to stop googling things, immediately.” He laughed and I felt embarrassed as if my phone history had been exposed.

“Okay, so you don’t, you made it clear so you can stop now.” I rolled my eyes. All was well but it did still not clear the fact that at the end of the day they were involved in shady business. The mafia ties remained an issue which I did not want to get involved with, discussed and to stay away from the Lamberti’s— and not only Christian but also Lucio wanted me to do the same, but letting my child grow up with a dad who would end up neglecting it would not be something that would make me happy. I never had a family, so I would make sure the baby would have one, regardless of it the Lamberti’s agreed to it or not. Lucio...

The last time I saw him things had gotten very awkward and I was definitely not ready to see him.

“We’re here,” Christian said, waking me from my thoughts. My head turned to the mansion and just like at his place it was surrounded by security at the front, and for a second that did get me thinking.

How unsafe must this family be for there to be security in every corner? Was his laughing fit a way to throw me off, or was he speaking the truth?

“Are you ready?” Christian asked me. My stomach was doing turns and I did not know whether it was the baby or nerves but there was no turning back.

“Do I have a choice?”