

CHAPTER 2

“Oh, boy. I’m glad today is over,” Alex called down the long hallway. She slid off her cashmere coat and hung it in the closet.

“Nice to see you home at a decent hour,” Victor said. He gave her a kiss on the cheek and handed her a glass of chardonnay, her favorite.

“Mm, thank you. It’s so nice to *be* home at a decent hour,” Alex said. She clinked glasses with Victor, then kicked off her shoes and moved into the living room, where she dropped into a chair by the fireplace. Victor joined his wife and they absorbed the welcome solitude of their home. Alex closed her eyes momentarily, trying to decompress from her hectic day. She took a deep slug of wine and said, “Please tell me you have good news.”

“Yes, my dear, I do. Hugo is no longer an issue,” he said with a smile.

“Well done. What an utter waste of a life. He had looks, charm, and money—things people would kill for. Since he pissed it all away, I feel zero remorse.”

“Neither do I.” Victor set his glass down, leaned back in his chair, and rested his interlaced fingers against his chest.

Alex glanced at him and snorted. “I know you certainly aren’t *praying*. Care to tell me what’s on your calculating mind?”

Victor rolled his head to the right and smiled. “Now that Hugo is out of the picture, we need to replace him.”

“Ah, you’re right. And who’s the lucky person?”

“I’m thinking Don Gaylord is our man. We can move him from his current domestic delivery position to the international importing side.”

Alex pursed her full lips together. “I like him for this. He’s been very dependable transferring packages, especially since he doesn’t drive.”

Victor frowned. “You are right. He doesn’t drive—a major problem.”

Alex finished, “Which means he’ll need a driver.”

“Yes, he will.”

Alex finished her wine. “Who do you think we could find? They need to understand how we operate and must be trustworthy.”

Victor considered his wife’s words and knew she was correct. He noticed she finished her wine and asked if she wanted a refill.

“Of course.” She handed it to him.

In the kitchen, he refilled her glass and checked his phone for messages. He scrolled through recent calls and his conversation with Tammy earlier jogged his brain. He looked up and placed his phone on the counter.

He returned to the living room, a triumphant smile on his doughy face. “I feel I have a solution for Gaylord’s driver.” He handed her the glass.

“Do you now?” Alex sipped her wine and wiped the smudge of mauve lipstick from the rim.

“Yes. Tammy called me today in tears.”

“Your sister? What does she have to do with Gaylord’s driver?”

“Apparently, her children—my niece and nephew Rubi Lee and Zeke Dixon—are down on their luck and have dead-end jobs.”

Alex frowned. “What else did she say?”

“She asked if I could help them with employment. I promised her nothing, other than I’d think about helping.”

Alex stroked her chin in thought. “I know what you’re thinking—hire them to drive Gaylord, right?”

“You win!”

Alex was nervous. “Given their parents’ proclivity to lie, cheat, and steal, how do we know we can trust them?”

“Because when they realize that I have the means and desire to improve their pathetic lives, they won’t say no. You know how persuasive I can be.”

Alex nodded as she rose from her seat and settled into her husband’s lap. “Oh, *yes* I do. I’m sure Gaylord will sign on too.”

Victor wrapped his arms around her. “He won’t say no to money. Furthermore, our little import business is thriving, and I will ensure Don continues our success.” Alex giggled at Victor’s use of air quotes around *import business*.

“And if he doesn’t?” Alex asked.

“Then he will be eliminated,” Victor answered.

Alex purred, “That’s why I love you. You always have a plan.”

Victor picked up his glass and said, “Cheers.”

“Cheers,” Alex replied, and clinked her glass against his