

The Billionaire's Bargain

by Alison Reid



A breeze rustled the vines above them, casting shifting patterns of light across the tablecloth. Luca's expression didn't change, but something in his eyes shifted—just slightly.

“She stole from me,” he said, not harshly, but as a reminder. A fact. “She created fake invoices. Funnelled money. Lied to my team's faces.”

“I know,” Willow said, her fingers tightening around her napkin. “And she should face the consequences. But not a prison sentence. Not something that will ruin the rest of her life.”

He studied her, quiet.

“She wasn't trying to hurt you,” she said. “She wasn't thinking of you at all, and that's part of the problem. She panicked. But if you give her a second chance... if you drop the charges... I swear I'll make sure she doesn't waste it.”

Her voice wavered at the end, not from weakness, but from the weight of it all. The stakes. The trust she was placing in both her sister—and him.

Luca leaned back in his chair, letting the silence expand between them like a held breath.

“And what about you?” he asked at last, voice measured.

Willow's brows drew together. "What about me?"

"You're asking me to spare your sister," he said slowly, deliberately, "to show mercy after she lied, stole, and put my company—my people—at risk. That kind of leniency comes with a cost. Are you prepared for that?"

Her breath caught, just barely. But she didn't look away.

"I didn't come here looking for favours," she said, her voice steady. "I came to make it right. For her. For you. Whatever that looks like."

Luca studied her. The vulnerability in her eyes. The defiance in her spine. The quiet conviction in her voice that didn't ask—it offered.

She wasn't begging.

She was standing her ground.

And something inside him shifted. A crack in the armour he'd worn so long it had begun to feel like skin.

He wasn't sure what surprised him more—her courage or the fact that it mattered.

She had no idea what it would cost. And yet... she was here. Willing. Present. Complicated.

Luca looked at her—really looked—and knew, with a clarity that unsettled him: he didn't want her to disappear at the end of the week.

He wanted more time.

Because Willow Taylor didn't just intrigue him.

She disarmed him.

And that, more than anything, made her dangerous.

She sat across from him in that simple white dress, the morning light kissing her bare shoulders, and Luca couldn't decide if she was unaware—or devastatingly aware—of the effect she had on him. There was no artifice in her

posture, no flirtation in her gaze. She didn't lean forward, didn't angle her body to seduce. She simply was. Present. Steady.

Not performing. Not manipulating.

Real.

And it terrified him more than any boardroom betrayal ever had.

He'd stared down hostile takeovers and watched grown men flinch under pressure. But this—this woman, this quiet intensity—unsettled something deeper. She wasn't like the women who moved in his world, all polished elegance and social calculus. She wasn't playing the long game or angling for a payoff.

She was simply here.

And that made everything more complicated.

Luca exhaled slowly, a quiet breath meant to anchor him, his fingers tapping once on the arm of his chair as if grounding himself in the present moment.

“Spend a week with me on my yacht,” he said, his voice low, deliberate. “And I'll drop all charges.”

Willow stared at him.

The air changed.

For a moment, she didn't move. The breeze stirred the hem of her dress like a breath across silk. A bird sang somewhere overhead, light, and sharp—and still, the world seemed to hold its breath.

“I beg your pardon?” she said finally.

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