

Chapter Two

Alan came home a little later with a Chinese takeaway for both of them. He laid out all the different cartons in the kitchen: crispy duck and pancakes, sweet and sour pork, chicken with noodles. As he was taking plates from the dresser, Barbara smiled and then clapped her hands.

‘Of course, Alan!’, she exclaimed. ‘I recognize you now. It’s been bugging me since I got here.’

Alan said nothing. Instead, he opened a bottle of wine and handed her a glass.

Barbara went on, ‘Weren’t you the butler in that series . . . Now, what was it called? It was brilliant.’

‘You mean *Harwood House*?’, said Alan.

‘Yes!’, said Barbara. ‘You were a butler and that amazing actress, what was her name . . . was it Margaret something?’

‘Yes, Margaret Reynolds,’ said Alan. ‘But that was over five years ago.’

‘No! Surely not five years?’ Barbara replied.

Alan offered her chopsticks so she could help herself to the food.

‘Yes,’ said Alan. ‘And it’s funny you should mention that show and Margaret now. A few of the cast are arranging a surprise party for her.’

‘Oh, how extraordinary,’ said Barbara. ‘I was such a fan and you were so good.’

Barbara ate hungrily as Alan described how the show had ended and what had happened to Margaret. No sooner than she had dealt with the loss of her gorgeous husband, her sister died in a car crash.

Barbara made all the right noises. The more she heard, the better it sounded for her article.

Alan was flattered by all the attention. After dinner, he showed Barbara a scrapbook of photographs and reviews of him in many different roles. In fact, it was all rather boring for Barbara. She had to be very careful not to put too much emphasis on *Harwood House* and Margaret Reynolds.

Luckily, Alan made things easy for her. He picked up the letter that Barbara had already read.

‘I got this last week,’ he said. ‘It’s from Felicity Wright, who was an actress in the show. Just imagine, Felicity and her husband bought an old cottage in Kent and now she’s seen Margaret in the village.’

‘Good heavens,’ Barbara exclaimed. ‘What a coincidence.’