

Chapter Two

Alex

My heels clack loudly on the pristine white tile as I walk through the doors of MatchAI. The building is modern, sleek, and very cold, and I instantly regret not wearing pants. It's definitely too chilly for the skirt I have on, but it's the nicest piece I own.

A chic older woman in a charcoal-gray suit is waiting in the lobby when I walk in, and she pulls a constipated-looking smile as she comes over to greet me. "Ms. Langley?"

"Call me Alex," I say, self-consciously tugging on my skirt.

"Ms. Langley. How wonderful to meet you. I'm Vivian." Vivian takes my hand in her cool bony one and pumps it twice very hard. "I manage all staff who work directly with the executives, but I've been filling in as Mr. Cabrera Garcia's personal assistant."

"Nice to meet you," I say, extracting my hand and taking the shiny new employee badge she offers me.

"Ralph, this is Alexandra Langley, Mr. Cabrera Garcia's new assistant," she tells the guy working security.

"It's just Alex," I say, addressing the security guy with an awkward wince. I hate correcting people about my name, but I hate being called "Alexandra" more.

"Mr. Cabrera Garcia gets in at eight sharp, so we don't have much time," says Vivian, striding toward the huge glass staircase to reach the bank of elevators at the top.

Feeling nervous, I glance at my phone to check the time. I'd thought seven forty-five was crazy-early to arrive for my first day on the job, but apparently I was wrong.

I hurry up the steps after Vivian, silently berating my choice of footwear. I bought these heels at Goodwill ages ago, and the left heel is a little wobbly. I'd forgotten about it until I was walking across the parking lot, and it's going to bug me all day.

Vivian reaches the bank of elevators and slides into the first one that opens. She presses the button for the top floor, looking even more nervous than I feel. "You'll need to have his green juice and mushroom coffee waiting for him when he arrives," she says. "The green juice should be ice cold, and the mushroom coffee should be very hot."

"I'm sorry . . . mushroom coffee?"

“It’s prepared with chaga powder,” Vivian adds, giving me a snide look. “It’s full of antioxidants and adaptogens. It’s what Mr. Cabrera Garcia prefers.”

“O-kay . . .”

The elevator dings, and Vivian breezes out. A huge empty desk fills the space between the elevator and the office door behind it, where a glass placard on the wall is etched with the name Rafael Cabrera Garcia.

“The thermostat in his office should be set at precisely sixty-five degrees with twenty-eight percent humidity. Mr. Cabrera Garcia runs hot. When he arrives in the morning, he likes to see a digest of all the emails that came in from the time he left the night before,” Vivian continues. “Mr. Cabrera Garcia doesn’t read email. It’s up to you to ensure he’s kept up to speed.”

I nod.

“His entire day is divided into fifteen-minute increments. At eight fifteen, he has a meeting with the VP of product development to get an update on each project. At eight thirty, he speaks with the head of user experience to go over any issues . . .”

I fumble in my purse to find a pen and some paper, frantic to write everything down. Something tells me Vivian is a woman who doesn’t like to repeat herself.

She rolls her eyes and hands me a piece of paper. “Here’s his schedule. At ten thirty, you’ll need to order his lunch. He usually eats alone in his office. On Mondays, he likes the boneless ribeye from The Capital. Tuesday, it’s Chilean sea bass from Eddie V’s. He also likes prime rib from Shanahan’s. They don’t open for lunch, but the chef will prepare his usual on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Fridays, Mr. Cabrera Garcia has sushi catered in for the staff.”

I take a deep breath and locate my notebook, but I only manage to jot down the days of the week before I forget everything else Vivian just said.

“Your application said you aren’t married,” Vivian quips.

I look up at her, thrown by this abrupt change in topic.

“That’s right.”

“Are you seeing anyone?”

A little inappropriate, Vivian. “No.”

Even if legally shackling myself to another human being for the rest of my days did sound appealing, it's not as if I have time to date. My entire life is spent in the newsroom, and I prefer it that way.

“Good,” says Vivian, staring down her nose at me as if trying to determine whether I’m telling the truth. “You should be at your desk from an hour before Mr. Cabrera Garcia arrives until he leaves in the evening, usually around nine o’clock.”

I raise my eyebrows. “Nine p.m.?”

“He is the CEO, Ms. Langley. Mr. Cabrera Garcia is intimately involved in every facet of this company’s operations. A seventy- to eighty-hour workweek is standard for him, as it is for his assistant. But if you feel this position will be too demanding for you —”

“No!” I say quickly. “Not at all. I . . . I’m actually surprised I’ll get to leave so early.”

Doubt flickers in Vivian’s eyes, but she pulls a tight smile. “I’m happy to hear it. You will also be expected to accompany Mr. Cabrera Garcia to his lodge in Aspen. He often works from there Fridays and Mondays.”

“And I’m supposed to go with him?” I ask.

“Yes. There are guest accommodations you’re more than welcome to use. He usually works through the weekend.”

I raise my eyebrows. I read the job description for Rafael Cabrera Garcia’s assistant, and I’m certain that working weekends from my boss’s vacation home wasn’t in the listing.

I swallow. Catering to the needs of the most overprivileged man in America isn’t exactly how I planned on spending my weekends, but the closer I can get to Mr. Cabrera Garcia, the juicier the details I’ll have for my story.



RAFAEL

Condominiums and office buildings rise up on both sides of the road, blocking any view of the mountains. The streets are choked with traffic this time of day, and inching through the gridlock with all this raw horsepower beneath my foot is frustrating, to say the least.

Owning a Ferrari is pointless when you live in the city. This car needs wide-open highways and mountain roads, but with snow already blanketing the nearby peaks, she's confined to the dry streets of Denver until summer.

My skin itches with the urge to shift, and I crack my neck to release some of the tension building in my spine. I cut my morning run short so I wouldn't be late, and my wolf isn't happy about it.

The valet takes my keys when I pull up, and a man standing outside the building opens the door to let me pass. The scent of espresso, floor wax, and cologne hits me the moment I enter the lobby. Every head snaps in my direction, and most people quickly avert their eyes. It's a natural reaction to an alpha wolf, though most humans think they find me intimidating because I'm CEO.

People trip over themselves to get out of my way, and when I approach the open elevator, two tech guys jump out so they don't have to ride with me.

My wolf preens at the way they submit, but it makes my human half sick to my stomach. I grew up a poor kid in La Alma. I'll never get used to the nonstop ass-kissing or the way people scatter when they see me coming.

Eight o'clock isn't an early start time for a CEO, but I've been up since four. I've always been an early riser, and my wolf likes the routine. I meditate. I knock out some work. Then I go for a run, lift weights, and take a cold shower.

Every second of my day is designed for optimal performance. I can't afford anything less. I have a multibillion-dollar company and thousands of employees riding on my shoulders. I also have my pack, my mom, and my little sister to think about.

When I was a kid, my mom worked three jobs to support us, and we still had to scrape for everything we had. I've made it my life's mission to make sure my family never wants for anything ever again. That's why I demand perfection from myself and everyone who works for me.

Vivian is waiting just outside the elevator when the doors open up, and my wolf snarls at the intrusion. Vivian is nothing if not effective, but she can be overbearing, and she puts my wolf on edge.

"Good morning, sir."

"Morning, Vivian," I mutter, striding past her to reach my office before she can bombard me with my to-do list.

“The latest numbers are on your desk,” she trills, nipping at my heels. “There was some negative feedback on Match candidates on the latest rollout, which I’m sure Mark will discuss with you. Applications for your new executive assistant have closed. Your new assistant, Alex Langley, is waiting in your office.”

I pause outside my office door and whip around to face her. When I suggested we have our AI choose my new assistant, I hadn’t expected HR to take me seriously. I figured Margie would spend weeks vetting whoever the algorithm chose and end up selecting a candidate herself. “He’s here? Already?”

“Uh, well —”

I throw open the door without waiting for an answer and stop dead in my tracks. A woman is bent over my desk, a glass of green juice in hand. Straight dark hair hangs just past her shoulders, and a pair of big brown eyes snap up to meet mine.

Alex, apparently, is a she. The tops of her creamy thighs are just visible over my desk, and for a moment, all I can do is stare.

“Mr. Cabrera Garcia, this is Alex Langley. Alex —”

My new executive assistant straightens up at the introduction, sloshing green juice all over my desk. Her full pouty lips part in surprise, and her cheeks flush a delectable shade of pink.

“I’m so sorry. I’ll get that cleaned up.” Alex shuffles around my desk, tugging at the hem of her skirt. It’s a little shorter than what’s appropriate and shows off the most gorgeous pair of legs I’ve ever seen in my life. “It’s great to meet you, Mr. Cabrera Garcia,” she says, meeting my gaze for longer than most people manage before sticking out her hand.

“It’s good to meet you, Ms. Langley.”

I engulf her dainty hand with my own, shocked by the softness of her skin. She smells like caramel and chocolate and ink, and the scent makes my wolf stir.

“You can call me Alex,” she stammers.

“Alex.”

Mine.

The word rumbles through me with a surge of possessiveness, and I have the sudden crazy impulse to pull Alex close and feel her soft curves pressed against me. She’s wearing a snug camel-colored turtleneck tucked into that skirt, and the fabric strains against her breasts.

My wolf likes what he sees, and my whole body is suddenly attuned to her — her scent, the warmth of her skin, the nervous timbre of her voice. I find myself wondering what she tastes like.

No.

Shut it down.

I can't be having these thoughts.

This woman is my new assistant — and she's human.

Mine.

I release Alex's hand and take a step back, but my palm still tingles from where we were touching. I don't know what's gotten into my wolf, but the fucker needs to calm down.

I don't date. I don't do women. I certainly don't do my assistants.

If I've learned anything in my time as CEO, it's that running a company and a pack requires controlling for every variable.

I oversee every department in this company. I insist on twice as much testing as is standard on every update, and every major decision goes through me.

My wolves are biologically driven to obey me. I give the orders; the orders are followed.

Human women are a different story.

Relationships are messy — unpredictable. And as tempting and delicious as Alex Langley is, she's a liability I can't afford.