

Justice Comes and Soon

Ralph Cummings swiveled his padded leather chair back to the expansive mahogany desk and faced the black speakerphone. "Yes, that's right."

He noticed a shadow pass the partially opened door that led to the hallway. A vertical frown line appeared between his eyebrows. He lowered his voice.

"I'll have to call you back." His thin lips tightened as he punched the disconnect button. He stood and hurried past the floor-to-ceiling bookcases to the door. Amelia was due home from school today, but surely it wasn't her. She knew better than to come into this part of the house. Or had she forgotten their last little chat? Back for less than a day and already causing trouble. "Damn you, Amelia," he muttered.

Ralph stepped into the long hallway and scanned the area, then retreated into the study. He closed the door and looked around. The phone line was secure and the paneled library was soundproofed, but he had left the door open a crack. His right temple throbbed. How long had he been on the phone? He would have to interrogate everyone now.

He walked to the desk. A newspaper lay on the surface. Headlines read, "Businessman honored for charitable works. Orphanage gives award." The photo showed a silver-haired man in a crisp black suit, accepting his award with a gracious smile.

"Only a momentary reprieve." Ralph growled and stabbed the photo with his letter opener. "Justice comes and soon." He tossed the newspaper and other items in the side drawer, slammed it shut and turned the key. He clenched his jaw and stomped out of the room.

"Amelia." He bellowed in a booming baritone voice as he entered the kitchen. "How many times have I told you not to come into the front part of the house uninvited? Don't you ever learn?"

Amy flew to her feet and pressed her back against the side of the parsons bench. "I am very sorry, Father."

"That part of the house is off limits. Then and now. Did you hear me?"

"Yes, Father."

"No, you didn't. Tell me what I said."

"The front part of the house is off limits."

"If you know that, then why did you do it?"

"I'm sorry, Father."

"You're always sorry. Doesn't keep you from continuing to do it though. Am I going to have to lock you out again? Or have you forgotten?"

Lock me up again, you mean. "No Father. I won't do it again." She remembered the last time well enough, including the feel of his belt on her back. She stood slumped, her head to one side, nodding in agreement at every word until he finished his tirade.

After he left, Glorie handed Amy a glass of water. "Whatever possessed you? Have you been at school so long that you forgot? You know how he is about anyone touching anything much less tracking in dirt, or worse, breaking something."

"The last time I broke anything was years ago," Amy protested.

"But he never forgets. You know that."

"And he never forgives," Amy mumbled.

"Why you would go there again is beyond me."

"I wasn't thinking about anything except getting into the house quickly. Away from the chauffeur ... the car. I tried to tiptoe past the library door."

"Why ask for trouble?" Glorie brushed a stray lock of hair from Amy's forehead.

"God. I'm a grown woman, but he still makes me feel like I'm ten years old." Amy took a piece of warm bread and retreated up the back stairs to her room.

Glorie watched her go. She clucked her tongue while she cleaned the table. "Chauffeurs," she mumbled to herself. "No good will come of this."