

# Chapter One

It didn't surprise Anabelle when her phone rang spot on 12:15 pm. Besides his most attractive attributes of gentlemanly demeanour and natural poise, Brayden was never late.

"Yes, Mr. James?" Her smile was unrelenting as she answered the call.

"Hmm, Mr. James indeed. Are you leaving your office?"

Anabelle's feet fidgeted in her heels beneath the desk. "I was just finishing an email."

"Leave it for now, please. Our reservation at Le Gavroche is at half twelve and I'm here."

It didn't take any further convincing for Ana to do as he said. She would do anything Brayden told her to do and it wasn't just because he was incredibly handsome, well dressed and charming. She loved him.

Ana slid across the beige leather seats of the Rolls Royce in her stunning red dress and matching patent heels. She planted herself beside Brayden and kissed his cheek as the chauffeur closed the door.

"Hello, darling." He returned the gesture with the kind of natural gentlemanly charm he so easily exuded.

The car pulled away from the kerb and slotted between the rest of London's afternoon traffic. "Do you remember that networking event I told you about? The one in New York?"

Brayden knew where this was going. "Yes."

"It's a lot sooner than I thought. The invitation came through this morning for two weeks' time."

"That isn't much notice," he looked at his watch. He lived and died by the clock, even when it was a luncheon reservation.

"I can hardly say I'm surprised. Every networking conference I've ever received an invitation for in the States leaves me with little time to properly consider it. It's almost as if they forget there are people in other countries who would benefit from the event, and those countries are thousands of miles away," Ana replied, as her mobile phone rang inside of her *Hepburn* Aspinal of London handbag. "Oh, I'm sure that's Mr. Langham." She unzipped the bag.

"Anabelle." Her eyes locked onto his larger, stronger hand preventing hers from reaching inside. "Have you forgotten?"

Her voice was less confident when she realised she should have ignored the ringing. "I've been trying to get him to use Tweed for his charity galas for years. I know I'm not supposed to take calls during the lunch hour but he will be the biggest client we've ever had." Ana's voice was saturated with gentle desperation.

He raised an eyebrow. "So you haven't forgotten." He was still holding Anabelle's hand as her mobile phone rang beneath the red lizard printed Italian calf leather. She felt like a schoolgirl caught passing notes during a lesson.

"Not entirely," she admitted, sheepishly.

Brayden stroked her hand with his thumb a few times as he held it in his own. "I know it's difficult to transition to new habits, Anabelle, but you know my rules are both necessary and fair. And the rule is, once you leave the office, you leave the phone calls, too. You know how seriously I feel about this." Before their courtship, Anabelle worked far too many hours on far too little sleep, with virtually no distinction between her career and breathing. Brayden put a stop to that straight after their first kiss. "I think it's time we had a proper chat in my study, this evening."

Anabelle swallowed. After six weeks of courting, despite their unquestionable attraction to one another and shared desire for discipline in their relationship, Brayden had yet to spank her. He set rules to ensure Anabelle was put on a balanced work schedule, and that she stayed on it. She was so used to working eighty hours a week that it was still second-nature to put her life on hold whilst her brain continued to work. If she had a spare moment, she would check client emails or return phone calls without noticing that the gap between her lunch hour and work, her personal life and work, even her weekends and work, were non-existent. There was no gap at all between Ana and the rest of her existence.

When they first began courting, Brayden addressed the subject of work as a major concern almost immediately. Despite the mutual desire for discipline in their relationship, he didn't want to threaten Ana with trips across his knee for answering her phone or running through endless to-do lists in her mind from their very first day as a couple. She was just coming out of a six-year work environment where her boss expected the unexpected, where boundaries between work and life were so blurred that anyone who didn't comply was quickly dismissed. No one could afford to go without his or her job. Especially Anabelle, who had a mortgage on a flat in Belgravia. So, Brayden set boundaries around their time together and her time at home to help her transition from the only expectations she ever knew in the adult working world, to ones that were healthy, and could still guarantee delivering what was required of her role. Brayden wanted to give her grace in the area that produced the greatest struggle for her, but it was useless to carry on asking her to follow rules that had zero accountability once they were broken.

“A proper chat?” She knew full well what he was inferring.

“Yes. I think it's time.” Brayden reached over and buckled the seat belt across her small lap. Anabelle's entire body went numb.

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Luncheon at Le Gavroche was the next restaurant on Brayden's list. Anabelle had been to most fine eating establishments in London in her career as a coordinator with the country's most exclusive events company, but not that one, somehow. She dined at countless restaurants on the company tab, but it was an entirely different experience when Brayden collected her from the office every Monday afternoon since they began courting. His chauffeur drove Brayden the hour and a half from Waldorf Manor into London to collect Ana for their lunch date, which was at a different restaurant each week. Ana wasn't allowed to answer her phone during the lunch hour anyway, but especially not when they spent time together. Monday afternoons were designated to completely focus on their relationship, which sometimes proved to be difficult, because he now owned Tweed Events. Brayden was both her future husband, and her boss. Therefore, work and personal life were rather intertwined.

“Champagne to start, please,” Brayden told the waiter.

“Are we celebrating?”

“We are, my darling.”

“What's that, then?” Ana was consistently and pleasantly surprised by his charming nature. She'd never known a man like Brayden James before.

“Monday.”

Anabelle exhaled a beguiling breath in place of an outright chuckle. “I think I shall enjoy Mondays then, if they are to be celebrated with Champagne.”

The waiter returned with a bottle of 2007 Brut, the only one on the menu—not that he would have complained about the selection in any case. Le Gavroche was an absolute gem of a restaurant in the heart of London. Owner and chef, Michel Roux Jr., was completely unmatched in Brayden's opinion. Although, he wouldn't say so within earshot of his own

team of personal chefs back home at Waldorf Manor. He wouldn't want to hurt their feelings. "To Monday afternoon lunch dates."

She smiled, eager to toast to that. Mondays had taken on a completely new meaning in the last six weeks. In that time, Brayden took ownership of Tweed, told Ana he loved her, and they began courting. A completely new routine had begun for both of them but it was quickly becoming the new normality. "How was Alice when you left this morning?"

Brayden looked up from the menu. "She didn't want me to come to London without her, of course. I have to remind her every week that Mondays are not eligible for her to make an appearance."

"Darling girl, she doesn't like to miss anything." Ana smiled, fondly. "Who is looking after her whilst Mr. Fowler is away on honeymoon?"

"You may call him Bennett."

Ana glanced up from the menu. "There's another habit to break." In her role as senior event coordinator for Tweed she'd come to know both Brayden and Bennett as VIP clients. She never referred to either gentleman casually, until very recently. Insistence wasn't enough to break professional vigilance, even if her future husband was best friends with the man she still referred to as *Mr. Fowler*.

"That's quite all right. I'm sure you know Bennett won't complain about the title and I certainly won't." He returned the gesture. Ana loved when Brayden smiled; it went so well with his neatly parted, thick brown hair that swooped obediently across his forehead. The whole of Brayden sitting there just being himself in his three-piece-suit and his gentlemanliness made her mouth go dry. A line of blushing ran up her cheekbones and a hot shower of internal giddiness followed over the rest of her body. "Anyway," he said, as he folded the menu. "Bennett's parents are still abroad so I had no choice but to hire a nanny for this afternoon."