Willow

I'm getting sick of it all.

It's a blur of designer, expensive jewelry and the finest champagne.

The fundraiser is packed with people pretending like they actually give two fucks about

in the fortunes they owned. But all this is nothing more than another elaborate event held for the multiplication of the money they just let go of. It's a playground for broker deals.

endangered whales. Yeah they showed up, dropped off fat checks that would never put a dent

There isn't any regular in sight. The ball room is flooded with the richest men and women in America, each of them gathered here under the pretence of saving the earth, but only actually

bothered about strengthening and spreading out their oil rigs and fuel ports all around the world. "Cheer up, Love." Kenzo says, his hand settling on my hip, "You might scare the potentials away."

I try not to stiffen, or pull away from the bastards touch. It's been about three days since the afternoon I caught him fucking my best friend. He's oblivious to my knowledge of it though, and I don't know whether or not I'm grateful for it. Part of me wants to lash out, toss a drink

in his face and call him all the names you'd never find in a children's book. Play the role of a

woman truly scorned. But there's another part of me that's exhausted by it all. I want to wallow in self pity and hide in my bedroom all day. I want to drown myself in a tub of ice cream and not have to worry about tomorrow. I want to ignore him, I want to ignore her. But I can't. I have to keep up appearances.

It's draining the life out of me. Beth returns with our drinks, holding Kenzo's up to him and then offering me mine. I take it,

but I don't drink it. It could be poisoned for all I know.

He has the audacity to lean down, brushing a kiss over the skin of my shoulder as he whispers in my ear, "Be good and I'll make it up to you tonight."

I fight off a full body cringe.

could it be though?

the tiniest bit.

Beth looks anywhere but at the both of us. I don't understand this, I don't understand how I couldn't have noticed this shit all this

And someone else did too. Someone who was bothered enough to help me see the truth of things. Ugh, who on earth

"Look over there," Beth says, subtly angling her glass in the direction of Rinaldo Alvez,

while. And I'm fairly certain it's been going on for a lot longer than Sunday afternoon.

"Looks like a couple hundred thousand just for blinking pretty eyes at him. You should go mingle with his daughter, Willow. She's about the same age as you."

Beth shoots me an offended look, "Hey, what's got you so worked up? I'm just trying to give a little business advice." "I don't need business advice from you."

And it's true. The insinuation hangs heavily in the air. The only reason someone like Beth

was even invited to something as practical as this is because of her association with me.

"That's not how it works," I try to keep the bitterness out of my voice, but it shines through,

She knew it just as well as I did. "What does that mean?"

Without, she wouldn't have even been considered for the job as a valet.

"I think the sentence was pretty self explanatory."

"What she said was stupid."

"I highly doubt that."

is the matter with you today? You've been in a pissy mood all evening, and I thought it had to do with the dragged out event, but why are you taking out whatever's got you wrung dry on Beth, huh?"

"Really? Well, I don't think so. Rinaldo's been thinking of burrowing drills in the west. It's

something I think your Dad would be interested in, I think you should make an effort, the

Does this guy have a navigator that directs him towards my exact location on a daily?

She blanches, and Kenzo steps into my line of sight, steps up to her defence. "What the hell

I stiffen.

easiest route would be establishing a connection with his daughter.

My hands tighten on my leather purse. I want to bite his head off.

Ugh.

"I'm Beth Summers," Beth introduces herself, "It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

regarding the situation.

Kenzo clears his throat again.

nothing but love for his youngest business partner.

And that's the thing, Luciano isn't an heir, he's the whole empire.

mistresses behind her back on all his endless business trips.

I could never respect a man that couldn't respect women.

but the old man loves his dear wife.

"You thought wrong." Luciano interrupts.

Kenzo pauses, "Excuse me?"

Willow-"

"Sure."

his place.

breeze.

Muti-Billionaires Boston has to offer. Everyone wants a second of his time.

He's built an entire legacy for himself from nothing but scratch. He's not like the other boys lingering around here in their twenties. He's not waiting for daddy's paycheck or leftovers. Everything he is, he built entirely for himself. It's one thing I can respect about him. The only thing I can respect about him.

Cause at the end of the day, he's still just as slimy as the rest of the men here. He'll never

And its safe to say, that's one of the many, many reasons I respect my Dad. He's a tycoon,

settle down with one woman. He'll be the type to keep a wife at home and parade his

Her smile only grows.

back of my hand, loving the embarrassed flush that rises on Kenzo's face. "Alvez doesn't mix personal relationships with business. He's a cutthroat of a dictator him, wouldn't want to hurt his relationships with the brutality of how he gets his work done. His

My eyes widen, and this time I can't fight the chuckle that springs free. I muffle it with the

business associates are kept at a wide berth, it's a tactic I appreciate if I do say so myself.

Keeps the disrespect and emotion based decisions at a minimum." Luciano's hand moves up

my back, his fingers splaying out just above my tailbone, digging into my lower back softly.

He continues on like he isn't touching me at all, "If Willow were to kick start a friendship

with his daughter, all it would do it blacklist she and her father from his list of potentials.

The facts are as simple as that. Anyone who's done their homework would know that."

noticed the drift of Luciano's hands, but then I wonder why I care.

I stifle a gasp, my body standing at attention. My eyes dart to Kenzo, wondering if he's

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. "Wow..." Beth breathes, "I hadn't thought of that. He has a really good point."

But me? I can't stop thinking about the feel of his hands on my body. There was nothing

the way he lingered when he pulled way, it felt a bit... inappropriate.

champagne from a passing waiter, I make my way out the balcony doors.

extravagant about it, nothing necessarily alerting. But the way he fingers dug into my skin,

"I need to get some fresh air." I say to no one in particular. Snagging off another glass of

The night air feels wonderful on my tense skin. I slide my eyes closed, relaxing into the

His fingers pull away from my body, lingering for just a second, ghosting over the curve of

"I have a proposal for you." His dark stare pins me from his position a couple inches away,

Kenzo straightens, puffing his chest out in a mortifying effort to look bigger. He clears his throat, extending his arm, "Luciano. It's a pleasure." Luciano comes to a stop beside me, sinking one of his hands into the pocket of his deep blue suit pants. The other one is free, but he doesn't make a move to take Kenzo's hand. He lets it stall in the air, eyeing it distastefully until the idiot gets the message and slowly drops it back to his side. I try to hide my smile. I was drunk off my ass a couple days ago when he offered to give me a ride home. Of course, bitter and stubborn as I am, I chose to walk instead. Tripping over my six inch heels and roasting under the late afternoon sun. He followed me though. Driving in pace with my messy steps till I caved in and got in his Aston Martin. He took me home. And he didn't say another word about my situation with Kenzo. But currently, I'm uneasy having him here. The Luciano I know doesn't have a filter, and the last thing I need is him exposing everything I knew before I landed on my own two feet

I don't see the appeal. As young as he is though, he's great friends with my father, so we've always been around each other more or less. It might be a bit harsh to say, but I really can't stand him. He's a fickle man. Present one second, absent the next. He does business like one plays chess. We're all just

pawns in a game he's sure to win. You're signing a contract with him in the month of

January, and then you don't hear from him till November. I don't know how he he's

managed to keep up appearances with a man as tricky as my father. But the old man has

Everyone knows Luciano Roman, but he keeps his circles tight, his business associates even

tighter. He's a picky bastard about who he does business with, yet, he's one of the youngest

Beth gazes at him with the kind of smile that hints her belief that he's hung the moon. I want to gag at her fan-girling. Luciano returns her smile, although it's nothing but a tight pull of his lips, "Likewise." Kenzo tries to pull the attention back to himself, "We were just analyzing the best route for incorporating Alvez into working on our side of the state. I thought it would be wise for

my ass before he steps away, disappearing into the throng of guests. Kenzo doesn't say a word, his features pulled taut, he was never one to enjoy being put in

him. It has to be custom made. I spin around to face him, trying to keep my voice neutral, "What do you want this time, Luciano?"

The scent of his musky cologne hits my nostrils, rich and masculine. Something so entirely

pewter grey eyes holding me hostage. "A proposal?" "Marry me." He says.