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Introduction to Fiction Workshop

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### A Business Deal

"Don't fuck this up," I muttered to myself as I rested my hand on the cool metal knob. I ducked in, relieved to be sheltered from the slums in which this particular dive bar resided. 'Of all the places to meet...' I thought as I scanned the area. There were only a few inhabitants in the dingy room. A bartender who leaned back against the wall, digging at something under his fingernails. A couple of old bikers clad in leather circled the pool table as they calculated their next shot. Finally, there was a young woman, sitting at the bar with her arms crossed on the counter. She was someone who ordinarily wouldn't be caught dead at a place like this, but rather on the arm of some old billionaire at a fundraiser.

Her eyes were silver and colder than the ice swirled in the drink she held in her hand. I could feel those eyes bearing down into the very core of my being as I seated myself on the barstool two down from her. The worn leather squeaked as my weight dropped on it, which only brought a look of annoyance to her. As she mumbled incoherently, she gazed again at her drink before taking a generous sip of the amber liquid. She brushed her long, platinum blonde hair over her shoulder and gave me yet another sidelong glance. The strands fell elegantly down her back in remarkable contrast with the tight black dress she had on.

I took a moment to really appreciate this woman's beauty. Her slender, yet muscular form, the way her pale skin seemed to glow in low lighting, like snow during the afternoon, and the way her cheek bones stood high and prominent beneath those almond shaped, silver eyes. I could only imagine the envious looks I could draw out of my competitors if I showed up at the

next gala with a girl like that. 'Maybe after I finish this deal I can-'

"Are you listening to me?" the old bartender growled, slamming his hand on the counter in front of me and breaking my train of thought.

I shook my head and looked at him. "What."

"I asked what you wanted," he said.

"Just a water," I said, as I reluctantly pulled my attention away from the woman.

"You've come all this way," she said as she looked at me from the corner of her eye.

"The least you can do is by a drink." She looked at the bartender and motioned to me. "Give him the same thing as me. Scotch on the rocks." The bartender nodded and dropped three icecubes into an old fashion glass before filling it half way. He set it in front of me and moved down the line to another man sitting at the end of the bar.

"Thanks," I said as I took the glass from the sticky bar top. Upon closer examination, I could see the water marks that covered it, though it would be easy to miss normally in the dim, smoke filtered light. I grimaced and set it back down, settling instead for a cigarette from my coat pocket.

"I wouldn't thank me. You're buying it, along with mine," she purred in her silky smooth voice with just a hint of an accent. Maybe Russian? And then if hit me.

"You wouldn't by any chance be Alex, would you?" I asked her before taking a drag from the cigarette between my fingers.

"I prefer Alexandra. It's just easier for men like you to trust a recommendation for me if you think it's another man you're meeting."

I didn't want to admit it, but she had a point. I had indeed been expecting to be meeting a man. "S- so you're the one my associate told me about," I stuttered in an attempt to quickly

change the subject.

"And your friend would be right." she downed her drink, to my surprise, and called out for the bartender, "I'll take another." The drink made its way to her in a flash. She raised the glass to her full lips and took a long sip before setting it down with a *clank*. "Now tell me. Why is it, exactly, that you want to hire me."

"Well," I said as I picked up my own glass, "I run a large business. Perhaps you've heard of it, Pf-"

"I have heard of it, and I would recognize the new CEO anywhere. The boy who rose to the top and took over the second largest pharmaceutical company in the world. I get it kid, you're special," she said with a nonchalant look in her eyes.

"I'm not a kid, I'm 36. But that's besides the point." I sipped the scotch and shivered a bit. I had never been on for hard alcohol. I placed the drink on the bar top and pushed it away. "You know the details of what's been going on in the market. I need you to stop them from pulling ahead. I mean, that is what you do, right?"

She let out an audible sigh. "Look kid, I get you're trying to save face considering your position, but what you're asking me to do is a serious crime. You could get in a lot of trouble if we're caught."

"*If* we're caught. But with your track record, I know that won't happen. You're like a ghost, no one can trace you right?"

No, no one *has* traced me. Or at least not to my knowledge. Getting cocky and calling yourself completely untracable, that's how you get arrested." Her cold gaze fell on me again.

"You're an idiot, kid. Do you really think this will make you happy?"

I stood up. "Look, stop calling me kid. You know my name, let's stick with that."

"Okay, Mr. Sheldon. I'll ask again. Do you really think this will make you happy?" she asked before downing the second drink.

I looked at the cigarette in my hand that had been burning away and thought for a moment. Would this make me happy, well sure it would. I could prove my worth to all of those bastards on the board, show them that the previous CEO, God rest his soul, made the right decision in giving me the company. After all, who would care if I used dirty business tactics. Who didn't in this day and age. As I looked at Alexandra, though, I could feel a bit of hesitation. She had a point. I wouldn't really be earning my success.

But why should that bother me? I would have the money, the power, everything! I would be an unstoppable force, and no one would ever question me. Maybe I could even beat out Johnson & Johnson and secure the number one slot for myself. It was settled.

"Ya. Ya, it'll make me very happy," I said with a grin before putting out the cigarette in an ashtray that rested a foot away.

For a long time, she didn't say anything. She stared at her empty glass and closed her eyes. "I've done unspeakable things all in the name of bastards like you just looking to make a couple extra dollars. But I've turned down even more people because they can't handle what part of my services include." She narrowed her eyes. "Can you prepare yourself for the outcomes? You act like it's as simple as crashing a computer. Trust me, darling, it's more complicated than that."

The grin faded from my lips and I looked down. "You're saying people could die." I hadn't considered that before, and I couldn't help but think back to the sudden deaths of heads of companies around the world. They were usually ruled and accident or of natural causes, though. There's no way it could be the doing of people like this woman.

"I won't confirm or deny that," she stated coldly. That was enough to answer my inquiry. A shiver traveled down my spine and an urge to guzzle the beverage in front of me took over.

I took a long, painful gulped and coughed as I suppressed the urge to gag. I hated scotch. I hated it so much. And yet, as the warmth spread through me, I started to slowly calm a bit. No wonder my predecessor always had a drink in his hand.

"So what's in it for me?" Alexandra asked. "If I go through with this, if I take down your competitor, what do I get in return."

'Good question,' I thought. I looked her up and down. She dressed like a million bucks, but judging by the bartender's familiarity with her, I'd say she was a regular at this dump. Maybe money wasn't the big motivator with her. She raised her eyebrow as I thought, as if to usher me into an answer.

"Whatever you want," I muttered after a moment. "I'll give you whatever you want as payment."

A sly grin pulled at her lips. "Really, Anything?" she purred as she moved over to the barstool next to mine. Guess discretion wasn't an issue with her. "Because I could think of so many things I would love to take from a man like you." She cupped my chin with her slender fingers. I could feel her long, ruby red nails caress my skin like a sharp blade and I couldn't help but shiver. Her eyes were dangerous, dangerous to remind me that despite her crude gestures, this woman could make my world crumble to bits around me if she so desired.

"Th- there are some limitations, of course," I stuttered as I pulled away. It didn't stop her advances. I grasped the bar to keep my balance on the stool as she leaned over me.

"Well, Mr. Sheldon," she half smiled, "I've always wanted to be a socialite, to live the

luxurious life. Having illegal money is worthless. Sure, I can buy myself a fancy dress on occasion, but I can't really flaunt what I have. Such a pity, isn't it?" In a flash she pulled away and rested her chin in her hand.

"What are you getting at?" I asked her shortly, growing tired of her games.

"Marry me," she said with a smirk, though her eyes were dead serious. "Marry me and make me a socialite. Give me the life every girl dreams of."

The shock of her sudden proposal made me freeze up. I could only stare at her as I attempted to process what she was asking of me. "M- Marry you?! That's absurd! There's no way in hell-

"Oh please, you think I haven't noticed that hungry gaze? You've wanted to take me back to your place all evening, I can tell." Aleksandra's smiled grew softer and ever so slightly sensual as she traced her finger down my leg. "Every wealthy man dreams of a trophy wife... With this, you'll have that along with your company forever secured."

'Fuck,' I thought as I took her hand to stop its progression, 'she has a point.' I took the final, long drag from my cigarette before pressing the tip into the nearby, soot stained ashtray. "... Deal." I muttered under my breath.

In the blink of an eye she was in my lap with her arms around my neck. "Good. Now, I want to be the sole beneficiary of your will, understand? And we'll be married within the month, tell the press you've been dating me for a year and three months. You were subtle because you didn't want to expose me. And, love," She held my cheek and pressed her soft, red lips to mine for a moment before the smirk returned. "I want a big diamond. Does everything seem reasonable to you?"

I nodded wordlessly as the blush rose to my cheeks from her kiss. Damn, this woman

knew how to get what she wanted. "Y- Ya..." managed to choke out. "I- I'll get to work on it."

She extended her hand. "Shake on it, then?" Her eyes seemed to glow against the gloomy smoke as I placed my hand in hers. With a flick of the wrist, our hands moved up and down once. She slipped a piece of paper in my pocket before getting up and grabbing her long, black trenchcoat. "Call me tomorrow," She said before slipping out the door into the light snowfall. A wave of satisfaction hit me, and in that moment, life was damn good.

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Aleksandra stepped out of the bedroom of her penthouse suite wearing her favorite crimson silk robe. She brushed her fingers through her hair as she grabbed the paper her maid had left in its usual spot on the table located in the breakfast nook. As the young woman came to pour her usual coffee, black, she looked at her mistress. "How are you feeling today ma'am? I could see you were very broken up at the funeral, I was a little concerned."

After taking a long sip, Aleksandra closed her eyes and gave the maid a hint of a smile. "Of course I was, I loved my husband very much," she murmured before setting the cup down. "but I'm afraid that I have to move on fast. After all, I have a company to run."

The maid nodded and managed to give her a smile before walking back to the kitchen. Aleksandra flicked to page three and read the headline with a bit of a smile. "Wall Street mourns the loss of young CEO, Joshua Sheldon." Her eyes skimmed through the print and she couldn't help but let out a soft chuckle as she saw "Aleksandra Sheldon, Mr. Sheldon's wife of seven years, spoke kindly of her husband and said he will be missed by all dearly."

She ran her ruby red fingernails over the image of her husband's face and smiled a bit before taking yet another sip of her coffee and turning to the business section of her paper.