A LABOR DAY PICNIC



JOANNIE KAY

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CHAPTER 1



nna didn't get bored often, but the prospect of a three-day weekend with nothing to do was making her crazy. She was completely caught up at work and her boss had said she was to leave at noon on Friday and not come back until Tuesday morning, which meant that she couldn't lose herself in the creative process of designing an advertising campaign for a new client. Her girlfriends were all paired up with someone special, and had glorious plans for cabins in the woods, fun in the sun, or visiting family. Anna's family consisted of one much older sister, and they didn't exactly get along well enough to spend a holiday weekend together. Stacy was stuffy and taught literature at a small college in New England, and she was of the opinion that Anna never should have been born! Anna just knew that Stacy's idea of a fun holiday was to curl up with a classic and read all weekend. As for Anna's love life - there wasn't one. She might date a man a few times, but when it came time for the serious stuff, she sent them on their way. Mr. Right hadn't come knocking on her door yet, and she refused to settle.

Anna wanted something exciting to do. Maybe she should call a close-by resort and take a short break? No, she couldn't. Her bank account was too low and her credit cards were maxed out from her

vacation just a couple of weeks prior. She should have thought ahead instead of splurging so much, but she didn't, and now she was stuck at home for the weekend. Even if she had the money to go somewhere for a couple of days, most places would have been booked solid weeks ago.

Anna didn't know her neighbors all that well either. From what she could see, almost all of them were married, or, at least, they were paired off. The only guy in the building who was single didn't know she existed. As she frowned at that thought, her doorbell rang. Excited for the break in her boring existence, she hurried to answer the summons, forgetting to use the peephole or ask who it was before throwing open the door.

To her shock it was the single guy from a couple of floors above who didn't know she existed! "Hello? Are you lost?" she asked in her normal blunt fashion.

"No. You're single, right? I need a wife."

"I usually like to know a man's name before I agree to get married!" Anna openly laughed at him, but inside she was enjoying herself and thinking he was quite handsome.

"Please don't laugh; this is a real emergency and I am desperate. I don't know your name, either," he sheepishly admitted. "I'm Dan Parker."

"Anna James." She stood there, obviously trying to figure out what his emergency could be.

"Anna, may I come in and explain?" he asked, sounding like he was begging.

"I guess so." She stepped back, and he pushed open the door and then came inside, looking around curiously.

"We have the same layout. I'm thinking of moving though. Not enough singles living here. It's too quiet."

"I like the quiet most of the time, but when I have nothing at all to do, it is pretty boring." Dan was handsome, and he wanted to marry her. "Yes, I'll marry you." She was teasing, of course, but the look on his face was priceless. She was no longer bored.

"What?" he asked, startled, then recalled what he'd said to gain entry to her apartment. "Of course I will pay you a fair amount for your time. It is an important matter."

"I keep waiting for the punch line," she admitted, looking at him curiously.

"This isn't a gag or a joke. The office where I work is kind of stuffy, and my boss has very old-fashioned ideas. He won't hire a man who isn't married, or engaged to be married. It wasn't a problem when I got the job, but my engagement didn't work out and I am single again. Mr. Fox is throwing this huge Labor Day picnic, and we are expected to bring our wives and children. If I show up without a fiancée I might as well kiss my job goodbye. Will you help me? You are very presentable, and I'm counting on makeup to hide the fact that you aren't the same woman he met nine months ago when he hired me."

"Aren't you worried that he will know me as an imposter? I know nothing at all about him. I could say the wrong thing."

"There will be so many people there that he won't have time to spend grilling you, Anna." Dan Parker seemed overly confident.

Anna thought to herself, *Only a man!* But, she was intrigued and she was no longer bored. She had something to do this weekend, and it could be a lot of fun, one way or another.

"You look nice," he said, studying her intently. "You'll need to get a manicure and pedicure, of course. And an expensive, pretty sundress is mandatory. No shorts, no crop tops, and no cheap flipflops. You'll want sandals that go well with your dress." He looked into her eyes and asked, "Do you already have anything acceptable?" His expression told her he found it doubtful.

Anna could see that he was not impressed with her bare feet, and the shorts and crop top she'd thrown on when she got home from work. She had plenty of clothes, but she was pretty sure he wouldn't like anything she owned.

Before she could say anything, he bossed, "Show me what you've got. If we find something suitable in your closet, great. If

not, we will go shopping – on me, of course. It will be well worth the price to have you do me this huge favor."

Anna took him into her bedroom, where he looked at her and smirked. "Do not say one deprecating word about my decor or the deal is off!" she threatened, meaning every word. Her bedroom was very homey and cozy, and she liked it.

"It looks like your grandma decorated, not you."

"That is because my grandmother made the quilt and the wall hangings. I loved her and I also love her gifts."

"I loved my grandmother too, but I doubt she ever took the time to make anything by hand during her entire life."

He said "by hand" in a distasteful tone of voice, and Anna abruptly decided that her grandma's favorite expression "Handsome is as handsome does" applied to Dan Parker. He was all show and no substance. "That is really too bad. It's a lot of fun."

"You do this sort of thing?" he asked in horror. "Oh God, don't talk about crafty things at the picnic. Those women would not understand doing something so mundane." He was burying himself by the second and had no idea how insulting his words were to her.

"What a shame. I would hate to be surrounded with shallow people all of the time. Whatever do you talk about?" She purposely baited him, deciding he might be decent looking, but she really didn't like him.

"Books, movies, work."

"The divorce rate among your friends?" she slyly inserted.

"We do not gossip! We hold intelligent conversations on politics, religion, art, charity works." He didn't know how pompous he sounded, or that she was on the verge of mischief.

"Boring stuff," she stated emphatically. "There is my closet. Knock yourself out. Just know that if you make a mess, you will clean it up."

Dan opened the closet door and looked at the contents suspiciously. "My closet doesn't have built-ins like these. How did *you* get them?" He looked like a pouty little boy whose friend had the

deluxe edition of a toy, while he was stuck with the average one. She wanted to laugh.

"I bought and installed them. I like organization."

"It is really nice; makes the space more functional." He walked in and started looking at her clothing, which was mostly the business suits and blouses she wore to work. Anna also had nice slacks and sweaters, jeans and tee shirts. There was a nice dress or two, but most of her clothing was geared toward work or home, not casual picnics with snooty, pretentious people who judged each other's clothing by what store it came from and the expensive price tag.

"I don't see what I am looking for, but you do have a nice assortment of things for work, Anna. How do you afford so many expensive things?" he asked. "Are you an attorney?"

"I should hope not!" Anna answered sharply. "I actually *work* for a living! I work in advertising."

"It must pay very well."

He was clearly prying into something that was none of his business. She shook her head, not about to tell him that she designed and made all of her clothing. He wouldn't believe her, and if he did, he would then decide her clothing looked too cheap for words.

"Are you able to go shopping right now? I have three hours I can spare to see you properly outfitted for the picnic."

"Sure, this is a great time. I will be busy tomorrow." She really didn't have a thing to do, but she wasn't about to permit him to ruin an entire day with his posturing. It was best to get it over with and then have tomorrow to decide how she would deal with his snobbery.

"I have clients to see tomorrow and golf with business associates on Sunday morning. We do need to make some time on Sunday to go over everything you'll need to know."

"Like what?"

"Well, you should know what I like to eat and drink, and all about my family. I will need to know those same things about you. Work matters; associates' names, people I would mention often—"

"Couldn't we just say that we do not discuss our work when at home?"

"What would we have to talk about then?" The puzzled look on his face was comical.

"Oh, love, marriage plans, future kids, what kind of home to buy, our parents, siblings, past misdeeds."

"Past misdeeds?" He was shocked.

"Haven't you ever done anything that is fun to talk about? Like one time I was in a restaurant and I overheard a woman at the next table saying nasty things about my friend, Natasha, who I just happen to love dearly. I accidentally knocked the woman's chocolate milkshake off the table, into her lap and all over the new dress she was so proud of. That little story usually starts a pretty good conversation with people."

"Were you dining with anyone?" Dan asked.

"Yes, another girlfriend."

"That figures. A man wouldn't tolerate such childish behavior."

UH OH! Maybe this guy was secretly the type of man she was looking for? Could he be? She looked at him and asked, "So, what would you have done if you were with me?" She wanted him to use the "s" word. All would be forgiven if he stated that he would spank her soundly. She held her breath and waited.

"I would have paid the bill, put you in a taxi, and never ever talked to you again!" he stated forcefully. "Especially after embarrassing me in that manner." He actually shuddered.

Nope. He wasn't the one. She didn't like him at all, and she could never be serious about a man she couldn't respect.

Shopping with Dan was a nightmare. He went to nothing but the "best" stores, and he was extremely critical of every item they looked at. He finally picked the dress, sandals, and a necklace that flattered her skin and the dress. He also told her what color of nail polish she should wear on her toes.

He drove them back to the building they lived in, and Anna was thankful to finally escape his scrutiny. He didn't offer to feed her dinner and she was glad. She needed to relax and watch a bit of television while she cooked for herself.

Anna loved salmon. She made a quick maple glaze to put over the salmon as she baked it. She also diced a small potato and put it on to cook. Frozen peas were quick and easy, and she loved them. She had watermelon for a combination salad/fruit dish. She rarely ate bread with a meal, unless she was having a sandwich.

Once everything was ready, she put her dishes on a tray and went to sit in front of the television. She turned on HGTV and watched another episode of one of her favorites. Someday she was going to buy a fixer upper and then turn it into a gorgeous home – when she could afford the down payment, which would be never if she didn't quit overspending.

As the evening wore on, Anna grew more and more agitated until she realized that she was truly troubled by Dan Parker and his lying, deceitful ways. She was not happy with herself for agreeing to help the upstairs neighbor to deceive his employer. She didn't like the man at all! He was what Grandma called a "hoot de snoot." Grandma would not like Dan one little bit. But, she *would* understand Anna's need to get out of the house and create a little mischief. Anna took after her grandmother in many ways, to her father's dismay.

Anna decided that she would teach Dan Parker a little lesson, and his boss too!

She occupied her Saturday doing the mundane things she always did on Saturday; thoroughly cleaning the apartment, doing the laundry, shopping for groceries and the supplies she needed for the next week or so. She also added a few fun errands like getting her nails and her hair done. Anna also went to the shoe store and found exactly what she was looking for. She giggled as she tried them on and tottered around in them. She would need to go home and practice walking like a teenage girl did in her first pair of high heels for her first prom.

When she got home the first thing Anna did was put on the

shoes, and she walked all around the apartment, putting away her groceries and her supplies. It was always an expensive shopping trip when she needed things like toilet paper, tissues, and paper towels. She preferred to purchase the items on sale and in large quantities, and she had to stick them in unlikely spots to be able to put them all away.

She finally finished, and then started a pot of beef vegetable soup. She would live on it throughout the week, and wouldn't have to cook every night – well, unless she simply couldn't resist. She could always put individual servings in the freezer and use it for lunches too. She simply adored homemade soups. Anna loved to cook, period.

Another plan came to mind, and she was positive that Dan wasn't going to approve. The thought that he would be shocked to learn that she loved to cook made her smile in anticipation. The man didn't have the first clue what life was like in the real world. He was too busy trying to keep up with the people he deemed the most important.

She had clients who were just like him, and some of their ideas for advertising were designed to reach others who were like them, and not the majority of viewers. It was difficult to convince those clients that their ideas wouldn't work and that they should allow her instincts to guide their advertising campaign. She was successful in this endeavor because her ad campaigns were successful; the numbers supported her facts. The one thing that people like Dan understood was the bottom line. They might shake their heads at her ideas once in a while, but when she could offer the data to support her claims, they sat up and listened – unless, like Dan Parker, they were too concerned with what the others of their social set thought of their campaign.

Once Anna's chores were done, she set up her sewing machine and started working on a project. It was the most fun she'd had all day. Anna had a flare for design, and wished she could turn her hobby into a profession, but she simply didn't know how to go about it. It was another of those things that took money to get your foot in the door, unless you knew someone at the top and could talk them into hiring you. In the meantime, she had a job, and it tested her creativity on a daily basis. One could wish she made more money, but she was already paid a decent salary. She just didn't save enough, and that was her own fault, she admitted.

Anna knew there were some who would blame her indulgent parents for not sitting her down and teaching her how to budget an allowance, but after a while it became her own responsibility for not taking a class on how to manage her money. Anna enjoyed shopping too much to stick to a responsible budget.

In her fantasies, Anna would meet Mr. Right, and he would teach her the error of her ways by putting her over his knee and using his hand on her bottom until she repented, and then he would make love to her, turning all of the heat he'd created on her bottom into sexual passion which fulfilled them both. Anna despaired of ever meeting her handsome prince. All of the promising men she'd dated had run away from her quick temper, or simply didn't have the "man in charge" personality that she was looking for and craved. Ever since she could remember she'd been in love with the old shows, the ones that featured spanking. The western *McLintock!* with John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Patrick Wayne, and Stephanie Powers was her absolute favorite of all. There were two spankings in that movie, and she'd watched it so often she knew all of the lines by heart. Where was her Mr. Right?