

Chapter 1

It's bizarre how even the most intrusive of noises can take their time to get through as the brain struggles to wake up. James Stern stirred and grabbed the clock, 3am, he groped for his glasses and then grabbed his phone, Jane Marsden was calling, grumbling, he pressed the green button, wondering why he kept his phone on. 'Jane? What the hell?'

'The Hampstead file James'

Seriously? The nerve of this woman! He rubbed his eye. 'Oh for... *Seriously* Jane? At 3am? I've been over it a dozen times - I'm sure everything's in order.'

She sighed. 'I just need you to take another look for me, I want everything to be perfect.'

Frustrated, but too tired to argue, James reached for his laptop and obeyed. 'Jane, seriously! We've BOTH gone over that file with a fine tooth comb, you're not going to find anything.'

'I just want to have a look - well? Are you ready yet?'

'For god's sake Jane! Just give me a minute will you? It may surprise you to know that I'm not *exactly* at my best at 3am!' His contractual working day hadn't even started and she was pushing him to the brink of exasperation already. 'There! Happy?'

'Ah! Yes thank you! I shan't be a second!'

He rolled his eyes. 'Oh no please! Take your time! Thrilled to be of assistance at 3am! what EXACTLY are you looking

for? Don't tell me you're going to start re-arranging things on my desktop - just because in your "Humble opinion" it was better - took me ages to find things!'

She tutted. 'Oh don't be absurd James! I'm just checking something...and I heard that, I am NOT a megalomaniac!'

He laughed. 'Just joking boss! of *course* you're not - I mean perish the thought! Maybe it would help if you could tell me *exactly* what you were looking for!'

'I was just a bit concerned about something with the Hampstead File that's all. I thought there was a certain inconsistency.' There was a pause. 'You haven't gone back to sleep have you?'

'Perish the thought!' He replied sarcastically as he went over to the

window and looked out over the dark city...he envied all of them - why were they tucked up in bed fast asleep and he wasn't? Suddenly, as if she was reading his thoughts she said.

'Maybe it would have been better if you had stayed over...'

'Yeah! Like that was going to happen' He smiled ruefully. 'You're not exactly known for letting me sleep...like now for instance...Please Jane! I need sleep!'

Finally, she decided enough was enough. 'I think that will be all, thank you James! Get some sleep OK? I expect to see you bright eyed to-morrow!' With that, she hung up, leaving him incredulous.

'Oh of course!' He muttered to himself. 'Right! I'll just add that to the long list of things to do shall I boss? Right after "Be more organised" and "Stop being so sarcastic!" He smiled to himself. 'Like that's going to happen'

Chapter 2

Evergreen Edge was a successful landscaping and gardening company and well placed in Cambridge with plenty of work - Jane Marsden had worked her way up until, finally, at the age of forty-three she had become CEO, during her climb to the top - she had not let anything get in her way, she was ruthless to a fault and, only until she had well established herself did she allow herself a private life. She prided herself on running a tight ship, as a result, everyone was practically terrified of her...well...ALMOST anyone..

Miraculously, James was alert and ready for work, fortunately, years of having to put up with Jane's somewhat anti-social phone calls had re-programmed his body clock. As he walked towards the office, he smiled as he saw secretary Sarah. Sarah was a nervous, wisp of a thing only just thirty, she was brilliant at her job and could be exceptional if it weren't for her nerves.

'Morning Sarah! Tell me how's The Boss today? Breathing fire or is it safe to approach?'

Sarah jumped, poor thing, he thought. 'M-Morning James! Well...you know, she's in a particular mood today...'

'Oh joy!' Too much to ask for a normal day? Of course! Talk about being Naive!

Suddenly they winced as they heard their Lady and Mistress call out. 'James??!!'

'Errr.' Sarah gulped. 'I-I think you'd better go in...'

'Yes! Yes! I'm going! Tell me Sarah - what on earth did I do to be so..."lucky?'"
With that, he gave her a wry smile.

He knocked on her door and came in with the post.

'Morning!' He placed it on her desk and couldn't help but feel exasperated at how fresh-as-a-daisy Jane looked and couldn't resist a sideways comment. 'Looking particularly...radiant today Jane if you don't mind my saying so.'

If she picked up the connotations of this remark, she chose to ignore it, and instead alerted him to an e-mail she had received. 'Have you seen this e-mail? Another complaint about Lucy, she'll have to go!'

He walked around calmly and glanced at the computer screen. 'Oh Come on Jane! Yes... she's a bit enthusiastic but...' Here, she interrupted him by handing him a pile of e-mails. Throwing himself in the chair in front of his desk and read them carefully before sighing, 'Alright! Alright so...she can let her enthusiasm get the better of her at times but still...that's not really an excuse to sack her...is it?'

'Excuse me? Did you not read what she did to that woman's grass?'

'Even so Jane...she's young...come on!'

She stared at him squarely, determined not to give even a flicker of emotion. 'Suspend Lucy for a week and put her forward for the re-training program and she is to be seconded until I say so...'

He gave a small self-satisfied smile. 'OK Jane! As you wish.'

'See you at the meeting!'

'Yeah! Yeah, see you then.'

'Right!' Jane slammed the folder shut. 'I think that's all for today oh and Rebecca - Mrs Jones was full of praise for the floral display so well done! Any other business? No, right well thank you everyone!' James followed her into her office.

'Actually Jane - there IS one thing we have to discuss the upcoming charity event...I've been looking at the figures. And they don't add up.'

Jane took the folder from him and looked through it intently. '...and you think we can't afford this?'

'Jane, I've been over the numbers and let's just say it'll be tight - we can't just magic money out of thin air...'

'I guess you're right.' She groaned. 'At this rate, it'll be simpler to do it myself!' James stifled a laugh. 'Something to say James?'

'Oh no...no jane - I was just...thinking about the challenges of cooking for a large group but you'll work it out, you always do...'

'She glared at him. 'I'm not a bad cook...as you well know!'

'Oh no! I know that...well.. apart from when...!' He went pink. 'Anyway...moving on, I still need to go over this budget with you.'

'Fine! But no garden jokes...please!'

""Vine" with me Jane!'

Finally it came to the end of the day, Jane sighed as she put on her coat. 'I hope we did the right thing - I hate coming across too soft!'

James helped her. 'Oh come on Jane! We made the right decision - you're a great boss, now let's grab a drink, my shout!'

'Well...although, we could go back to mine for a night cap...'

'Oh Jane...I'm tired, it's been a long day you know...'

'OK! Fine!'

'...Ok! OK! Fine! Just one! although I know you're just going to wrap me round your finger and do what you want anyway...'

'Thanks for your help today.' Jane handed him a large glass of wine. 'See? Virtue DOES have its own rewards!'

He smiled and took the glass, grinning. 'Ah! So "thank you" *is* in your vocabulary! It's my job remember? What you pay me for, mind you it's a wonder I'm still in one piece, dealing with you on a daily basis. Although it has to be said I've worked for worse!'

'Thanks for the character reference! Remind me to return the favour!' She sat down and her hands very slowly began to undo the buttons on his shirt, he shivered with desire.

'Seriously though...I don't take up *too* much of your social life do I?'

'Social life? What's that? I have a *very* demanding boss who always seems to be calling me in for "emergencies" and "meetings"' He grinned. 'But I manage...somehow.' He took another, longer sip.

She grinned suddenly. 'It's a shame you can't drive home tonight...'

'Wh...Oh for god's sake Jane! Thank you VERY much! That's hardly fair is it?' They looked at each other, the sexual tension was palpable, he slowly leaned forward and gently undid her buttons on her shirt until they exposed her bra and ran a hand up her thigh, going as high as he wanted. 'I swear to god Jane, I'll kill you one of these days...' Before pulling her into a fierce all consuming kiss.