

Chapter One

‘What on earth is this?’ I thrust the news agenda onto my boss’ desk.

Phil reluctantly tears his gaze away from an article he’s reading and casts a withering glance at the agenda, which assigns reporters to the key news items of the day. Normally, I look forward to getting my hands on it, to see what I’m working on, but today, it’s a different story.

‘What about it?’ He shrugs, turning his attention back to his screen. He pushes his glasses up the ridge of his nose to continue reading the article, as if I’m not actually there.

I push the news agenda closer to him, dragging his attention back to it.

‘The royal wedding?’ I tap my fingernail against the part of the agenda which shows my name next to coverage of the latest royal engagement.

‘Is this a typo?’ I ask, even though I know it’s not. If there’s one thing Phil refuses to tolerate, it’s typos.

‘Yes, the royal wedding,’ Phil states simply. ‘Is there an issue?’

I narrow my eyes at him, trying to figure out what he’s playing at, but he looks back at me with bored disinterest. If it wasn’t for the fact that he’d been my boss for the past ten years, sometimes I’d genuinely think Phil hates me, but his off-hand manner is part of the package that comes with being a news editor at a national tabloid newspaper. The tougher you appear, the more revered you become. I used to live in fear of him as a junior reporter, until a few years passed and I began to realise that underneath Phil’s gruff no-nonsense exterior lurks a secret softy who’s more likely to be worrying about how much revision his 15-year-old daughter Abby’s been putting in for her GCSEs than about what’s happening in Westminster.

‘The *royal wedding*? Since when do I cover the royals?’ I scoff. ‘Let alone weddings!’

‘One second.’ Phil’s phone rings and he takes the call.

I sigh. You see, royal weddings are not my thing. I'm a politics reporter. I cover Westminster, not weddings! My last piece was an interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the latest budget reform. And before that, I was covering a vote on – in the House of Commons. I write about the kind of policies that shape the country. I don't cover weddings! Weddings aren't news. Weddings are just lace and flowers and cake and silliness. Even royal ones.

'Sorry, not interested.' Phil slams the phone down into its cradle. 'Bloody freelancer with some batshit story. How do these people get my number?'

'Dunno,' I mutter. 'Anyway...' I tap my fingernail against the agenda.

'Needs must, Sam. Ella's on maternity leave, so I'm leaving it with you,' Phil sighs.

Ella's the Daily Post's Royal Editor. Obsessed with marriage, family life and patriotism, she's far better cut out for the gig than I am. When the shock engagement between reality TV star Holly Greene and Prince Isaac of Norway was announced, Ella squealed so loudly that she silenced the newsroom. This story was absolutely made for a romantic like her, but she left work last week at six months pregnant. If she wasn't already ecstatic to be having a baby, she'd be kicking herself for missing out on covering Holly and Prince Isaac's wedding. To be fair, it has everything. A rags-to-riches tale of sweet girl-next-door type from Leeds – Holly - who rose to fame on a cheesy island survival reality TV show, with the nation embracing her down-to-earth character and surprisingly quick one liners. She took on various presenting roles until she ended up fronting *The Morning People* – the nation's most-watched breakfast show. Holly's dated a couple of other celebrities, but she's always been coy about her love life in the press and never seemed to have a long-term boyfriend. Then bam, it emerged that she'd been swept off her feet by Prince Isaac – a gorgeous strapping Norwegian prince first in line to the throne, who she'd interviewed on TV when he'd been visiting the UK to promote his charity work. According to reports, it was pretty much love at first sight. If Holly hadn't already had the nation hooked with her dramatic rise to fame, her engagement to a dashing prince was the perfect fairy tale ending – giving hope to every normal girl in the country that she too could come from nothing and have a happy ever after. Even I can admit that it's a sweet story, but it's not exactly political by any stretch of the imagination and politics is what I do. It's my job! Plus, I'm not exactly the biggest fan of weddings. Not after mine ended three years ago when my fiancé stood me up at the altar.

'But I don't cover weddings,' I whine. 'This is just-'

'Look, Sam,' Phil interrupts, fixing me with a pointed look. 'I know you like your nitty gritty Westminster stories but why not lighten up for once? Do you realise how many reporters would kill for the chance to cover the royal wedding for a national newspaper? This is the biggest story of the year. You're one in a million right now. You should be thanking me.'

‘But...’

Phil rolls his eyes, when the assistant news editor, Jeremy, who’s sitting next to him, butts in.

‘Earthquake in Mexico. Seven point two on the Richter scale. Five dead,’ he says, quoting a Reuters report open on his computer screen.

‘Get the TV on,’ Phil barks and before I know it, they’re turning up the volume on the enormous TV screens that dangle from the ceiling of the newsroom and tuning into the coverage.

‘Get on that, Matt,’ Phil orders one of the news reporters who begins scrolling through coverage on Twitter, one eye on the news broadcast.

I stand there for a minute, lingering by Phil’s desk, half-watching the crumbling wreckage on TV.

‘Still here?’ Phil asks, raising an eyebrow in my direction. ‘Go and do a feature on the happy couple. Where they met. How they fell in love. A real heart-warmer.’

‘A real *heart-warmer*?!’

Phil shoots me a look, before looking up at the live footage of a town being reduced to rubble.

‘How close are you from getting that online, Matt?’ He says over his shoulder. ‘We don’t need much. Just a couple of pars.’

Matt’s sweating at his desk as he bashes out a few sentences in a mad rush to get the story onto our website before our rivals publish it.

‘Five minutes,’ he mutters, over a flurry of typing.

Reluctantly, Phil turns his attention back to me. I’m well aware that I’ve overstayed my welcome. I’m old news, but I don’t care! Yes, journalism is fast-paced, but that doesn’t mean my boss can just change my role to Royal Reporter over night and inform me on a sheet of paper the next day.

‘Sam, just go and do it, okay?’ Phil groans.

‘I’m not happy about this. You know how I feel about weddings,’ I add in a lower voice, hoping none of our other colleagues catch my words.

Even saying them out loud gives me that shiver-down-the-spine sinking feeling of dread and it’s been years since my fiancé – my boyfriend of five whole years – ditched me on our wedding day to run off with a bouncy American girl with the name – I kid you not – Candy Moore. That’s her actual name, even though it sounds like the kind of thing a stupid spoilt baby would cry out to its parents. Candy! More! If Ajay had gone for someone slightly less annoying, I might have been able to forgive him, but Candy Moore? I mean, seriously? Actually, who am I trying to kid, there isn’t a woman in the world he could have wrecked our wedding day for that would have made me not hate his guts or, for that matter, anything and everything associated with *weddings*.