

THE FOX'S WATCH
M.A. SIMONETTI

Chapter One

My two o'clock appointment was losing her nerve.

Mia Kaplan sat hunched behind her steering wheel, eyes glued to the front door of Malibu's Lotus Day Spa. She was in serious danger of chewing off the tip of her thumb.

"Are you sure this is legal, Alana?" She whispered.

"Legal has nothing to do with it," I replied. "It's going to be an accident."

Across the parking lot, a red Maserati roared to a stop. Dimitri Greco, the director himself, emerged and sauntered into the spa for his weekly brow wax and nose hair trim.

"How can it be an accident if I wrote the note already?" Mia asked.

"Let me see the note."

She handed over a crumpled envelope. On the back she had written in fountain pen: 'Apologies for scratching your lovely car. Please call this number so I may arrange for repairs. Mia Kaplan 555-xxxx.

"Excellent!" I said. "This is exactly the message we want to send. The envelope suggests you grabbed whatever was handy and the fountain pen suggests you are a woman of good breeding."

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea after all," Mia hedged.

Mia's innate sense of decorum is what led her to hire me in the first place. People contact me to help them establish new social connections. Some call me a social coach. A few call me a pushy broad. Either way, I make a tidy little income by keeping society in order in Malibu. I know the local social circles and how they intertwine. I know the middle-aged bridge groups, the tight knit golf buddies, the artsy nutcases and the drinkers. If you are a single woman, I know the men. If you are married, I can get you and yours on the cocktail circuit. I can even find a nanny if you are unfortunate enough to need one. Suffice it to say, if you live in Malibu, have \$5,000 in cash and are willing to do exactly as I tell you, I'm your new best friend.

Normally the work is pretty straightforward. I meet with new clients, determine where they fit in and then introduce them around. Or send them away to a community with lower standards. Somewhere like Beverly Hills, for instance.

Mia's project had required a little more creativity than usual. She hired me to help her

capture the attention of Hollywood's most elusive director. I do know Dimitri Greco but sadly he is not fond of me. Actually, his un-fondness falls just short of a restraining order. So, to put Mia face-to-face with the guy, I dreamt up a little incident that would force Dimitri to contact her. But she had to follow through for the plan to work.

"Dimitri Greco will be casting his film next week," I reminded her.

She concentrated on chewing her thumb.

"How long have you been trying to work with this guy?" I prompted.

"Five years," she replied with her thumb firmly between her teeth.

"And how long have you hounded your agent to set up an interview for you?"

"Five years." Thumb slid out of her mouth.

"And you still haven't met him," I pointed out. "All you have to do now is put a little ding in his precious Maserati and Dimitri Greco will call you!"

She sat up straight.

I reeled her in with, "Or you can spend the rest of your acting career cast as the grouchy mother-in-law!"

She turned on her ignition. "How hard should I hit it?"

"Just leave a scratch on the driver's side. Make it bigger than a dent but smaller than a gash. Call me when you hear from him."

I left as she turned her key in the ignition.

It was best for Mia that there be no witness.