

Bennett

"The plans for the hotel in Wailea, Hawaii have gone accordingly. Both our construction team and the town mayor have approved the blueprints. I have the estimated budget here and if you approve, you may sign and we could start the construction by next week."

I looked up from my phone to see a few nervous pairs of eyes blinking at me. I turned to my wild-haired assistant, Henry, who had the same apprehensive expression on his face. I'd forgotten I was in the middle of a meeting. I had no idea what we were talking about. I cleared my throat. "If my mother agrees to it, let's go along with it."

"Uh, Bennett, your mother said for you to oversee this," Henry whispered to me. "If we go to her she will scold us."

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. Were they still talking about the building of the hotel resort in Wailea? Or had we moved on to something else? I couldn't concentrate today.

It was all that girl Henley's fault. It'd been one week and she had yet to call me. Every few seconds I glanced at my phone wondering if I'd see it vibrating with an unknown number on display. What was taking her so long anyway? I figured she'd call the next day and we'd work out a deal. But she hadn't. And the last two times I'd been back to the restaurant she hadn't been there.

"Mr. Calloway?"

"Ah, let me see the projected costs again," I said, hoping I could piece together everything by that. It didn't matter what I said anyway, my mother would get the final say on the plans no matter what.

After the meeting, I went back to my house and found Sebastian waiting for me by the front door. He held up a hand in greeting. "How'd the meeting go?"

"Boring. They don't really need me. All I say is yes or no. What are you doing here?"

"Hiding from my mom," he said, following me inside.

I raised an eyebrow at my friend. "You can't at your house? Why don't you just lock your doors?"

"She has keys."

"Change the locks."

"She'll have keys," he said, shaking his head. "She's crazy. She won't come here though. I think she's afraid of your mom."

I wouldn't have been surprised. Most people were. I definitely was. "Don't be noisy," I warned him.

He waved me off. "I'll do my own thing, don't worry about me."

Sighing, I plopped onto my couch and checked my phone.

Nothing.

Tsking, I tossed it away from me.

"You look like your prom date ditched you," Sebastian commented from across the room, where he'd taken a seat at my computer desk. In his hands was a newspaper he'd produced from God knows where.

So much for him not being noisy. I gave him a moody look but realized I was just proving his point so I looked away. "Why hasn't she called?"

"Who?"

"Henley."

"The girl from the restaurant?"

I nodded.

"Well, your note was a little weird," he informed me, opening the newspaper.

"I was drunk though. She knew that."

He shrugged. "Did you leave a bad tip?"

I blinked. Did I leave her a bad tip? I remembered writing the note, but I couldn't remember writing a tip. "I can't remember what I left her."

"Maybe it really was a bad tip."

"Hmm, well, we did have to wait half an hour for our food," I said. She hadn't been a bad waitress, but not exactly the best one, either— from a professional view. From a personal view, it wasn't fair she seemed to be running the entire restaurant by herself. I did vaguely remember her bringing me to the bathroom so I wouldn't vomit all over the restaurant, which went beyond her responsibilities for a customer. I owed her a good tip for that, at least.

Sebastian flipped a page. "The manager had her running around nonstop, give her a break. I felt tired just by watching her. If I were her, I would've walked out."

I frowned, crossing my arms over my chest. "She said she needed money. Why wouldn't she take me up on my offer then? Perhaps she didn't get fired like she expected she would."

Which reminded me, I had to call that restaurant and make sure her job was secure. She shouldn't lose her job because of one pervert. How could anyone blame her for her actions? The moment I'd noticed that immoral man's hand on her bottom, I'd been ready to sucker punch him in the gut. Fortunately, at the last second, I'd remembered just exactly who I was and how I was expected to act. It was far worse for me to hit him than for her to.

And I probably shouldn't have told her to punch him, but I blamed that on my drunken state of mind. Admittedly, I had enjoyed the sight of those dainty fists landing a rough blow on that degenerate.... for such a tiny girl, she had quite the hook.

"I'm going to find her," I decided. Waiting around for a call wasn't really my style, anyway.

"Don't you think you're taking this a little too far?" Sebastian asked.

"You know I don't have much of a choice, Sebastian."

"She might think you're stalking her."

Unfazed, I pulled out my phone, ready to call for some assistance. "Someone who looks like me would never be considered a stalker."

"You have heard of Ted Bundy, right?"

I ignored him, dialing the number for Michelangelo's. After a five second long spiel by whoever answered the phone telling me they couldn't give out employee information, I gave them my name and they quickly changed their mind, telling me she was most likely at her other job and easily gave me the name of the place. I was also informed of her month's suspension and she wouldn't be back at the restaurant until then. I hung up the phone, a little worried about the amount of information they had given out. Sure, I'd needed it, but it had been a bit... too easy.

"A month suspension seems like a bit much. And why in the world does she have two jobs?" I pondered out loud as I went over to my closet to pick out a nice suit. For some reason, I felt the need to look good.

"These days you need two jobs to live on minimum wage," Sebastian said.

I decided against a suit and slipped into a navy button up and threw on a mint

I decided against a suit and slipped into a navy button up and threw on a mint colored tie. "If she's poor then that's even better."

"Why?"

"She'll be interested in the money and I won't be interested in her," I said. She was the best possible candidate to be my fake girlfriend. I'd been worrying about finding someone and I'd found her on day one. It was perfect. The longer I pretended to be in a relationship with her, the more heartbreak I could pretend to feel.

I stretched, smiling widely and feeling satisfied. Today was going to be a good day.

"You're so creepy," Sebastian commented, but his tone was amused. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"I only have good ideas."

He chuckled, closing the newspaper and placing it on the side table. "What are you going to do if you actually fall in love with this girl?"

"Impossible," I answered immediately. The reasons for that were simple.

A) She from a different lifestyle and therefore incompatible with me.

B) It would be counterproductive to my plan on being allowed to be *single*.

And

C) I hadn't fallen in love with anyone for the past twenty-five years, so what were the odds of it happening now?

All in all, there wasn't anything to be afraid of. When the contract was over I'd have no problem saying goodbye and never seeing the girl again. Maybe even down the line we could get coffee and laugh about our fake relationship.

Sebastian scrutinized me for a few seconds, his lips pressed in a flat line. I didn't know why he was so worried. He was in the same boat as me. All the girls around us were the same— they wanted our money or they wanted to say they slept with a millionaire. It was almost impossible to find someone genuine.

"Alright," he finally said. "I know nothing can keep you from what you want to do anyway. Go hunt her down."

"You coming with me?" I asked.

"I wouldn't miss this for the world."

"My car?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Not really." The keys to my recently exchanged BMW were already in my hand.

I wondered what kind of expression Henley would have on her face? One of the most elite men in America coming to look for her personally? With such a contract to offer? I could almost see those blue eyes widening, a little sparkle of awe glinting in them. Her cheeks becoming rosy at the prospect of dating me— even if just for a ruse. Her pink lips softly parting as she gasped.

Suddenly I really, *really* wanted to see that expression.