



The Heiress

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: One heiress, one Hollywood hellraiser... and zero chill

DAISY

I don't take kindly to jerks. So when Lorde Sheen – yes, that Lorde Sheen – crashed into my carefully curated life, I knew she was trouble. She's the daughter of a Hollywood icon, all bad attitude and devastating charm, and she challenged me from the second we met. I tried to shut her down. She made me feel alive. I told myself it was just a game. But the moment she saw through me, it stopped being pretend...

LORDE

Daisy DeMonte is everything I'm not – poised, polished, and planned to perfection. She wasn't supposed to fall for my stupid flirtations that only existed to rile her up for my amusement.

But she did. And I wanted her right back.

Now, everything is on the line. Her family, my feelings, and our future. I came into Daisy's world to shake things up. I didn't expect to rebuild them with her!

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Chapter 1

Daisy

This insufferable asshole.

We met not two minutes ago, and I'm already prepared to rip her throat out and make her watch me devour it whole. I'm not kidding!

Her name is Lorde Sheen. Yes, that Sheen. The first thing I learned about her is that her mother is Camilla Sheen, the actress with more Oscars than Meryl Streep. The second thing I learned about her?

She's a jackass.

Right now, I'm learning that she has one of the pearliest white smiles I've ever seen. Because she's laughing right in my face from across our table. At this rate, she's not going to be keeping that nice smile for much longer.

"So, Daze..." She pops more artisanal bread into her mouth, flakes and crumbs falling from between her teeth. Gross. I'm frozen, though. What gives her the right to shorten my name like that after knowing me for two minutes? Besides, what does she think I am? A movie title?

"It's Daisy." My teeth are gritted to the point where I can barely understand my words. The recipient of my murderous look is my supposed best friend, Ashleigh Lee of the Hong Kong hedge fund Lees, who was responsible for dragging me into this

quagmire.

Lorde's eyebrows reach her hairline. "That so? I think 'Daze' suits you so much better. It's very... homely."

What? What did she call me?

Luxurious. Stunning. Beautiful. Sophisticated. Patient. Regal. Those are the words people call me. Those are the words I appreciate being called!

Homely? Fuck right off with that shit!

She definitely notices my anger. Lorde is going to ride my rage into the sunset like I'm some deranged bucking bronco (mare?) in need of taming and training. Daze. Look at her take great joy in calling me that, "I hear you've shacked up with plenty of people over the years. So, what made you choose Angus of all assholes?"

Beside me, Angus Smith, the worst date I've ever had, shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Ashleigh is responsible for this mess, but it's only because Angus and Lorde are good friends, and the former needed a date – and I'm single. I have no idea how Angus and Lorde are friends, though. They couldn't be more different!

Let's start with Angus Smith. Perfect, London-bred, bit on the short side but who's measuring... he's got the boyish good looks to make up for it. You might even say he's our city's very own Prince Harry. Every girl I know whether from the country club or my old high school, has some nasty, dirty dreams about Angus Smith.

Then there's this damned Lorde Sheen. Nouveau riche, I shall say out of politeness. We all know her illustrious mother, a classic rags-to-riches story starting as a teen in the '80s. Nobody knows who her father is. Does Camilla Sheen know which

Hollywood riffraff knocked her up to create this piece of work? Lorde looks more than fine on the outside – what? I can admit when someone I greatly dislike is hot. She’s taller than me when I’m in my sky-high heels. Her thick hair begs for someone to either mess it up or comb it to perfection. Now, look at those toned arms and shoulders and that it’s right there chest. Or so the tabloids – which I read religiously for a mention of my name – are always talking about. I wouldn’t know. I haven’t been looking.

The thing the tabloids have forgotten to mention to loyal readers like me is that she’s a terrible fuckhead who should not bother being in my presence.

In a matter of ten minutes, this double date has gone straight to hell, and there is no one to blame save for Ms. Sheen. Even though she is my friend’s date, she has made several crude remarks about me, shot me down even after polite answers, and managed to trip me on the way into the restaurant, breaking the heel of a Louboutin. While I hobbled into the restaurant, she laughed it off.

Back to the gross thing she asked me. “I think that’s a bit inappropriate to ask,” I snap, although I’m blushing. I don’t want to be blushing. Lorde’s shit-eating grin makes me wonder if this isn’t a blush of embarrassment, but pure, righteous anger.

I look to Angus for some support. All he does is clear his throat.

“Come on, Lorde, don’t be a butt.” That’s all the help I get?

“So,” Ashleigh chirps, since we’ve all but forgotten the woman responsible for this mess. I’m dropping boulders in her face with this glare of mine, but she won’t meet the avalanche heading her way. “Thanks for conning me into this, Ash,” I want to say. “You kept going on about how hot Lorde is, and I had no choice but to come when it turned out she was Angus’s friend.” I keep my trap shut. “Have we decided what we want to order?”

“I’ll have the ossobuco,” Lorde begins, before turning her attention to Ashleigh. “And I wouldn’t mind having you for dessert if you know what I mean.”

I lift the tablecloth and find Lorde’s hand on my friend’s bare knee. There is not much to grab there, so she’s about two inches away from finding a place she has no business being!

“Ow!” Yes. That was my foot meeting Lorde right in the shin. She got her hand off my friend, didn’t she? Except now that icy grin is directed right at me again. “What’s the matter, Daze?” she asks through those pearly whites. “Jealous? There’s more than enough room, so you’re definitely free to join us for a menage. I hear it’s the trendy thing around here.” Both she and Angus laugh like that was the most hilarious joke in the world.

Me? I’ve had enough.

My napkin hits the table. My chair screeches as I push it back abruptly. No one’s laughing now. “You may treat girls like that in California,” I say, “but we have standards here in New England.” I use the last of my energy to give her the most derisive glare I can devise. Not even Angus Smith is worth this. “Come on, Ash, let’s go and let these children laugh alone.”

Ashleigh is squeamish, shifting back and forth in her chair. Finally, she meets my gaze. For the first time in a long while, she’s defiant instead of compliant. Damn it. The one time she decides to grow a backbone!

“Looks like you’re on your own.” Lorde swings her arm across Ashleigh’s chair.

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Fine. I will snatch my purse and leave with my head held high. At least I'll have tha—

“Ah!” My heel! It's broken! Shit, shit, I forgot! Here I go, down, down to the floor in one of the city's nicest brunch spots, latching onto the tablecloth as if it's going to save me...

More like I take the whole damn thing down with me!

The tablecloth drapes over me as I look up at the ceiling. Cutlery sings around me as it plunks onto the floor. The whole restaurant has stopped functioning. Why pay attention to your own table when you can gawk at the mess I just created? Pull out more cell phones and snap more pictures, why don't you!

Lorde is the first to try to help me up. While I would love to shirk her off out of principle, I grasp her hand and wobble my way back to my feet, sans one heel. Nope. Can't do it!

She slams back into her chair as I topple onto her. “Oh, boy,” she grunts, catching me by the armpits, my left foot scrambling for purchase on the floor. I'm such a mess by now that all I can do is sink to my knees.

My head rests most unceremoniously on the side of her lap.

“I was gonna buy you a drink first,” she murmurs, so only I can hear. “But hey, if you wanna get right to it...”

I'm up in a flash, hopping on one foot in a mad dash to get away from this morbid

humiliation. A waiter rushes up to me, asking me in accented English if I need someone to call 911. Ashleigh gets up and rounds the table. Angus puts both hands on his face, and I can't tell if he's holding back more awful laughter. Everyone at the nearest table continues to gawk.

I ignore them. With my chin tilted far too high, I slip out of my broken heels and carry them with me out of the restaurant barefoot. Who knows? There might be a pap around here, and if I'm gonna show up in *The Daily Social*, it will be with my pride intact!

Then here I am, standing on the sidewalk, realizing that I left my purse, phone, and sweater in that cursed place.

Deep breaths. Remember, you're Daisy Fucking DeMonte. One of the most put-together girls in all of New England. Heiress to a department store empire.

I've got what many women don't. Long legs. Great hairline. Blue eyes and the lightest brown hair around, as expected of an upstanding young woman. Plus a mega-rich Daddy who thinks I'm his shining star.

Nobody...nobody fucks with me and gets away with it!

Daggers fly from my eyes as Lorde Sheen steps out of the restaurant with my things. I yank them from her grasp, tell her one more time that I do not appreciate being treated like a rotten piece of meat, and go hail the first cab I find.

We drive by her still standing on the sidewalk. "Sorry," she mouths. Too little, too late!

Chapter 2

Lorde

I met a girl today.

Just a regular ol' walking cliché, that's me.

This one, though? She's special. Really special. I'm not talking about her cute face or her attractive figure, either. I'm talking about the whole damn package.

Feisty. Big, smart mouth. Yet still so damn elegant in the way she chews me out. You know, the only kind of girl I could think of as "my" girl if I were to settle down at this point in my life. Not that I have any intention of doing so. I'm young, I've got wild oats to sow, and no lack of women lining up to take a ride on the Lorde Sheen Express. I learned that good shit from my mother. You might know her... Camilla Sheen? Even though she had me later than most at the time, I still had about four different Daddy figures and a real Dad who didn't give a shit about me growing up. That does stuff to a young, impressionable woman. Somehow, when I wasn't screwing around, with girls, I did well enough in school to get accepted to Stanford for undergrad and Harvard Business School after. Not that I'm thinking about going...

But I don't blame my mother for any of it. Considering our unique situation, she did the best that she could to raise me between here and California. Let's say she was working her ass off to win another Oscar when I was hitting puberty and had no idea where to transfer my crazy, sexual urges. So started my life being with a different girl every week. Okay, sometimes only one for a whole month. You get what I mean! I like to date around!

The sudden thought of having one girl for the rest of my life is brand spanking new to me. I've got Daisy DeMonte to thank. That gorgeous vixen who hails as one of the country's most expensive heiresses.

She's snobby. She's annoying. She's the hottest girl ever, and I've seen a million.

It's not unusual for me to see a hottie and instantly start thinking of sex. How I'm going to seduce her. How I'm going to make her mine. Even if it's for one day, I want that woman to think that she's all mine. I'm going to blow her mind and take care of her unlike any other could. They usually leave in the morning, but they've got that fantasy now stashed away for the next time they're alone – or with someone who can't find her clit.

That's what I was thinking when I met Ashleigh a few days ago. That I wanted to see how quickly I could get under that tight skirt and bury my face in that long neck of hers.

Anyway. Daisy DeMonte. A girl I've only heard of in passing and the tabloids, when I bother to flip through them. When I saw her today, strutting into the restaurant like the hottest shit on Earth, I was overcome with that same feeling of make her mine. Yet it was somehow different. It wasn't only my body begging me to do unseemly things to another one of society's good girls. It was my... heart? Yeah, that thing. Thumping harder than ever! I could make a crack about it pumping extra blood to my hands so I could impress her with how well I feel her up, but I don't think that would make my point well.

So what did I do? What I always do when I have no idea how else to seduce a woman. I say whatever the hell comes to mind without a damn filter, hoping that whatever natural charm I exude will be another to garner her interest.

Instead, I took it way too far, and now she absolutely despises me. She stormed out of the restaurant in the middle of a double date.

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Great job, Lorde!

I'm quiet for the rest of the day. Ashleigh is all over me with her superficial attraction. I can tell it's fake by this point in my life. I doubt I could tell her anything about myself and she would care. She's simply seen the photos, read the stories, heard scandalous tales from her social circles, and now wants a piece of me. That said, I can tell she's been with women before. She lets slip exactly what she expects once we're alone, based on a previous experience she also drops like I'm not going to be weirded out by her telling me sordid tales of butches she's bedded in between male heartthrobs and non-binary busybodies. I get it. I'm probably a fetish to her. I'm a woman who has been around a G-spot a few times with all sorts of implements (including my hands, thank you.) Nothing is sacred in my bed. I'll wine you, dine you, and sixty-nine you until you're screaming nice! with two big thumbs up on either side of my ass.

Usually, I would give it to her. I've got a reputation to keep up, you know. It wouldn't be hard. Kiss her. Touch her. Throw her down on my bed and give her the ol' Lorde Sheen rough 'n ready. Sometimes, when I'm already bored I make a game out of sex. How fast can I make her come so I can come? Those can be the best times if it turns out our quiet and sweet high-society girl is a freak in the sack.

I'm not interested in that now.

Somehow, though, we end up in my apartment.

She's persistent, I'll give her that. Ashleigh Lee is down to fuck, and she's hot enough that most would call me an idiot for turning her down. "Look at the way she's

shoving her tits up toward you! How many references to boning has she made? You think she's playing coy? Hooooon, she's totally gonna bend over your bed and pull down her panties at any moment! Come on. A ten-minute quickie! You gonna love yourself or not?"

Except it's like a switch has gone off in my head, and try as I might, I don't feel attracted to her anymore. Daisy's face keeps transposing itself on Ashleigh's every time I look at her. Even I know that's messed up and wrong.

While we're standing in the middle of my apartment, talking about nothing at all, Ashleigh stands on her tiptoes and plants a kiss on my lips.

I'm sure it could turn passionate, but I never open my mouth to find out.

Ashleigh's confused and offended when she steps away and gives me a hard stare. "What's wrong?" she asks, getting ready to unleash her spoiled rich-girl pout on me. "Did I do something wrong?"

Aw, shit. I can tell from the look on her face that she's not prodding me to open up. She really thinks she has done something wrong. Ashleigh Lee is one of those girls who worries about every single thing and is obsessed with what others think of her. They're a handful. Their egos are as small as mine is big. Sometimes, I wish I could chip off a piece of my ego and fuse it into them. Every bit helps, right?

"Hey, Ashleigh," I say, forcing her to meet my gaze. Here's a hint: I don't say a girl's name like this unless I'm about to let her down. "You're a beautiful girl. Seriously. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

She's smiling, but traces of worry line her lips. You could probably tell Ashleigh Lee that she's the queen of your universe, and she would still doubt you. No wonder she's friends with Daisy DeMonte.

Honesty is the best policy, right?

“Listen, there’s someone else on my mind right now. I hate to tell you this late, but I didn’t think it meant anything. Sorry...”

I’ve never seen someone blink as much as Ashleigh does. It’s like every time a synapse fires in her brain, she’s gotta blink. Some kind of strange reflex. Wait, do I do that too? “Is it Daisy?” she meekly asks.

“Uh...” I wasn’t going to be that honest. What? You think I’m mean enough to tell the girl I’m on a date with that I think her best friend is hotter and more worthy of my time? Maybe my reputation is that bad after all... “Why would you think that?”

Ashleigh makes a face I’ve yet to see – a mix of disbelief and condescension. “That’s how it usually goes. Everyone likes her a lot. You two seemed to hit it off, so...”

“Hit it off? Were you even there?”

“You provoked a huge reaction out of her. She’s usually a lot more in control of her emotions. The only time she lashes out like that is when she thinks someone’s worth her time.”

“I see.”

Ashleigh readjusts her purse strap. “I’ve gotta get going. Thanks for lunch. I’m sorry for making this awkward.”

“Hey, don’t apologize. I kinda led you on.”

She looks at me as if I’m the sorriest bitch around. “Yeah, you did. That’s okay, though. Better for you to reject me now than in the middle of doing it. That’s

happened to me before.”

“Yikes.” How do you respond to that?

“By the way,” she says, hovering near my door. “If you try it with my friend, good luck. She’s not as easy as me.”

Was that supposed to be cheeky? To make me rethink sleeping with her? Because what the fuck. That merely makes me think she should leave. Harder. Leave harder, Ashleigh. This wouldn’t be good for either of us.

“Thanks for the warning.”

Ashleigh shows herself out. I’m left alone in my cozy apartment, and all I want to do is sit on the edge of my rumpled bed and think of Daisy. A woman I haven’t even seen since we had lunch hours ago.

It didn’t matter if she was pissed or trying to contain herself. Her eyes were made of the iciest fire I had ever seen. I know it’s cliché to say a girl’s blue eyes are like ice. Well, it’s very true in Daisy DeMonte’s case. Every time I made eye contact with her, the room grew about ten degrees colder, as if someone had drawn an ice cube down my arm. You know what that means, though: she’s extra hot in the places that matter most.

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Those chills take me now. They're exploding from within, blasting my heart down like the sinking ship it is.

Before I know it, I'm lying back on my bed and thinking about Daisy. Surprise! I'm turned on. The moment I reach beneath my shirt, wondering how turned on I am, I'm thinking of Daisy's head on my lap, her breath terribly close to my thighs.

And imagining her pulling down the front of that breezy sundress.

Showing me her breasts, which were more than nice to look at in a dress.

Kissing me hard, turning me into a wild bear that only wants her hidden honey.

Daisy would be the type of feisty woman who pulls off that tablecloth and all the cutlery on her terms. She'd do it just to hop in front of me and spread her legs, teasing me with her body that she touches in a rhythm only we women know.

"Fuck me, Lorde. Put me in my place and make me yours. Show me what it's like to be taken by someone worthy of my time."

Shit. My bra isn't worth my time. More like I should unzip my jeans and get this quickie with myself over with.

My middle finger moves up and down the length of my slit, right between my denim and my cotton underwear. I sigh, resting my head against the nearest pillow and imagining that it's Daisy's pussy I'm fingering instead of my own.

The whole restaurant would watch. Or maybe not. Who cares? Time has stopped so we can have our rough and furious fuck on a dining table. I grab those long, silky brown locks and pull. Daisy cries out, my hand buried in her pussy that only gets tighter as she readies to come.

I can see it. The look of sheer, feisty ecstasy on her face as she caves to my talents. She doesn't want to admit it, but it's the best lay of her life. (Let alone on a table, ahem.) Her big blue eyes gaze at me with speechless awe as she cranes her pointed chin over her shoulder and drinks in how calm I am as Ifuck her harder.

It's the only way to tame a spoiled heiress like her.

My groans of pleasure are only interrupted as I'm rudely reminded of my hand instead of her body wrapped around me. That I'm probably never going to experience a moment like this with one of the only women I've decided deserves everything I've taught myself in the bedroom after a life full of lusting after half the women I see.

Kill this fantasy, Lorde. You're only going to piss yourself off. There's gotta be someone else. Find that black book and call up the first available girl to come by so I can fuck her, thoughts of Daisy constantly intruding.

I don't want another girl. I want her. I want Daisy DeMonte's lips locked on mine... and possibly a few other places as well.

I jerk up on my bed. The most brilliant idea has entered my mind.

See, I've got an interview for my mother's latest movie to do in an hour. It's going to be the perfect opportunity to start setting in motion the only way I'll get Daisy DeMonte's hot, firm ass in my bed – and my tongue inside of her.

First, though, I've got something else to take care of.

Chapter 3

Daisy

I am currently not on speaking terms with Ashleigh, so I've been ignoring her calls since that so-called date. That doesn't explain why she's been incessantly ringing me all day. Suffice to say, I am ignoring her. The first few times I merely put her on silent. After the tenth time, I blocked her – temporarily! I'll be over this fit with her soon enough. It's not the first time we've been on these kinds of terms. Probably won't be the last, either.

Text messages blow up my phone when I'm not answering. Fuuuck. I shove my phone beneath my pillow and go back to doing my nails and flipping through my favorite tabloid.

I live and breathe for The Daily Social. Don't believe me? It's my homepage on all my devices. My maid knows to leave my physical copies on a silver tray outside my door, complete with iced tea and two vanilla wafers for me to enjoy while I flip through the pages and see who is up to no good these days. See who is wearing what and who is dating whom.

This month there is a page dedicated to the big wedding between Etta Coleman and her assistant-turned-fiancée Jamie Joy. I only know of Etta Coleman because Daddy does a lot of business with her. Don't know anything about her pretty fiancée, but I love her fashion sense. This month's big picture of her in some poufy pink dress and a fluffy white jacket. Her big, round sunglasses go great with her curly hair. Who does it for her? I bet it's Raul. I can pick out his styling from a mile away!

The next page is dedicated to the annual Down With Domestic Violence Gala spearheaded by Monique Warren, who had the wedding of the year until her BFF Jamie upstaged her. Monique is the real winner if you ask me. She's got a baby

coming. Of course, she somehow totally got knocked up before the wedding, but only Mama will say anything mean about it. Daddy agrees with her until he's alone with his buddies. Then he can't stop talking about what a catch both Helen and Monique Warner are. I hear she runs a fancy brothel. Mama hates her even more for that!

I turn the page. Eep! Do my eyes deceive me, or is it a rare photo of Kathleen Allen and her partner Ira Mathison? No way. You don't understand. These two do everything they can to avoid the paps. Their relationship is so private that some speculate they've been secretly married for months. I hope they are. They're such a darling couple, and the idea that they could hide something like that from the press makes me love Kathleen even more. I've had a major crush on her ever since she gave the commencement speech at my high school graduation two years ago. She went to the Winston Academy too but is way older than me – like, almost thirty.

She's the kind of woman I aspire to be. Not only is she a mega-rich heiress like me, but she's so incredibly classy and humble. (I know, I've gotta work on that.) In fact, isn't she the richest woman around here? Yet she's never flaunted it, except to cut huge checks to her charity projects. I was shocked to find out she started dating a player like Ira Mathison a year ago. Never thought she would go for someone like that. Isn't it amazing how a woman can reign another in? Oh, I know it's not a good thought to have. Life doesn't really work that way. Once an ass, always an ass. Yet it's a fun fantasy, this business of taming a wildling who could have any woman in the world – but it's you they're committing to for the rest of their life.

Ugh, and they look so good together. Why can't I have something like that?

One more time my cell phone rings. Fine, Ashleigh, have at it!

“What?” Can she hear my ire? I bet she can.

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“Hey, Daisy...” Ashleigh’s more sheepish than Mary’s little lamb. “What’s up?”

“Calling to grovel?” My voice is syrupy sweet. I instantly regret saying that, but here’s hoping Ashleigh doesn’t take it too personally. When I’m pissed at someone, I tend to come off as a huge bitch even when I don’t mean to. All I know right now is that I hope she’s sorry about what transpired the other day at the restaurant.

“Actually,” she begins, making my blood turn cold in my veins. Her tone is only a tad strange. I am not in the mood for whatever is going to come slap me in the face.

“Well? Spit it out, already.”

Throat clearing. Shuffling the phone. Cracks over the line. Get. To. The. Point.

“Have you seen The Big Hello yet today?”

I flip The Daily Social shut and look at my stack of weekly magazines accumulating on a coffee table near my bed. I have a ritual. I read one first, then the next, all in a certain order. The Big Hello is at the bottom of the list. One time some fucker wrote an article that I was pregnant with twins by two different guys at my university, so it can burn for all I care.

Some women gobble up romance novels every day. I need a hardcore dose of trash to start my day off well.

“Not yet,” I admit. “Why? Am I in it?” My nail polish almost falls out of my hand. “They didn’t say I’m pregnant again, did they? Last time Daddy and Mama almost

sent me to a nunnery at the mere prospect that I'm not a virgin." It's been three years, y'all. Getting laid was one of the best decisions I ever made. College has been so much sweeter for it.

Some tawdry giggle comes over my line. "There's an interview with Lorde Sheen in it. Don't get too upset, okay?"

"Upset?" My mouth twists into a sneer. "Why? Like I give a fuck about her."

Yet I'm already off my bed and rummaging through the stacks of magazines on my coffee table. When I find the right logo, I flip the magazine open and turn until I find a giant spread of Lorde Sheen looking like the smarmiest fucker in the world.

Asshole. Of course, she's got a full portrait. The media loves their Hollywood darling. I bet the interviewer was a single woman who had to clench her legs shut so she wouldn't jump Lorde's bones for some answers. It's hard to not imagine her riding that smug, pouty face while she asks these asinine questions on the page.

"How are you enjoying the east coast again? Any girls you have your eye on?"

Oh, good, we're cutting right to the chase.

"Definitely. I've had a few flings here and there, you know, the usual... but I have my eye on someone right now."

"Who might that lucky lady be?" "Don't ooze any more jealousy, lady. Otherwise, you might have to go to the gynecologist to get that checked out."

"Do you know Daisy DeMonte? She's always showing up in your fashion column, I believe. What I hear, though, is that she's nothing like the other prissy princesses of New England. I hear she's quite [omitted] and likes to [omitted], even with a few

people at a time. So, yeah, you could say that I'm interested in her! She sounds pretty kinky."

The magazine lands by my recently painted toenails.

"Daisy? You there?" My phone is still glued to my ear, although I don't think I'm moving anytime soon. "You okay? Should I come over? Maybe I can call my family's publicist to help you deal with this."

"I... she... that... bitch!" I pick up the magazine so I can throw it at the nearest wall. I'm not exactly a softball pitcher, and the wall isn't exactly close by. The magazine lands in the middle of the floor, opened to the smiling, guffawing picture of a darling daughter straight from the bowels of LA. What the fuck has she done! "How could she do this to me?"

"Look, Daisy, there's something you should know..."

I can no longer pay attention to Ashleigh. Down goes my phone onto my couch. My mind is racing with terrifying images: like my super traditional and conservative parents finding out about this quote and losing their utter shit in my direction.

Be absolutely assured that everything Lorde Sheen has said about me is a lie! Not only have I never... whatever she is implying! Fuck! Why are words omitted! What did she say? What is she trying to get at? Furthermore, why is she torturing me long after we met? Leaving the restaurant should've been the last I ever heard from her.

We are far beyond that now. Oh, she's about to get me in her face!

First, I must ground myself. Yes, this sucks. But I can't storm out of my apartment. There's probably an army of paps out there ready to snap pictures of me in complete disarray over what Lorde said in that tabloid trash.

I must set aside my rage for now. Deep breaths, girl. Prioritize, then rage.

My closet opens to reveal the outfits my stylist has put together for this week. I grab the one that was supposed to be for tomorrow: a mosaic black and white silk halter top with a short black skirt. I throw some of my nicer jewelry with it and start attacking my hair with a brush. Wear it down? Pull it back? Fuck it. I'm leaving it down and my hair can be happily tucked behind my ears. I double-check that I look presentable in my mirror, and on second thought add some subdued red lipstick and my tortoiseshell cat-eye sunglasses. Bam. Badass bitch and still ready to be papped for those stupid fashion columns.

After snatching some black pumps out of my shoe closet and picking up a black Chanel bag, I finally decide I'm ready to leave.

Ashleigh has kept calling me this whole time. I decide to answer on my way out the door. I need the fucker's address, right? She's ready to give it to me. Sounds like she's got it memorized, honestly. I bet you a thousand bucks she slept with Lorde. You may not be able to tell from meeting the mousy socialite, but she gets around – with girls, too. She was on a date with one of the nation's most notorious playgirls. Of course she slept with her!

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Why she's in such a hurry to give me Lorde's address so I can take her ass down is the real mystery. Maybe she was bad in bed or insulted her. More ammunition for me to kill Lorde.

As I suspected, a flurry of photographers await me outside. They snap pictures on both sides of me as I ignore them, stepping calmly to the sidewalk and hailing the first cab to pass.

Usually, I would have a driver to cart me around the city, since Daddy is always going on about the Evils of Public Transport. (Cabs qualify, in his mind.) No time for the driver today. I have things to accomplish, complete with me taking out a wet wipe to rub down the leather seat I'm about to sit on.

Someone save me. The cab driver is looking at me in his mirror, ready for some conversation. "Dressed to kill, huh?" I glare at him through my sunglasses.

The man won't shut up after I give him the address and we leave the pap-ridden street. I'm trapped in this hellhole for half an hour as we get caught up in traffic and the driver swears he's lost in a town he should know inside and out. I think he wants to keep staring at me. Does he think he has a chance? Sorry, pal. I only date Greek life hustlers and the kind of heirs my daddy thinks are good for me. (They're not.)

This whole time I'm thinking of something unsavory. Something my father mentioned about a month ago when he called me into his office and dropped a huge bomb.

Going to see Lorde Sheen isn't about my pride. It's about my family's pride, too. I

swallow and start counting bills as we reach our destination. Thankfully, I don't see any paps. Then again, who knows how they're hiding out these days.

After paying the ungrateful driver handsomely, I steal into the building, hoping to avoid any paps who might be lurking about. A doorman and receptionist both greet me. I can tell from the female receptionist's face that she recognizes me. Sure enough, a copy of *The Big Hello* is turned over on her desk. Great.

The doorman hurries to escort me up to Lorde's apartment on the third floor. The building is short and squat, a Mediterranean-style complex that could either be brand new or recently updated, who damn well knows. I didn't even know they had Mediterranean luxury apartments out this way. Of course, Lorde would live here. Probably makes her think of California.

As soon as the doorman is back down the hall, I slam my finger against Lorde's buzzer. And hold it.

Hold it!

"Coming!" comes a groggy voice. Don't care. Still holding down this buzzer. I hope she's internally screaming from the obnoxious sound. "For fuck's sake! Could you..." The door unlocks. I finally pull my hand back and cross my arms, face as stony as I can muster.

When she opens that door, she will see the Queen Bitch of her nightmares.

The door swings open. She's... shirtless.

My mouth drops open. Fuck it, I admit I'm gawking, because she's like a statue carved from old Italian marble – like the old shit my mother dragged me to see when we visited her country of birth. Lorde's tight sports bra is holding on for dear life to

those shoulders while drawing all of my attention to her pushed-up cleavage. And those abs?

Those god-damned abs?

Fucking. Delicious.

“Eyes up here,” she says, leaning in her doorway. I raise my flushed cheeks to her face. She’s wearing jeans, low-slung on her hips, and that perpetual grin is driving me crazy.

What kind of crazy? That I do not wish to admit.

“Well, well, well.” Lorde matches my crossed arms, covering her sports bra. Naturally, this flexes more than a few muscles. Kill me. “What a lovely surprise this is.”

Chapter 4

Daisy

Curses speckle my lips as I shove my way into her apartment. Lorde Sheen will not be showing me the exit today. I’ve got a new asshole to rip this piece of work, and...

Is it warm in this apartment? It’s warm in this apartment. I think steam might be exuding from my skin.

Oh, wait. That’s her skin. Apparently, she has emerged from the shower. A towel litters the floor and that thick hair is sopping wet. Are those water droplets on her chest?

Hello, there.

No! No hellos!

Lorde strolls in behind me, closing the front door with a soft click. “I take it you saw the article.” Her cheeks keep puffing out in contained laughter. She looks like a squirrel who thinks she’s oh-so-funny.

“You bet your ass I saw it!” Volume? Tone? Who cares about either? With a few short words, Lorde has me riled up again. Doesn’t take much! “What the hell were you thinking? How could you fucking do this to me? What have I done to you?”

I don’t want to showcase the panic and anger inside of me, but when I get emotional, it’s almost impossible. To think, my doctor put me on birth control back in high school to help me with this. I think it’s time to switch brands.

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Lorde feigns innocence with that stupid grin. “Just being honest,” she says, way too cheerily. “If anything, I’d think you’d be flattered. Didn’t I pay you a compliment?”

“A compliment!” Someone’s shriek echoes in Lorde’s apartment. It’s mine, isn’t it? Suddenly, I’m the big fat Italian stereotype I’ve been shrugging off for the past twenty years. To be fair, I haven’t heard this side of my voice since... Daddy...

Nope! Not thinking about it here!

“You said I was a kinky slut! You said I had threesomes and orgies and whatever the else the editor had to censor!” Those words sink deeply into me. My reputation. My honor. All ruined because of Lorde Sheen getting mad that I didn’t positively react to her sick jokes the other day. This woman... No, no, this isn’t a woman. This is a little girl. I don’t care if she’s a year older than me. She’s about as mature as twelve-year-olds discovering boobies in a Playboy magazine. “Do you know what this is going to do to me?”

“You mean you don’t do those things?” She looks me straight in the eyes and widens her smile. That’s it. I’m going to knock the teeth out of her mouth. See how many people want to take pictures of her now!

“No, I don’t, you God-awful asshole!” Tears burn in my eyes. My arms shoot into the air, my purse flailing at my side. “I’m a perfectly presentable member of society! I’m a part of the Young Women’s Club! My father holds a key to the city! I’m respectable!” Somehow, I keep my tears in my body. “Unlike you, Lorde.” Fed up with my obnoxious purse, I slam it onto her floor and stand up with a huff. I can’t see anything because of how blurry my anger has made my vision. I think it might be

colored red now, too.

However, I can make out that Lorde is not looking me in the face anymore. Her arms remain crossed in front of her chest, but one of those hands is going up to her mouth and stifling another wicked chuckle.

“I wouldn’t say you’re respectable at all right now.” There it is. The escaped guffaw, and a finger pointing right at my dress. “Can you say wardrobe malfunction? Or is it Miss Jackson if you’re nasty?”

I’m horrified before I even look down. Why. Did I. Wear this. Top? Because it’s betrayed me, one halter strap unsnapping and falling down my chest. Behold, Lorde, ‘tis my breast! Contained in a hot pink bra, but it doesn’t exactly cover much.

Of course. Of course my clothes are falling off my body around this ass. It’s like I subconsciously wanted to be half-naked like she is. With those stupid tits and those stupid six-pack abs and that stupid body wash wafting in my direction. Oh my God. Is that my hard nipple poking through pink fabric? I’m gonna hurl – then die!

Not before I take Lorde Sheen down with me!

I throw myself at her. No, not like that. My nails are extended, ready to draw blood, or to at least make it physically known that I am not a woman to be trifled with. I know I shouldn’t try this haphazard violence, but what else do I do? Cry in front of her? I’ll never! I’d rather be indicted for manslaughter than cry in front of Lorde Sheen!

She takes a huge step back. It’s not enough to make me miss her. All it does is make me trip in my black pumps while a snarl takes over my demeanor. Anger mounts. Rage boils my blood. Those tears are finally coming out and clouding my vision. I draw upon the last of my energy and lunge at her once more, crying out in the most

embittered frustration I've ever had the displeasure of experiencing.

Why do people do this? Why has Lorde singled me out for her bullying? Why is Daddy trying to control my life and future?

Why am I thinking of Daddy right now?

"Principessa," I hear his voice echoing in my memory. "It's time we talked about your future. Namely, who you are going to marry..."

I make contact with Lorde. She tries to push me away, but I end up landing against her chest, hot tears exploding on her skin. I don't expect her to wrap those toned arms around me, but she does. And I...

I feel safe. Protected. Independent.

Wait, what?

"Okay, wow." Lorde doesn't move, either to shove me away or bring me tighter into her embrace. "This took a turn. First your tit busts out, then you're crying..."

These tears transform into one last surge of anger. We've stumbled through a doorway, and with one last push, I've broken through her hold and fallen forward.

Right onto her freakishly big bed. Unmade, because God forbid someone makes her bed around here.

The soft sheets greet me like an old lover. I instantly roll over and wonder what thread count they are, because it's better than realizing I've popped through Lorde's bedroom door and thrown myself onto her bed.

“All right, this isn’t what I had in mind.” I don’t know what that means, but Lorde grabs my hands and pulls me back onto my feet. No, I don’t want to touch her again. I’d rather twist my arms and make my escape now. Nope. Outta here!

Except she’s still grasping me, attempting to force me to turn around so she can say something to my face.

“Get off of me!” I inadvertently hit her bicep. Because we’re already teetering against her bed, she loses balance and smacks against the edge – taking me down with her.

“Uh...”

My vision clears. Here I am, on Lorde Sheen’s bed... with the woman herself beneath my straddled thighs. I’ve got her chest pinned down with nothing more than my black miniskirt and the legs beneath.

“I hate you,” I whisper, looking straight down at her shocked countenance. “You have no right to say those slanderous things about me. You don’t understand what it could do to me. You think it’s funny?” I slap my hands on either side of her head, ass lifting off her chest but my sharp teeth coming closer to her nose. My hair slips off my shoulder and grazes her skin. “You think it’s cute destroying someone’s reputation and damaging her relationships with lies? Because it’s not. You had no reason to do that other than to sate your evil ego. I...”

Her eyes have glazed over. Not out of disrespect, but in what I think might be attraction.

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No. Noway.

Whatever words I was going to say next disappear. It's like Lorde's expression is passing onto me. By the way, did I know that I was straddling her hips like no big deal?

Oh. My. God.

She's smiling like this is the best day of her life!

Either Lorde Sheen is secretly into dominatrixes, or she's been this attracted to me for a while now. I don't know what to think. Other than that's a hand brushing against my skirt as if she's simultaneously trying to avoid touching me while also thinking about going for it. All I'm wearing underneath my skirt is a pair of black undies. It wouldn't take much at all for her to touch me right in my waiting...

What the fuck am I thinking!

I nearly topple over the bed when I realize I'm fantasizing about screwing her. Once I catch my balance again, I look down, meeting a burning, aroused gaze. "I want you," Lorde's blazing browns say. "I want to fuck you if nothing else."

No words necessary. This woman wants me. That's as clear to me as the heat rushing to my pussy and saying sure, why not?

Why not? Why not? How about because she's a total asshole and I have a very strict "don't fuck assholes" policy? How about because two minutes ago I was chewing her

out, and the one thing I shouldn't do is reward her stupidity with, uh, my pussy?

I bet she would love that. I bet she would love to slam me down on this bed and go at me until I incessantly come.

Wow. Where did that come from?

Only a few seconds have passed, but in those few seconds, my brain has done a terrible 180. We've gone from wanting to kill this jerk to wanting to fuck her!

As if she's on the same wavelength as me, Lorde lifts herself onto her elbows and meets my kiss halfway. Her lips are more locked on mine than mine are on hers.

She's a maniac. A kissing killer. Somehow, in ten seconds, she's managed to transform me from a rampaging psycho to a famished woman who wants nothing but her.

I've never experienced a kiss like this before. Let alone when I'm straddling a woman's lap, her body stirring directly beneath me, threatening to take me right here. I almost want her to. Wouldn't it be great if we could get this over with? Before my senses return to me and I realize what a horrible mistake this is?

Come on, Lorde. Take me over. Consume me. Fuck me like it's real.

Her tongue darts into my mouth, slamming against mine and attempting to penetrate my throat. Her chest pushes harder against mine, the soft material of her sports bra grazing the top of my exposed breast. I already feel like we're having sex. Everything is heating up. My skin. Herskin. That place between my thighs that realizes we have access to someone hungry for nothing but us. I bet she's as good as the tabloids imply. I bet Lorde Sheen knows how to fuck hard and rough, taking a girl for a wild ride until she bursts all over the place. The shivers!

I've yet to really react. Passively sitting here, accepting her hungry kisses, is all I can do. When her passion softens into a chaste bite to my lower lip, I sigh, eyes rolling back in my head. Now I'm the one initiating a kiss. Long. Meandering. Demanding compensation for what she so erroneously said about me in that article.

"You said I'm a kinky slut! You said I had threesomes and orgies and whatever the fuck else the editor had to censor!" Shit, I wish that was true. When I'm in the mood, I start fantasizing about all sorts of crazy scenarios. Right now, I'm fantasizing about the wild way Lorde Sheen could do me. I want the whole kit of nasty. The crass words, the spanks to my ass, the hair pulling, the hands pushing me down, the toys she probably keeps around here somewhere... even for her own pleasure...

I've never done that before. I want to do it right now.

"Knew you wanted me," Lorde groans against my lips. "You don't kiss like no prude."

"Do I look like one?" My bright red nails tug against my blouse, showing her my exposed breast again. If I rock right in her lap, the mound jiggles and we both appreciate that spectacle. I like the way it feels and based on how much she's heating up beneath my ass, she likes the way it looks. In case she still thinks I'm a prude, I kiss her, my tongue running along her perfect teeth and my hands exploring her torso. I tug on her sports bra. Her eyebrows mount her forehead as she takes the hint. Oh, boy. There she goes, pulling her bra over her head, shaggy dark hair shaking out – but I only have eyes for her breasts that taunt me to put them in my mouth and inhale.

I bet she squeals if you suck her nipples. Girly squeals. If she doesn't, I'll swear off sex.

"You know what I want right now?" I say without thinking, my thighs grinding against her jeans. "I want you to fuck me. Do it now, before I realize what the hell

I'm doing with you."

Her groan grows louder, arms encircling me, hands grabbing my ass and yanking up my skirt. I can't believe how strong she is. This woman could toss me like a stone and not break a sweat! Could she toss me around a bit? Throw me around and show me how unbelievable she is? I'm limber and eager enough to take it. Take it. That's what I want to do. I want to feel my clothes ripped from my body and her body surging into mine on the road to breaking every piece of me so I can be born anew.

"I would love to fuck you, Daisy." Oh, my God. Is that what my whole name sounds like from her? I didn't know my name could sound sonaughty. "What do you think I've been thinking about ever since meeting you?"

"I dunno. What?"

She lifts against me, her breasts brushing against my chest. I'm still wearing my top, so I can't feel her, but I can imagine. God knows I can imagine all sorts of things right now!

"I want to fuck this prissy perfect girl streak out of you. I want to fuck you so hard and good that you forget who you are and why you care so much about your image. Get me? You'll be squirming on me and begging for things that good girls don't know exist."

I'm melting in her arms. She's almost got me. I'm halfway to spreading my legs wider so she can do that to me.

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Then I open my eyes and see her determined look turn into that smirk I despise so much.

“Shit,” I whimper, embarrassed that I said anything at all. To her chagrin, I crawl out of her lap and momentarily curl up on the edge of her bed. My eyes catch a glimpse of her hard nipples hanging on her palm-sized breasts. Do you know what I want to do to them? Go on. Take a guess. Obviously, it has to do with unleashing her real power. “This isn’t supposed to happen.” I was supposed to give her a piece of my mind... not my ass.

She follows me off the bed and attempts to take my hand. She fails.

“I should go.” Where is my purse? Right. On the floor in the main room. I go there now, fixing my blouse along the way. I hazily take in the apartment around me. Clean. Detailed. Definitely a designer’s work, but it’s been well cared for. A tasteful painting of a half-naked woman in the living room reminds me of what almost happened.

I need to leave before I make a huge mistake that I’ll regret.

“Scared?” comes Lorde’s voice from the bedroom doorway. “One kiss, and you bail? I take off my bra and you dry up? Didn’t think I was that frightening.”

I try to ignore her as I pick up my purse and finish straightening out my clothes. Am I decent? I have to be decent when I leave her place. It’s bad enough I’m still thinking of the way she kissed me. Owned me for those brief seconds. I clear my throat. Shake my head. Anything to make the images go away. I refuse to carry them with me on

the way out of here.

Lorde approaches, but it only makes me move faster. I don't want her hearing the erratic pounding of my heart.

"Bye," I say, putting my hand on the front doorknob. I glance over my shoulder and see her looking anything but pleased. Sure, she thought I would end up in her bed, ass up in the air and begging her to fuck me until I couldn't scream anymore. Even so, I told her I wanted her to fuck me... but at least I kept some dignity.

She's behind me. Not trying to touch me, but an easy distance from me. "Bye, Daze." She looks away. "I'm sorry about the magazine. Really."

I slightly turn, taking in her half-naked body and the somber expression on her face. Is she really sorry? This is the most mature I've seen her. Lorde Sheen's reputation for being an unrepentant player in the queer scene is unprecedented. Nevertheless, I reach up and lightly kiss her on the cheek.

A small gesture. God, I'm a wreck.

I rush out after that, not wanting to take my chances around her again. As I fly down the stairs, I realize I could have easily turned that situation back there into something way more...more.

Never. I can never let that happen. Not only for my reputation but for the sake of my poor daddy's heart. I've disappointed him enough so far this year. Falling for a girl like Lorde would kill him.

Chapter 5

Lorde

The door slams shut. I stand here, totally gobsmacked over what happened.

I had her. Right there, panting in my bed, begging for my touch and kiss in a way that seemed too good to be true. Apparently, it was. Right when I thought I was going to fuck the girl of my dreams, she bailed on me with hardly an explanation.

For the second time, Daisy DeMonte has left me hot and bothered with no one to take care of me. I swear, she's going to drive me to extremes.

After another – cold – shower, I attempt to go about my day. First, I hit up the grocery store, instantly reminded of Daisy when I see the lobsters. Not just because she pinches like the devil, either, or because she gets lobster red when she's furious. It's what she ordered on our double date, not that she stayed long enough to enjoy it.

Then I have an appointment at the queer-owned salon I quickly discovered when I moved back into town. I listen to the chatter of the dykes and dolls around me, congratulating one another on either their most recent “wins” or the trips they're taking with their current lovers. When the full-on-drag-queen doing my hair asks about my recent dating life, having already read my interview, I simply say that things are heating up. What I wish I could say is that I scored with someone like Daisy DeMonte. For some reason, I'd feel bad about mentioning her name. I've done enough damage already. Irreparable? Fuck me. I think so.

I can't stop thinking about her no matter where I go. I replay what happened in my bedroom. The way she straddled my hips, teasing me with her poor pussy trapped in clothing. Does she know she left a wet spot on my jeans? That was almost hotter than my fantasies.

Her breasts had rubbed against my chest. Her lips were as eager as mine to kiss and suck. They wanted punishment. Everything begged to be punished with my body.

My whole week is like this. Every day I wake up thinking of Daisy. Not just her body or how she felt against me, but the sound of her voice, whether she's giving me a piece of her mind or laughing at something Ashleigh said. Her smile when she thinks I'm not looking. The fact that she's so fiercely protective of who she is. That woman has a ton of confidence for someone raised to be a spoiled princess. I'm not used to that. I'm used to girls like Ashleigh, or girls who think they're confident.

So consumed are my pathetic thoughts that I don't fool around with another girl. I'm given plenty of opportunities. I could call one up from my address book. Or I could nail a waitress behind a restaurant. Maybe that hottie at the bar Angus and I go to for a few beers. I bump into a supermodel at my mother's apartment. She's older than me, but I can tell she's ready to teach me a few things. I decline.

Angus invites me to a club, which would almost ensure getting laid with a star-struck girl. I don't go. If my goal isn't to get laid, I find little appealing about the clubs.

All I do is mope like a loser. I haunt social media on my phone, trying to see Daisy's private profiles which I've sent friend requests to. (She never responds.) Staring at her photo doesn't help me much. It only makes me crazy to see her again.

The lowest I sink is buying a local fashion magazine so I can check out pictures of her. The only ones I find are some candid shots of her having lunch with Ashleigh, wearing a vintage floral dress and those big cat-eye sunglasses. She looks so perfect, even when she's not posing. For once her lips aren't pouty. They're smiling widely.

Daisy probably hates this photo, because it shows a more realistic side of her. If there's one thing I've learned about Daisy, it's that she wants to be nothing but picture-perfect. She's building a brand with her image. What she's doing with it, I have no idea. I don't pretend to understand the scrutiny girls like her are under. I took a very different path in life as the daughter of someone rich and famous.

One night, while I'm staring at these photos like a stalker, I get a call from my mother.

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She and I have an okay relationship. We don't talk much since we're both busy people, but she's never been anything but nice and cordial to me. Even so, she doesn't call me unless she has a reason.

"You've got your invitation to my film premiere, right? You never confirmed with my agent." Of course, that's why my mother is calling. "It's important that you go! You missed the last one, and the trash the tabloids came up with... saying that we're estranged... don't do that to me again."

"What? You're a supporting character. Who cares?" I lean back in bed with the magazine smacked against my face.

"Who... Lorde! It's a series of vignettes with an ensemble cast! Everyone's a main character! Come on. You have to see me star in a movie with Pedro Pascal. It's been my goal to be in a movie with him for the past ten years."

I sigh.

"I know you hate that sort of thing. Do me a favor though, okay?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't be smart with me. This is Oscar bait and I need you in New York to support me."

I pull the magazine off my face and stare at the candid collage of Daisy and Ashleigh. Mostly Daisy, of course. Okay, all Daisy.

While my mother blathers, I read the caption. “Rich socialite Daisy DeMonte enjoys lunch with fellow heiress Ashleigh Lee. Ms. DeMonte is relaxing during her summer break from college, although rumor says she has a packed week in New York planned.”

New York, huh? Daisy’s going to be there?

My mother’s movie premiere happens to be in New York... such a fateful city.

“I’ll be there.” I interrupt my mother, already planning how I’m going to find and approach Daisy DeMonte. Throwing that trash into my interview was a good way to get her in my apartment, but it ultimately failed at getting her in my bed – or at least naked and with her legs spread wide open so I can explore every inch of her. Great, Lorde. Think about these things while on the phone with your mother, why don’t you? “I got the invitation. I’ll be there. We’ll take some pics for the press...”

“Oh, I know you’re busy,” my mother tersely says. “Don’t worry. I’m in the first vignette, so you can leave soon enough. You don’t have to stay for the whole thing.”

“Great, yeah. I’ll be there. Love you.” I hang up before she has the chance to reply. My brain is going five thousand miles a second, coming up with as many ways I am going to finally seduce Daisy DeMonte. I won’t be able to function until I see how far this attraction goes.

You hear that, Daze? You’re relaxing for now, but when I’m through with you, you’ll be a panting, writhing, dirty girl unable to keep her legs closed around me. I’m not just taking you in my bed. I’m taking you everywhere.

Prepare yourself. I’m coming to devour you.

Chapter 6

Lorde

Chapter 6

LORDE

The girl looking back at me is damn fine.

It's been a long day, and this evening will prove to be longer, I'm sure. After flying into JFK earlier this morning, one of my mother's drivers took me from one tailor to another. My mother insisted after seeing that picture of me in the magazine. "You will not show up to my premier looking like the shaggiest kid on the block. At least get it trimmed!" Didn't matter I had it cut back home. Nope. Had to go to my mother's favorite New York salon so some guy named Felipe could fix it.

Then it was off to pick up my tailored suit for the evening. My mother arranged that too. Funny. A lot of things had been arranged for me even though there was no guarantee I was coming. But I have to hand it to my mother: she didn't pick a bad suit for me at all. Valentino. Baby pink. Believe it or not, pastels look great on me. I don't wear them often because they don't really go for the vibe I project. But this pink Valentino suit begs to be paired with a lacy white bra that shows off my figure in the kind of ways that would scandalize my mother even if she weren't Oscar-baiting several judges. "You will be dressed nicely," she says before every event that she invites me to. "And you will be covered up." So I pick out a pale beige camisole to wear beneath the pink jacket. And, fine. I'll wear a damn bra. My breasts really should be on display in an outfit like this, but if it's for my mother...

Hey, I'm not shy. I'm the kind of woman who's naked the moment you suggest you want to hook up. I once camped out on a nudist beach for spring break. There are a dozen pervy pap shots of me standing topless next to a swimming pool in the Hollywood Hills. You can Google my name and see half of them in two seconds. My

bra size and nipple color have probably been featured in Jeopardy! questions at this point. (32B and pink, by the way. They match my jacket!)

I'm in New York for a few days, but I picked the day of my mother's movie premier to come here. As soon as today is over, I'm going into Daisy DeMonte mode. I received confirmation that she's in town when I saw her picture in a daily newspaper. With any luck, she'll stay a few more days. Plenty of time for Lorde Sheen to work her magic.

My driver for the evening calls and informs me that he's waiting downstairs. "Some flies are buzzing around," he says. Good to know. I dab on some perfume before grabbing my wallet and heading downstairs to meet him.

"Lorde!" A light flashes right in my face the moment I step out of the apartment building. "Lorde, is your mother with you? Are you excited about tonight's premiere?"

The driver wasn't kidding. Some serious flies are buzzing around my mother's New York apartment. I pull down my sunglasses, even though it's dusk. If nothing else, it'll keep that incessant flashing out of my eyes. I do throw them a few waves. It's the least I can do.

As soon as we're at the premier venue, I'm greeted with more damn lights. Way more. The cameras are so bad that an assistant pounces on me the moment I step out of the car and the driver zooms off to park until I need him again.

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“This way, Ms. Sheen,” the assistant says, pulling on my hand to get me to the red carpet promptly. Already, half a dozen big-name stars are milling about, posing for photographs and answering questions about their recent news and the movie they’re about to watch. My mother is nowhere to be seen. Didn’t she want some pictures together for the press?

“Lorde! Over here! Lorde Sheen!” I’m recognized. The carpet is barely beneath my feet, and already I’ve got a flock of vultures trying to climb over the ropes and get in my face. Security pushes them back with some stern words. These paps are ridiculous. Does security think a few choice words are going to keep these predators at bay?

The assistant abandons me. I see her standing only a few feet away, ready to do whatever I ask her to, but right now the focus is on me and how many dashing smiles I can shoot the cameras popping off around me. Good thing it’s something I’m a natural wonder at. The paps are content with a few poses this way, then that, my smile never faltering and my choice words regarding my mother’s movie – the title of which I can never remember – nothing but glowing.

Making one’s way down a red carpet is both mind-numbing and a total blur. You have to shuffle your way down, giving everyone their due attention that they crave. At the same time, it goes by so quickly that it’s like you blink and miss it.

Not today. Today, the red carpet walk is taking forever. Or at least that’s what it feels like the moment I realize who is standing in front of me in this molasses-slicked line.

Daisy. DeMonte.

Time stops. The clicks and yells of the paps fade from my hearing. I see lights, but all they do is illuminate her in front of me. A regal princess. Pure, untouched royalty.

She's wearing a dark pink gown that's skintight on top and effortlessly flowy on the bottom. It would be perfectly respectable if it weren't for the naughty slit showing off her toned legs. You know, the kind of legs that beg to be touched and grabbed in bed. I had felt them straddling my body not even two weeks ago. They had felt fantastic then. How great would they feel now?

Her light brown hair spirals on top of her head in an intricate twist sprinkled with sparkling gemstones. Diamonds and rubies, it looks like. They match her diamond teardrop earrings and the ruby necklace wrapped around her white throat. They're probably borrowed from the designer's storehouse. I bet they're besties.

Her throat is too white. You know what it needs? Some love bites from my famished lips. Now that would be a delight for the press, don't you think?

"Fuck," I mutter in awe. Daisy is easily the most beautiful girl here. There are Hollywood starlets heralded as the second coming of Marilyn Monroe present, yet it's some heiress who is only famous for being famous that has me speechless.

"Lorde! Who has your attention, Lorde? Who are you looking at?"

Dumb fucks! Who does it look like I'm gawking at? Am I the only one who sees the stunning beauty traipsing up the red carpet? Idiots. All of you.

For years, my mother has warned me to keep my more serious relationships private. She learned the hard way that the media will chew up and spit out any rumor it can latch onto. In my case, I rarely have relationships that I consider serious enough to keep away from the press. If I'm caught necking with some hottie in Miami, it's no skin off my back. I probably don't even remember her name.

This. This is different. Ever since I met her, Daisy has consumed my thoughts. Daisy DeMonte. How could I ever forget a name as beautiful as that? The girl of my dreams is standing before me. I don't think she's noticed me yet. Good. That means she can't take off right in front of the cameras.

They're snapping a million pictures as I approach Daisy from behind. Something has tipped her off, for she slowly turns, eyes widening as she takes in my form. She doesn't move.

"You are radiant tonight, Daisy," I say that low enough so no one but her can hear me. Her lips twitch into a smile. Snap! Snap! Snap! So many cameras going off. We'll be the main talk of the premier. My mother will riot, and I don't care.

"You clean up nice." There's a bite to her voice. Love it. Love her blooming smile more.

"What are you doing here?" Does Daisy know someone in the industry? Of course, she does. Who, though? There are dozens of A-list stars here tonight. She could know any of them. Or maybe it's her father who knows them, and she's here to represent the DeMonte empire. She bears that responsibility well.

She cocks her head at me. "I was invited." What? Does she think I'm accusing her of crashing the party? Because she knew I would be here? She had to have known that I would be here. My mother's in the damn movie! "It's good publicity."

Good publicity for what? Her brand, probably. I can think of a few other things that would look great with her brand. Ahem. I mean me. "Would you like to sit with me? I've got a great view of the screen, being one of the headliner's progeny and all."

Something sparks in her eyes before quickly dulling again. An assistant is politely asking us to keep moving. So we do. We take small steps toward the end of the carpet

while more guests pile up behind us. I do not touch Daisy, but I'm sure the people around us are getting quite the show while we dodge each other's looks and pretend that there is no sizzling sexual attraction between us. I can see it in her eyes. That hunger, returning.

"I thought our seats were assigned," Daisy says.

"My mother's a movie star. I can pull a few strings." I'll pull every string in the world if it means Daisy sitting next to me for two hours. And here I had planned to bail after my mother's vignette was over!

She glances at a group of giggling girls in front of us. No doubt she came with them. Will she stick to her original plan of hanging out with them all night? Or will she join me for a night at the movies... and maybe more?

I feel like crossing my fingers behind my back. Come on, Daisy, give in to your temptations once more. After this is over, I want to take you to any hotel in the city. Your choice. I'll treat your dress like it's a million dollars and your body like it's priceless. Doesn't mean I won't ravage the fuck out of it, but I promise I'll put it back the way I found it.

Daisy looks back at me. "All right."

All right...

All right?

All fucking right it is.

Chapter 7

Daisy

Is this really happening? Am I losing my mind?

Probably.

I had promised myself that I would stay far away from Lorde Sheen. I had almost lost my senses – and parts of my reputation – the last time I confronted her. To think, that was powered by anger. Now that I'm no longer angry at her? Who knows what could happen? Seeing her through my usual eyes is a lot different from seeing her through that red haze of hatred.

Yet here she is in New York City at her mother's film premiere. Of course she's here. I knew she would be, but I brought my arsenal of BFFs and intended on staying away from anywhere she might lurk. The red carpet is the only place we could bump into each other. Here we are!

Now, here's Lorde, offering her hand to me while my group of friends skedaddle on ahead. There's something in her demeanor that's making my heart thump so loudly that I'm afraid the whole world can hear it. I don't want to admit it, but I think it's the idea that she wants me so badly. Whether that's true or not... I have no idea. A part of me doesn't want to find out. Another part of me can't wait to be alone with her.

Plus, she's scorching hot! Especially in this pink suit that totally matches my dress... and I remember what her chest looks like beneath it. The rest of her? Oh, I'm game to

find out...

No, Daisy, no. Focus. Just because you accepted her invitation doesn't mean you have to follow through. Or, if you do, it doesn't mean you have to sleep with her!

I take Lorde's hand and let her guide me into the theater. Damn, her hands are fine but strong. I wouldn't say that I have small hands, but they're definitely contained by hers. Yet they're so soft. A woman who has never had to do a day of manual labor in her life, although she obviously spends a lot of time at the gym.

What are you doing? That voice in my head won't leave me alone. Now the whole world is going to see these pics of you two together like you're dating! What is Daddy going to say? What about Mama? Oh, girl, you're in deep shit when they find out you're out with a love interest who isn't your...

I stop those thoughts. No. Not going there. Happy place. Right here. Never thought my happy place would be with Lorde Sheen, but that's how the world spins sometimes.

She occasionally waves at someone she knows. I know no one now. I am so out of place. My place is in fashion shows and up-and-coming venues, not movie premiers like this one. Yet when my friend said she had extra tickets through her father the producer, I jumped at the chance, long before I found out what movie and who was starring in it.

Now I'm at Camilla Sheen's movie premier, paraded around by her daughter. We're in the dark theater with fewer photographers, but there are a ton of important people coming up, shaking hands, and saying hello. Clearly, Lorde knows them. Enough to call some of them by name and feel confident enough to introduce me. I don't meet any of the big stars, but I meet the director and some of the producers. The most interesting guy is the cinematographer, a man with frizzy hair and a blue polka dot

bowtie.

We reach our box seats. We're the only ones here. Occasionally, this man or that woman comes in and out, but it looks like the only other people who showed up for their assigned seats are another young couple I don't recognize. They're sitting on the other far side. The one light shining above us dims the moment Lorde and I take our seats, my hand still in hers. Or at least until I struggle with the hem of my skirt and need her assistance detangling it from my heel.

Her hand brushes against my ankle. How can such a thing feel so scandalous?

The stage below is dim as well. Applause breaks out as the stars of the movie stand in a single line across the stage. They bow in unison. Up here I can't see them well... until the projector kicks in, and suddenly Camilla Sheen is smiling on the giant movie screen.

She may be over fifty, but she's still one of the most stunning women in Hollywood. The press says it all the time. They also say she's remained a natural beauty. Ha. As someone who has been deeply entrenched in the world of plastic surgery for all her life, I can tell you that Camilla has had some work done. I can also tell you the name of her doctor from the curve of her nose. He's one of the best in the business, so I'm not surprised the press can't tell she's familiar with rhinoplasty.

The rest of her is pretty natural, though. She's wearing a bright, sparkling gold dress that accentuates her tanned skin and the fluffy blond locks sprouting from her round head. She has a million-dollar smile that instantly reminds me of her daughter's.

Camilla Sheen is the kind of woman I want to look like when I'm her age. I may be young now, but I'm fully aware that this beauty is fleeting. My goal is to hopefully not have a total meltdown when I'm twenty-eight and get so much work done that I no longer recognize myself in the mirror.

Lorde's mother begins the opening speech by thanking everyone who came out to watch her new movie. One of her costars reminds her that it's not her movie, and the whole theater laughs, including Lorde and me. We exchange fast glances. Did I mention that my hand is still in hers? Well, not anymore. I politely take it out and curl it in my lap. I may be on a private balcony with Lorde Sheen, but I will retain some tier of ladylike qualities.

The stars vacate the stage as the movie begins.

It's a series of vignettes about the different kinds of romantic love people can experience. The first one features Camilla as a woman going through a midlife crisis... and her young, college-aged daughter. They both fall in love with the daughter's professor. Shenanigans ensue.

"Did you know..." Lorde's whisper startles me, "that Stephanie May was originally supposed to play the daughter? Not kidding. The contract had been signed and everything when her scandal broke out."

"Really?" I remember that. Stephanie May was one of the biggest up-and-coming actresses around. I had met her a few times at some functions. Even exchanged numbers with her. Then it came out that she had lied about her age and had a secret baby somewhere. I don't remember all the details, but I do remember it annihilating her career. I don't recognize the new actress in the movie at all.

The vignette ends with both mother and daughter deciding they don't need the professor who was leading them both on. They drive off into the sunset in Camilla's Thunderbird, laughing and talking about California. Applause ripples through the theater.

As the second vignette starts, a hand reaches for mine in my lap.

Why am I surprised when I look down and see that it's Lorde's? I shouldn't be surprised. This is a woman who has been seriously flirting with me since I went to her apartment. She came up to me on the red carpet, in front of every pap in America, and asked me to sit with her. People are already going to be gossiping.

Not to mention, this was the woman I was making out with and thinking about fucking. In fact, we were so close to doing that nasty deed that I still tremble thinking about it.

Like right now. So many trembles.

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I don't mean to give her an encouraging look in the darkness of our balcony. Yet I do. It's like I can't help myself when I'm around her. The moment those dark eyes pierce my soul? My legs spread open and I turn into a slobbering mess.

It's only handholding. Right? So, why is my heart still thundering in my chest while some has-been actor yucks it up on that huge screen? I can't even focus on the movie anymore. I don't know who these actors are. Bit before my time, you know? Why should I work so hard to pay attention? The other couple isn't paying attention. They're getting up and exiting the balcony, snickering over some private joke between them.

My perverted brain imagines them sneaking off to make out somewhere. Meanwhile, Lorde Sheen has decided that holding my hand is way too innocent for a playgirl like her.

Her fingers slip off my hand. At first, I'm sad to see it go.

Then it lands on my thigh. My inner thigh.

No prelude. No touching my knee or the outer parts of my leg. Lorde's going straight for the kill, using the slit in my long dress to her advantage.

The air is thick and hot. You know what else is hot, Daisy? No! No way. Not going there. Stop it, brain.

I make the mistake of looking in her direction. She's staring at me. Not at the theater below us or the movie projected onto the screen. Me. Only me, as if I'm the only

thing in the world worth gazing at.

For as warm as it is in here, I'm frozen in my seat. I'm not powerless, but I'm immobile as Lorde's fingertips graze against my underwear and tease my aching slit. No, not the one in my dress. The one in me.

My clit wakes up, firing off a billion signals to my brain. Hey, yeah, hey girl, let that happen over here! I bite my lip and suck in my breath. Lorde touches my thigh and my slit at the same time, a brilliant cacophony of sensations that wants to destroy me. In public, no less!

She inches toward the top of my underwear, finger-tugging at the fabric. Her eyes remain on me, even though I now look straight ahead into the blinding darkness of the theater. Lorde Sheen is waiting for me to tell her no. To tell her to back off and stop touching me so intimately. I can't. No matter what I do, I can't say no. Because I want this.

Heat engulfs my thighs. Tingles... so many damn tingles spread through my body. My nipples are suddenly sensitive. I'm not wearing a bra with this dress. Behold, my nipples poking through pink fabric. Lorde sure as hell is beholding them. What is she thinking of? Sucking them? Biting them? How badly does she want me naked? How about turning in my seat and pulling aside my dress so she can bang me right here, with her mother somewhere around? Is that other couple ever coming back? Not that I want an excuse to put a stop to this. Not that I need someone else... some strangers... to hold me accountable while I dive into folly.

My breath is sharp in my nostrils when her finger finds the width of my lingerie. Lorde also sucks in her breath. She's found me hot and wet, after all. I've all but advertised how willing I am to have her touch me. Finger me. Make me come; make me hers.

I hate that line of thinking. That I'm somehow hers. The last thing I want to be is someone's possession. It's what I've been running from for so long. It's what I'm afraid of whenever I go back home and my father says he has "big news" for me. I am not a possession.

Yet...

I want to be hers so badly.

Is this some biological fuckery? Something in my brain turning me into a sex demon whenever I'm around Lorde Sheen? Like I'm some lowly animal that goes into heat and demands a healthy she-beast to keep her brain filled with orgasmic dopamine and some primal twist on reproductive stupidity? To find a way to tell and show the whole world that I'm hers?

Lorde is a brazen, brash woman. I shouldn't be surprised that a girl like her, who is always with someone new in the papers, is pushing aside my lingerie and running her finger along the wet skin of my nether lips.

A million thoughts burst into my mind. This empty balcony. Asking me up here, knowing that we would more or less be alone... did she plan this? Did she think that because I made out with her I would be easy? That I would give up sex like she does? She would not be my first. I'm adept enough at sex to know what I want and when I should have it. Should.

She leans in close and whispers into my ear. "You're wet, Daze."

"Thank you for the professional commentary," I mutter. "And it's Daisy." Just because she's trying to finger me doesn't mean she gets to call me "Daze."

"That's good. Because I would like nothing more than to take you out of here and

somewhere even more private. How about a hotel? I'm dying here. I want to know what this tastes like." She rubs my naked slit.

I shudder. "I bet you would." Few have ever offered to eat me out. I wouldn't mind it.

"Then do you know what I would do?"

No. Don't meet her gaze. That's what she wants. "What? Do tell?"

Her teeth touch my ear, and my shudder turns into a full-body groan. "I would fuck you so hard that everything would spin in front of you for a whole week. I wouldn't let you walk away from my bed unless your thighs were sore and your pussy begging for mercy. I've been thinking about you nonstop since you teased me in my apartment. You wouldn't have to do anything. I'll do all the work. Whatever you desire, Daisy, I'll give it to you. Tonight."

I close my eyes. "Would you give it to me until I came?"

"Absofuckinglutely."

"How would you give it to me? Paint me a picture, Lorde."

"It doesn't matter. I'll take you lying down, kneeling, or riding my strap-on like a cowgirl. Once I'm inside of you, I won't care what it's like. I won't stop until you're screaming my name in pleasure. I want all of me in you. I want you to know what it feels like to have me give you something so sinful that you've never dared to have it before."

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Lump after lump tumbles down my throat. I'm so aroused that she could plunge her finger inside of me and I'd barely notice. "What makes you think I've never gone that hard?"

"Because you've never met a woman worthy of having that honor. Until me."

This arrogant shit is going to end me!

"Oops," she hisses in my ear, that damned finger pushing ever so slowly into me. Even though my legs are hardly apart, Lorde has no problems spreading my nether lips and dipping her finger into the source of my wetness. I grasp the armrests and allow my eyes to blur. There is no one else in this theater except for Lorde. "Well, how about that? I'm inside of you, Daze. Right where I've wanted to be since I first met you."

Another finger joins the first. Because any woman who is adept at fingering knows you need at least two to accomplish anything.

"Was that a hate fuck you wanted? Is that all you've wanted until now?" Somehow, I'm able to put the pleasure grazing my clit out of my mind. I do know that the other couple is due back at any moment. Right? We should cut this out before we get caught and I'm embarrassed out of my mind.

"I've never wanted a hate fuck." Lorde lightly bites my ear. The combination of her slowly fingering me is not only easing my legs open through the slit in my dress but making me slide ever so slightly down my seat. My right hand releases the armrest and massages her left leg. She intends to make good on her promises. All I have to do

is say yes.

“Then what is it you want, exactly?”

I rub her thigh through her soft trousers. What designer is she wearing? Valentino? How suave. Good thing I’m not impressed by designers. I won’t have any qualms ripping this fabric off her hot body!

“I want you to keep doing that. Mostly, I want to fuck the priss out of you.”

At first, I thought she said something else. When I realize what she did say – while her fingers continue to fuck me and my hand is encircling her thigh for a glowing round of mutual masturbation – I am struck with the idea that part of the reason Lorde Sheen is attracted to me is because of my image.

To be fair, isn’t that what attracts me to her as well?

She’s rubbing me faster, harder now. My thighs are on fire with a need to come. I don’t doubt she’s feeling much of the same way based on how tense her body is. Her thigh is so rigid that I can barely fit my hand around it. Granted, I have small hands, but...

There’s only one way to settle this. How badly does she really want me? I must unzip her to find out.

“Oh...” Her growls are infectious. Or maybe that’s me growling by now. “You may be a stuck-up princess, but you’re no stranger to pussy, now are you?”

I know what she’s implying. I choose to ignore it and instead smile in her direction, my hand pulling aside her thong so I can touch her flesh. Warm. No, hot. Light fuzz of hair. Wet.

“For a woman who claims to have bedded many, you sure are taking your time in making this one come. Or maybe you’re not as good as you think you are?”

Them be fighting words. Good.

I’ve barely begun to stroke her when she’s going harder at me, her fingers taking me two knuckles at a time. Perhaps that doesn’t sound too interesting to some of you, but you best keep in mind that Lorde has the kind of digits that more than make it a delectable experience. I can safely say that none of the others I’ve been with were this good at fingering me even when my legs were spread wide open and their tongues were right on my clit!

“You better deliver,” I mutter. “If I’m going to let you put your fingers in my pussy, I better get something good out of it.”

“Your wish is my command, your highness.”

I close my eyes and focus on the pleasure spreading through me. The source is Lorde’s dexterous fingers plunging in, the rest of her hand rubbing against my clit and my wet folds. I’m about to crumble from the inside. All I want is to throw myself into orgasm. As if I were home alone, safe in my bed and touching myself. Instead, it’s Lorde touching me. Lorde. Sheen.

The girl who pissed me off so badly that I stormed into her apartment and proceeded to make out with her.

“Look at me,” she commands, making my eyes snap open as I approach the cusp of climax. “Look me in the eyes when you come. I want to know what you look like.”

While making me come harder, I’m sure! Because what other effect is this supposed to have on me? I’m looking right into Lorde’s passionately dark eyes in a darker

room in one of the most respectable movie theaters in America. Her lips slightly part. So do mine. We don't dare kiss when someone could look up and see us in this moment. It's bad enough they would catch us locking gazes while we finger each other. Yup. That's what my hand is doing now. Rubbing her whole slit and searching for her clit – oh, there it is. She jerks, sighing a moan that I barely hear. Between her gaze and that, I'm about to...

“That's it.” Lorde's voice is right in my ear but also a million miles away. Orgasm hits me, my inner walls closing in tightly around her fingers, refusing to let them go until I'm done riding out my pleasure. My eyes want to close. They can't. They're too busy looking for Lorde's approval... which they get if I can count on that grin to be telling me the truth. “Come for me, Daisy. Come undone.”

Composure. Carefully trained composure I've been practicing since I was a girl in the world of the rich and famous. That's the only thing keeping me from moaning on this public balcony. Do I want to, though! I want to thrust hard against Lorde's fingers. I want to grab her wrist and feel it tremble in my grasp. I want to kiss her so hard that she throws me down on the floor and fucks me senseless. My thoughts are consumed with more than fingering while I ride out a long orgasm.

Lorde sits back in her seat, fingers going to her lips as she licks me off them. Her gaze never leaves mine. She's making love to her fingers like she probably wishes she could make love to the place they just were.

“You're exquisite, Daisy DeMonte.”

I crash back to reality.

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Oh my God.

What have I done?

I snatch my hand out of Lorde's pants. The closer my hand gets to my face, the more I smell her natural scent. It's so heady that my instincts tell me to fall face-first into her lap and go for it for all we're worth. What the fuck!

"You okay?" The spark is gone from Lorde's eyes. "Did something happen?"

Yeah, I let you finger me, asshole!

Holy crap. Holy shit. In a theater? At her mother's movie premiere?

What the fuck am I doing!

"Daisy?"

I fix my clothes before standing up. Before Lorde can ask me what's wrong again, let alone attempt to take me by the hand, I'm gone from the balcony and taking off for no place in particular.

You're a bad girl and you should feel ashamed! I'd tell my conscience to take a hike, but I have no business telling that piece of shit anything right now.

Chapter 8

Lorde

Did that happen? Did I finger Daisy DeMonte in plain sight? Furthermore, did she give me a few complimentary touches for my diligent efforts?

Ho, boy.

It takes about five seconds to realize she's run out on me. Well, me and my unzipped pants, which I quickly fix so I won't embarrass myself when I race after her. Which I do, by the way. I catch glimpses of her brown hair and pink dress as it disappears around corners and past guards.

"Daisy!" She never responds. "Hey! Wait a sec! Let's talk!"

Me? Talk? I must be high on her pheromones because Lorde Sheen doesn't talk unless it's dirty foreplay.

Daisy bursts into the lobby and stalls outside the main entrance. She probably doesn't know where to go or if she should contact someone.

As I'm about to approach her and suggest we find somewhere private to talk, I bump into the one person I was hoping to avoid for a while.

"Lorde! Well, fancy that!"

I grimace, eyes darting between Daisy's faraway figure and the woman now standing between us. "Mother," I say with a sour grin.

Daisy turns around, gasping at the sight of my movie star mother and me conversing not too far away. I count my lucky stars that she's not running away in terror.

“So good to see you here again.” My mother pats my arm and catches where I’m staring. “Who’s that? Some charming friend of yours?”

My throat is so dry that it feels like swallowing sandpaper whenever I try to speak. Here’s the thing: I have never, ever brought a girl home for my mother to meet. I have never voluntarily introduced her to a girl I’m sleeping with, or even casually dating. Nope. Not ever. It’s never been any of her business. Besides, I don’t want to get her hopes up. She would never understand that the women I’m with are nothing more than temporary acquaintances.

Sure, she knows that I have quite a voracious appetite and reputation. She’s even bumped into some of the girls I’ve dated and had flings with, but I’ve never introduced her to a girl I’m currently pursuing, let alone the girl I just fingered. Hopefully, she can’t tell what I’ve been up to. I would die.

“Mom,” I try to stay gracious as I suck Daisy into this terrifying fold. “This is Daisy DeMonte, of the department store chain.” I step aside, and my mother instantly gravitates toward the woman I would call my date. Run, Daisy. Why did you ever stop running? “Daisy, this is my mother... Camilla Sheen.”

Daisy shakily raises her hand for a friendly greeting. “Pleased to meet you, Ms. Sheen. I love your work.”

“No, pleased to meet you, sweetheart.” My mother’s eyes narrow as she scrutinizes Daisy’s appearance, from her coifed brown hair to her powdery pink dress. What ensues is one of the most awkward minutes I’ve ever endured around my mother. This is a woman who has read all about my exploits in the tabloids and I’m sure has heard some naughty things on the grapevine. My mother is sexually liberal – how else do you think I came about? – but it can’t be pleasant to hear these things about your flesh and blood that you birthed during the peak of your acting career. What’s killing me is that Daisy isn’t anything like the other girls I’ve dated. There’s no

reason for my mother to tear her apart with a mere glance. Yet here we are, and all I can do is rehearse how I'm going to apologize to Daisy later. If she'll even talk to me, that is.

"I like your style, Ms. DeMonte," the venerable Camilla Sheen says after that agonizing minute. "Fresh, but elegant."

I sigh in relief. Daisy manages a small smile of appreciation. She has no idea what bullet she's dodged by not making my mother think she's some flashy heiress who barely knows how to slap together an outfit.

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“Thank you so much, Ms. Sheen.” Daisy regains her feisty countenance now that she has my mother’s approval. Great. Now they’re going to gang up against me, aren’t they? “You’re stunning as well. Are you wearing Cartier?”

A delicate hand flutters to my mother’s neck, where a thick necklace encrusted with diamonds rests. “Indeed, I am. You have a good eye.”

So much relief right now. I was expecting the absolute worst with my mother, having never introduced her to someone before... and considering the state Daisy was in when she ran away from me, I had no idea how she would have handled this on the fly.

My good mood may have come too soon, though, because my mother suddenly bursts into a slew of questions, the first of which I can’t answer.

“So!” She glances around the theater lobby, probably searching for some cameramen to flash a smile to. Or, God forbid, grab Daisy and me into a motherly embrace so we can look picture-perfect for tomorrow’s gossip columns. Or maybe I’ll be shoved out of the way entirely so she and Daisy can hit the “HOT” lists on the fashion pages. I wouldn’t put it past her. My mother loves her exposure. “Did you enjoy the movie?”

Daisy blushes such a deep crimson that she almost turns purple. I, on the other hand, am used to playing this game with my mother and can give her my opinions uncensored.

“Loved it, Mom,” I say. “Although, I think Daisy may have liked it even more than I did. Every time I looked at her, she was flushed and fanning herself through the sex

scenes.”

Daisy gasps. “There were sex scenes?” she whispers in my direction. Uh, duh. Did she miss the part where my mother walked into the professor’s office and ripped off their clothes?

I laugh. Daisy looks like she wants the earth to swallow her whole, but not before she smacks her satchel against my arm. As always, I appreciate getting a rise out of Daisy DeMonte. Not that it’s hard or anything.

My mother is more than shell-shocked over this playful exchange between us. That’s right. This is something not even the tabloids have been able to capture between girls and me. Anytime we played for the cameras it was always so forced and posed that my media-savvy mother must have noticed.

Her perplexity is soon replaced with a dreamy smile. “Yes, that was done quite artistically, don’t you think?”

Let me tell you, I had the great misfortune of seeing my mother’s cleavage pop out of her blouse before she disappearedbeneath that desk, and nothing about any of it screamedartisticto me.

But I can’t resist the opportunity to torment my sweet Daisy even more.

“Indeed,” I say, somber. “Daisy is artistic herself. That’s probably why she got so into them. I swear I caught her panting at one point.”

Daisy’s pretty pink lips drop open. My mother laughs, although is shortly interrupted by a loud photographer calling out her name. She politely excuses herself to tend to the world at large, leaving me with my date who looks like she wants to slaughter me.

“Wasn’t that good fun?”

I don’t get the reaction I thought I would.

No playful banter. No light slug to the arm again. I don’t even get a joke at my expense.

What I get is hot tears of humiliation and a snarl in her throat.

Before I can react, her hand hits my face with a crackling smack. Daisy spins around and storms off for the women’s room while I’m left to stand here and nurse the burning sensation spreading through my cheek. That slap still echoes in my ears!

“Trouble in paradise, Lorde?” a photographer shouts at me. Of course, this whole debacle has been caught on camera.

It’s all I can do to not send them a million daggers from my eyes and shout back, “How’s that for a hot story!”

Chapter 9

Daisy

I don’t think I can eat another scoop of ice cream for the rest of my life.

For the past week, I’ve cooped myself up in this stifling apartment, eating junk food when my stomach aches get too bad. Basically, I’ve been existing on Ben & Jerry’s Cookie Dough and a box of donuts Ashleigh brought over a few days ago. She claimed to be worried about me. Not worried enough to block me from seeing Lorde Sheen that first time!

The donuts are all that are left now since I can't fathom eating another spoon of ice cream. Since they're so old – and the box has been opened, yay – they're getting moldy, and I won't risk it.

This is when I realize I can't stay in my apartment forever.

Never mind that everyone, from Ashleigh to my housekeeper to my stylist, has warned me to keep to myself for a few more days. This past week has been nothing but a shitstorm of blogposts, tabloid articles, and terrible high society gossip that no one will cop to having – but you know everyone does it!

It all started with Lorde's damn interview. Then someone took a photo of me arriving at her place, even though I swear there were no paps around. All hell subsequently broke loose after the movie premiere in New York.

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Photos of everything exist. Everything. No, not the naughty shit we did up on the balcony, but everything else that mattered. God. If anyone knew about me trying to finger Lorde or her touching me until I came... I would die! Not to mention my parents arriving to throttle me. I think my mother would literally head to the nearest cathedral and light a candle to the Virgin Mary to make this all right.

Speaking of my parents, they desperately want me to go home and hide out there for a while. The only thing on my side is that my father doesn't bother with the tabloids or gossip, and my mother quickly found out how many deplorable lies they spew when she moved here to marry my father. Back in Italy, she only had to worry about the busybody gossips in her affluent village. Here? She had barely stepped off the plane in 2000 when the tabloids were saying she was having affairs with five other men. My mother was a proud, God-fearing virgin when she married my father, so you can imagine the strokes she had upon facing the American gossip mill.

So they don't care... for now. Except my father has called me no less than once a day to suggest I go to the family estate to "relax." Oh, and there's someone there he wants me to interact with. Maybe take a few pictures with. Like I don't know what he's up to after the stunt he pulled over a month ago...

My maid has brought me my usual stacks of magazines, but I can't bring myself to look at them. My old favorite *The Daily Socialis* headlining with a picture of me as red as a tomato while Lorde implies to her mother that I am a perverted slut.

To Camilla Sheen. The woman who has so many Oscars she needs a walk-in closet to display them. And Lorde was teasing me about fingering me in front of her famous mother? Can I die already?

Pictures of me and her are in every tabloid. On every blog. On the lips of every idiot who thinks they know all about us now. People have been tagging me on Facebook about it. Who does that? Isn't it bad enough that there are a million articles speculating why I slapped America's favorite hot mess?

Meanwhile, I'm not letting myself think about her.

Which means I try to stop it, but sometimes those toxic thoughts still slip through.

On one hand, I'm too embarrassed to even acknowledge what we did in the theater, but on the other... it's quite telling that she hasn't said a single thing about this kerfuffle to the media. From the sounds of it, the media shitstorm has sent Lorde Sheen into hiding. Where? I have no idea. Maybe her shitty apartment, or one of her mother's many homes. Maybe she's in Boca porking some floozy who is so happy to be another notch in her metaphorical bedpost. God, why am I thinking about that? Why am I letting it make me angry?

The whole thing is only mildly shocking. I was expecting a photo of her leaving a club with a model totally shitfaced by now.

I don't let myself dwell on it too much, because Lorde Sheen is a complete, utter asshole. I don't want anything to do with her. I swear it.

My phone keeps ringing – and has been all week – but I don't answer it unless the ringtone says it's Daddy or Ashleigh. Not many people have this number. I don't know if the media got a hold of it or what, but I don't want to take my chances. At this moment, I'm too busy throwing magazines into the recycling bin.

However, staring at my moldy donuts makes me realize that something has to give.

A sigh powers me through the next hour. I take a shower and go sit down to do my

hair and makeup. Somehow, even though I've been existing on junk food for the past week, I seem to have lost weight. My cheekbones are jutting out even more than usual, and it's not a good look for me. Now if I get papped, people will say that I have an eating disorder.

On a whim, I pick up my phone and check my messages. I press play on the first one out of thirty-seven.

I pick up my small makeup brush and start applying eye shadow. I nearly stab myself in my left eye when I hear Lorde's voice.

She's pleading with me. Pleading! I don't catch any of the words because I'm trying to concentrate on my makeup, but that is a pleading tone in Lorde's voice. I should turn the message off and delete it. I don't. I tell myself it's because I'm too stubborn for my own good. Yes, that's it. It has nothing to do with her deep, sexy voice. The voice that was murmuring all that nasty shit into my ear while she fingered me...

Lorde is apologizing. She's sorry. She fucked up. She was nervous about me meeting her mom. She feels strange around me. She trips over her words in a rush to get them out, and it's kinda cute, I guess.

Next, she attempts to flirt with me. Not going to work. If anything, it's making me angry. Then again, I can't say I hate hearing a ton of compliments hurled in my direction after my week of endless self-pity.

Now she's annoyed because it's been almost a full week of me not answering my phone and she really, really wants to talk to me. Did I know it's even worse for her because Ashleigh refuses to give her my address? Poor thing! Smart Ashleigh.

Yet... why am I kinda mad that she hasn't given her my address? Sure, I'd be pissed based on principle, but then Lorde would be here...

Everything Lorde says goes from angry, to frustrated, to flirtatious and then some more apologizing for everything she previously said. By the end of it, I am completely exhausted. My makeup also happens to be finished, and it only takes me a few minutes to get dressed in something simple. All that's left is to take a deep breath and prepare myself for my first foray into the outside world after a week of seclusion.

I figure some shopping never hurt anybody, so I call my driver and he confirms that he'll be waiting for me downstairs in a few minutes.

Even though I know better than to leave early, I am so restless that I can't take being cooped up in here any longer. I grab my purse and sunglasses, toss my cell phone into my bag, and take off for the fresh summer air.

As soon as I step out into society, I regret my decision. A whole swarm of photographers are camped out in front of my building, and I can barely shade my eyes with my sunglasses before they start snapping their cameras in my direction.

Questions regarding Lorde are fired at me. I ignore every single one of them. This isn't my first walk of shame, although I am sure to keep my chin pointed high in pride as I approach the sidewalk where my driver will be.

That's when I am convinced that I have gone insane. Because that's the only explanation for seeing a woman who looks a lot like Lorde Sheen behind the tree across the street.

The paps must be so consumed with staking out my building that they never thought to look behind them. They thought Lorde Sheen would stroll right up to my door, did they? Pshaw. As if. Until a few minutes ago, I was led to believe she didn't even know where I lived! (Whose ass do I kick? Ashleigh's?)

My driver pulls up and helps me get into my car. Photographers are to one side, and

Lorde is to the other, still keeping to the shadows. Against my instincts, I climb to the other side of the back seat and stare at her through the window. The weirdo stares back. She motions to the street behind her.

I tell my driver to drop me off two blocks over and to drive elsewhere to keep the paps off my tail. If nothing else, I will get some closure with Lorde. It's time to move on from this haphazard tryst.

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I get out of the car and hustle into an empty alleyway. Lorde meets me there not two minutes later, appearing out of thin air.

“Fuck, you scared me.” I clear my throat because her mere presence is embarrassing me. Like I need a crazy reminder of everything that’s happened in the past two or so weeks. Wait, how long has it been again?

“Sorry about that. I really need to talk to you.”

I’m afraid to look up and meet her gaze. Her closeness alone is making me lose my mind. I’m angry. Cheated. Annoyed. Sexually frustrated. Because there’s still that underlying attraction between us. If I look up and face it? I’ll lose any resolve I had when I came out of my building.

At least God blessed humanity with sunglasses!

“Daisy.” She says my name in a breath, and my heart does this wild thing in my chest. Hearing my name on her lips like that... she should say it more often. It sounds damn good.

“Yes?” I remain stern. Or at least my tone is, anyway. Inside, I’m wobbling.

She starts to speak several times but halts before the words spill out. Finally, she says, “I’ve been a jerk. Sometimes, it’s hard to get out of my own skin... I think you drive me crazy.”

I raise my eyebrows, not bothering to say a word. Yet I use my icy gaze to implore

her to continue.

“Screw it. I don’t know.” Her frustration would be cute if it weren’t for the circumstances. “I... really like you. I can’t explain it. From the moment we met, I’ve had this compulsion to push you to your limits. I realize now I went about it entirely the wrong way.”

“I’d say.”

“I’m serious. The way I think about you is completely different from any other...”

“Woman.”

“...Woman I’ve ever been with before. See? That’s one of the things I like about you... but I digress. I’m afraid that one day you’ll realize what a loser I am and cut me loose. So maybe I’m trying to accelerate that so it’s at least on my terms. If I see it coming, if I make you hate me, then I never have to worry about losing you.”

For all her blubbering, her voice is sincere. It moves me to remove my sunglasses and look her straight in those deep, dark eyes of hers. “I don’t like being messed with.”

“So I’ve noticed.” Her youthful grin returns, and holy hell would I love to smack it off her again. All that gushing about how great I am and she tries to sabotage it... again? Even so, I’d be willing to smack her if it meant a long, slow kiss from one of the only people who can kiss me so well. “Actually, I’ve been meaning to tell you. That interview I did? Where they censored what I said about you?”

I narrow my eyes and say nothing. Why did she have to remind me?

“You’ve extrapolated a lot. Shit, so has the public. I didn’t even say anything. Not like that.” When I’m about to call her out on her bullshit, Lorde explains, “I

specifically asked the interviewer to put some censorship there. She agreed to help me with my request to..."

Oh, I can't wait to hear this. "To?"

"To get your attention." There's that stupid troublemaking grin I can't stop thinking about. "It worked, huh?"

No, Daisy, keep your head here on planet Earth. "Please," I begin, keeping her at bay with my hand. "I need you to be respectful. Or at least when we're not fooling around." I smile, letting her know that I'm deathly serious, but not without my humor. "I'm fine with banter..." My fingers stroke her arm. "But I like to keep my image spotless. You haven't been helping with that. Saying things like you did at the premier..."

A sheepish tone takes over her complexion. I move my hand up her biceps, already enthralled again.

Lorde leans toward me. "Like what you feel? There's more where that came from."

I back away, shrugging. "Could do better. There's no shortage of cute hotties when you're as popular as I am."

"Oh, yeah? Bet I could take on anyone who comes sniffing around you. When I decide a girl – I mean woman – is mine, then by the skies above, she is mine." She winks. Nice try, Lorde. I heard that edge in your voice. Damn.

She could give it to you really rough I bet. Lovingly rough. Is that a thing? Excuse me, conscience, but nobody invited you to this conversation.

"We'll see." I turn to leave. My driver is due back at any moment, and I want to get

on with my day. Give me some time to think about this. She's got my number, hasn't she?

The moment I let my guard down, Lorde grabs me by the arm and wraps me into her tight embrace. Holy shit. One second I have no idea what it's like to be this close to her, and the next? I'm inhaling her body wash and spreading my hands across her shoulders. My thighs quiver from the impact.

"Going somewhere?" she whispers in my ear. "We're nowhere near done... I have things I desperately need to do to you."

She kisses me. Oh, God, do I want her to keep kissing me! Her breath is so hot, her tongue so strong as it pushes into my mouth, consuming me. I'm not prepared for her teeth grazing my bottom lip when she finishes. My stomach drops; my heart quakes.

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She's found the small of my back. Now I'm being pulled closer, my whimpers muffled against her black shirt.

"More?" Lorde teases, moving away a few inches. She's doing it to torture me, I know. She wants to see the look of missed desire take over my face as I note her absence from my arms. She gets it.

I don't have the words to respond. All I can do is pull her close to me again and attack her lips as if I haven't kissed someone in ages. It certainly feels like it. All I want is for Lorde Sheen to kiss me until I don't know how to live without her anymore. Grab me. Hold me. Tenderly kiss me and then rough up the back of my throat with this tongue of hers. That's not the only thing I want in my throat. My hand goes to her crotch, and although I should feel embarrassed over stroking a woman's pussy in an abandoned alley, it gives me a thrill. The rest of me knows to save it for later when we're alone... in a hotel room...

Our beautiful moment is spoiled by the bright flash of a light.

"Daisy!" calls some voice I've never heard before. Masculine. Impatient. Go getter. "Daisy DeMonte! Look this way!" Like an idiot I do that, pushing my body from Lorde's as if I can spare us further humiliation. Nope. I'm a deer in the photographers' flashing headlights.

The question is coming. It should be no surprise when someone immediately asks me about my father. "What will he think of this, Daisy? Isn't your family traditional and conservative? How about your mother? Can you comment?" My heart is crashing against my ribcage as the embarrassment consumes me again. I can't with these paps!

“What’s going on here, Daisy?” asks the first photographer. “What about your engagement? Does your father know you’re cheating on your fiancé?”

Lorde pushes away from me, shock overcoming her. More questions hurl in our direction. Everything comes crashing around me. The gig is up. Now the whole world knows everything. Lorde will never understand or forgive me. Daddy? Daddy’s going to be pissed.

Fuck.Fuck!

Chapter 10

Daisy

“What’s going on here, Daisy? What about your engagement? Does your father know you’re cheating on your fiancé?”

The guards staking my childhood home come out to greet me the moment my driver pulls up in front of the big house. Lividity fuels the fires in my heart, and soon I am choking on the fumes of What has Daddy done?

When I woke up this morning, I was not an engaged woman. I was not betrothed. I was not promised to any man.

Daddy.

Daddy, what have you done?

I walk ahead of the guards, taking the front steps two at a time, something I’m only able to do when I feel inhuman. I’m so detached from the world now that I’m doing things I normally can’t.

Like storm into my father's office with a scowl on my face.

If you haven't been able to tell, I am a total Daddy's girl. From the time I was born, I was Principessa. If Mama was angry at me? All I had to do was go to Daddy and cry hard enough for him to finally relent on any punishment bestowed upon me. Or at least that worked until I hit puberty and sprouted C-cup breasts overnight. The moment my father realized I was a sexual being, I... well, I stayed Principessa, but it was a look in his eye that suggested I put on a chastity belt and follow my mother's example of being a virgin until the day I married a man of his choosing – or at least grooming.

He would really love to know how much fun I've had, hm? Never mind with...

Women. Oh, God, my parents have no idea that I'm queer. I've always thought that I'd "cross that bridge" if I fell in love with a woman. Is it here? Is that the bridge ready to crumble right before me as I prepare to enter my father's office and deal with this?

I pass through the hallowed halls of my father's business dealings. The man lives in his home office if he's not somewhere else. I don't need the guards to tell me where he is. I know where he is.

He knows where I am too.

"Daisy!" His voice echoes in the long hallway. "If that's you, come in here!"

I fling the door open to his study. There he is. Marcello DeMonte. Third son of the prestigious DeMonte line. He's the first one to not have a son, and at no point in my life have I been allowed to learn the family business. Without ever telling me, I quickly learned what my place would be one day. Bartering chip!

Daddy sits up in his seat, a smile tugging on his lips. Usually, I live to see my father smiling at me. I believe he thinks the same about me. But when I storm into his office, my face flushed in anger, all that changes.

Also, we're not alone.

Another man – whom I do not recognize – sits in the room. He has short, dark hair. Neat black eyes. A hint of stubble on his face. Tailor-made Armani suit straight from the source itself. A hundred bucks says he's from Italy. I admit I'm struck by how handsome he is. That quickly leaves my head, however, as I face my father once more. I should make this quick and let him get back to his business meeting.

Before I can open my big fat mouth and demand answers from my father, he motions to the man sitting in front of him. "Daisy, I want you to meet Cristiano Antonetti. I've been waiting a long time to introduce you both." He's still grinning. "Cristiano, this is my daughter I've been telling you all about."

"Yes, nice to meet you." I barely acknowledge the man with a wave. He exchanges curious looks with my father.

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“Have a seat, Daisy. The summer heat has apparently made you incorrigible. There’s ice water on the tray there.”

Incorrigible? Please, Daddy, you’d be incorrigible too if you found out from the paps that you’re engaged! Don’t make it sound like you don’t know why I’m angry, Daddy. I told you weeks ago that I wanted nothing to do with your marriage scheme.

I sit, but only because I don’t know what else to do. I’m going to get answers from my father, though, I swear. Ice water be damned!

“Today’s been a trying day for you, I’m sure, Principessa.” Daddy gives me the softest look his stern Italian face can muster. Mama always said that he makes incredible exceptions for me. He never looks at his wife as nicely as he looks at me. I learned a long time ago that there’s been little love between them. A ton of respect, since my father is a successful businessman and she’s a learned mother of his child, but scant romantic love. “This whole week. The terrible, nasty things the media is saying about my girl...”

“What’s this about, Daddy?” You’d never guess that I took the initiative to come here and drill him with my questions. Then again, my father has that effect on me. “How did you know I was coming?”

“Your driver called ahead as he has been instructed whenever you’re returning home. As it so happened, Cristiano was here to have a chat. I wanted you to meet him.” Daddy gets up from his seat, rounds his large desk, and claps his hands on the stranger’s shoulders. No. No, I do not like how buddy-buddy they are. This is not sitting well with me one bit. “Perfect timing. As I always expect from my girl.”

My eyes go from meeting Daddy's gaze to the man called Cristiano. Well, he's handsome. What's scary is how good-looking he is... in a different way from Lorde. (You know, the woman I'm kinda-sorta seeing behind everyone's backs?) Lorde is an affable, all-around American girl with a big smile that kills me right in the undies. She radiates her tenacity like this man Cristiano radiates poise and sophistication. I'd dare say elegance. Cristiano is lean and dapper in his Armani suit. His cologne is as Italian as the rest of his getup... and to die for. If Lorde is the Hollywood rebel, then Cristiano makes a habit of sipping cognac and blowing his sweet Italian nothings into some woman's ear.

"The Antonetti family are friends of ours back home in Italy." Oh, come on, Daddy! You were born and raised here in America! My great-grandfather was the one who came over on some ship and established the family name in this country. Yet my father has always been enamored with the family legacy and makes a big deal about how classically Italian we are. It was fun when I was a girl. Now it's embarrassing. It's one thing to have a house in Tuscany, to speak Italian, and to know the difference between great Italian food and what the local restaurant serves... but my father takes it to another level. Marrying my native Italian mother only made it worse, I'm sure. "Cristiano is the second son of the main clan."

"Funny. I've never heard of these people." I'm too bitter to care.

"He's come from Europe to meet you, Daisy." Cristiano sends me an apologetic glance. "This meeting has been a long time coming, and you never even knew it."

I have a sinking suspicion that I know what he's talking about, but I don't want to admit it. I'd rather glare at him. I also glare at Cristiano, although as far as I know, he's an innocent party so far. (Give it time.)

"Daisy..." You'd think it was Christmas, 1965, and my father was about to get all the toys he had asked for. "Cristiano has come all this way to become formally engaged

to you. This is the man your mother and I have decided you will marry.”

The words sink in. I mean... I guess. If I’m going to let those words sink in. I’m not in a huge hurry to acknowledge them, truthfully. I’d rather pour myself a small glass of ice water and sip it, letting the frigid temperature freeze my tongue so I don’t say something incredibly stupid. Denial is strong within me.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I mutter.

So. The day has come. A day I’ve seen lurking on the horizon but had hoped I had missed by making it to the age of twenty without any of these shenanigans.

Since I was a girl, my parents have heavily implied they wanted an arranged marriage for me. It was the thing “to do” in their families for the longest time. Of course, times change, and being in the modern age, I had hoped they gave up such traditions. Since, you know, last I checked I was a woman of majority and could do whatever I legally wanted. I don’t have to rely on my parents to support me anymore. Not that it’s yet to stop me...

Then, out of the blue, my father took me out for dinner at one of my favorite restaurants. Since it wasn’t my birthday, I should have known something was coming. Sure enough, we hadn’t made it to the second course when he asked me what I thought about getting married sometime in the next couple of years.

Suffice to say, I was shocked. And declined.

No, but don’t you all see? My mother has been flying back and forth between here and Italy ever since I went off to college. To find me a husband among the many connections her family and my father’s family have. Apparently, Mr. Antonetti made the cut and agreed to this stupid venture. Whoever he is!

“The ideal timeline was to announce the engagement by the end of the summer.” My father takes his hands off Cristiano and stands between our seats. He’s not a tall man by any means, so it would be plenty easy for me to reach up, grab him by the tie, and growl into his ear that no means no! “Due to recent circumstances, we all thought it best to go ahead and leak it to the media so they’ll finally stop printing such awful things about you.”

“You decided? Without me?”

“We’re looking out for you, Daisy.” He pats my head like I’m a puppy. “Now, don’t worry. Of course, the wedding won’t happen until after you graduate. So you have a few years to get to know Cristiano and become acclimated to the situation.”

“Daddy,” I begin, trying my damned best to keep a level head. Ha.Ha. “I hate to point this out, but I don’t even know this fine gentleman.” Don’t get me wrong. I’d love to drag Cristiano along with my father. Because any man who agrees to marry a woman without her even knowing about it? Suss.

“That’s not a problem. As I said, you two will get to know each other over the next several months. How about you two go on a date tonight? That would be lovely!” He claps Cristiano on the shoulder. “You like her, right son?”

Son. So that’s what this is really about...

Cristiano looks me up and down. I don’t like the twinkle in his eye. Undressing me with it... is he trying to decide if I’m as worthy in real life as I apparently am in my pictures? I could clock him right now. He’s lucky he doesn’t say anything.

“Son,” my father says, still looking at me. “Why don’t you wait outside while I talk to Daisy? I’m sure this is a shock to her.”

“Of course.” Wow. What an accent. I’m used to Italian accents, too!

He gets up, straightening his Armani jacket before showing himself out – but not before flashing me a wicked grin. I bet he thinks that’s charming. No one gets to win me over with a grin like that except Lorde.

Ugh. Lorde. What I would give for her right now...

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“Principessa,” my father says, sitting back behind his desk, “as I told Cristiano, I’m sure this is a huge shock for you. Rest assured that your mother and I have vetted him to the furthest extent possible. We wouldn’t pick a husband who we weren’t convinced would do you justice as a husband and the father of your children.”

Oh, now he’s the father of my children? How nice of him to assume such things for my womb. “Daddy, I...”

“Now listen to me.” Great. He’s got serious father voice. “It’s not only about you, Daisy. It’s about this family. As you know, try as we might, your mother and I were never able to have children aside from you.”

That’s code for “we never had a son.” The prodigal son that would continue the family line and name.

“Cristiano comes from a good family. He’s been trained his whole life to run companies like ours. His older brother will inherit his family’s business. He’s a choice candidate for coming here and taking over for me when I’m gone. The best way to do that is by marrying into the family... which is where you come in.”

Right. So instead of raising me to inherit the company, some nobody man gets to sweep in and pluck my pussy and my inheritance. What year is this again?

“He’s also very generously offered to take on the DeMonte name so it can stay in the family. We’ll be adopting him through your marriage, essentially.”

How nice of him!

“You’ll get used to the idea in time, Daisy. Meanwhile, the press will grow tired of saying all these terrible things about you. I know you enjoy being in the papers. Hopefully, you can go back to being their fashion princess, especially with a high-profile wedding in a few years.”

He thinks this is going to make me feel better. He really, truly thinks that, doesn’t he?

I came in here fuming in rage, having known that my father did something like this, but not wanting to admit it to myself. Now I feel... defeated. Not only is my father fucking with my fate, but in the process, he may have made me lose Lorde, the only woman I’ve given enough shits about in recent years to count as a real potential girlfriend. Whatever that means. God, I’m glad Daddy never found out the truth about Lorde. He probably thinks she insulted me and I unleashed my family rage. Hence the slap. The truth? I want to... love her, I guess.

“Marcello!” My mother’s voice breaks through the door. So does she, holding a tablet opened to The Daily Social’s real-time blog. “It’s Daisy!”

She notices my presence. My father notices the tablet. I notice that I never drank my water. Seems like a good time as any to have my drink. I’m gonna need it.

Chapter 11

Daisy

I’m used to being on a team of one. It helps that I learned to live on my own as soon as I started college and decided I should have an apartment to reflect my new adult life. (That and it made it so much easier to bring people home to sleep with, paps aside.) But I must admit that I feel even more defeated than before.

Let’s start with the media. Daddy was right about one thing. The press no longer

cares about my dalliances with Lorde. They're all about delving into who Cristiano is. It's safe to say they are 100% on board with him as my fiancé. Going on about what a handsome couple we are... even though they have to splice photos of us together since we've only met for five minutes!

The press is so heavy on the announcement of our "engagement" that I daresay even Ashleigh was fooled for a while. Lorde? She must be fooled, because no matter how manytimes I call her and no matter how many messages I leave saying it's all a lie, that I had no say in it, she won't return my calls. I guess you could say that the tables have been turned, I'm getting a taste of my own medicine, etc. etc. clichés.

Finally, there is my family.

My father raged in ways I had never seen before. Not only did he not know who Lorde was (and when he looked her up, he raged harder) but seeing us in such a passionate kiss sent off every sensor that declared his little virginal girl was hardlysuch. You know, one of my main selling points to a prospective husband, besides being pretty and rich.

Not to mention the very non-Vatican-approved same-sexness of it all. That might be worse. I don't know. Nobody will tell me anything.

He won't look me in the eye anymore. My mother dared to take me aside and have a "talk" with me. Did you know that boys will fuck anything that moves? That by "giving away my precious pearl" I am turning into a useless oyster? Where do people get these disgusting analogies? I'm surprised she didn't compare me to toilet paper or a gym towel.

That was when I had to ask if she had taken a close look at Lorde or any of the articles written about her. Yes, her. Because despite Lorde's shaggy shoulder-length hair and the fact she very evidently has tits when wearing crop tops and a leather

jacket – and carries a purse, God, Mom – certain people in my family didn't glean that Lorde Sheen is a woman. Yes, a woman. One issued with a vagina, no less. Dear Daisy DeMonte has been making out with and fingering a "veritable" woman, as my mother was once described in an old tabloid introducing her to American high society.

So, that started a whole new fight. My mother has been so sheltered her whole life that all she knew about queerness was what she sees in more conservative news. And most of the news she watches is Italian because she cares more about what goes on in the Old Country than here where she holds dual citizenship. To her, gay people are sad, sick humans who need the right prayers and a good home-cooked meal to set them straight. (Literally.) She can't even wrap her head around bisexuality. I think she understands being transgender more than bisexuality. Because, if you haven't figured out my mother yet, she's very "you're either this or that." Since I turned out to be a pretty princess-type femme, I must be straight. That's how it works in her mind.

I flat-out told her that I had been with women already. I even used the word "fuck" to drive the point home. She then proceeded to fake a stroke.

When Daddy decides to start talking to me again a few days later – he claims he had to take time off to attend a big wedding, but I know he was too busy fuming – it's to pester me about Cristiano. Don't I understand how good he is for me? Do I mistrust his and Mama's judgment? Why don't I go out on a date with him? One date. Since I'm such a big girl, he won't insist on a chaperone. Gee, Daddy, how sweet of you.

This persists for several days. I don't even get to enjoy the fireworks on the Fourth of July because he's blowing up my phone, saying Cristiano is in town again and that I "owe" him my time because he came out to get to know me.

Fine, Daddy. If this will get you off my back for a while, I'll go on a date with

Cristiano. One date. It's not like Lorde is returning my calls anyway, and Ashleigh swears she doesn't know anything. The one I would much rather be with is done with me. I'm starting to accept this.

It was a fling. I'm not saying anything about Cristiano, but I'll at least humor my dad for one night. It kinda helps that he off-the-cuff threatens to cut off my trust fund if I don't go on a single date.

Flash forward to a somber Friday night. I say somber because I'm cooped up in some Italian restaurant with Cristiano, who has managed to spend the first half hour of our "date" talking all about himself and his family. Not once has he asked about me. About my schooling. What I like. What my ambitions for the future are. The only times I'm allowed to speak are in carefully placed intervals where I am expected to agree with him or stroke his ego. "Yeah, your parents sound cool." "Oh, you studied abroad at Oxford? Wow." "I had no idea a family from Florence could make that much money." "Oh, is that what that scent is? I thought it smelled good." Barf.

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Don't get me wrong. This guy is not husband – let alone boyfriend – material, but if I were bored and this was my choice, I might humor him for a night because he's hot. Hot in that suave, total douchebag way. The kind of guy who would drive you crazy for more than one date and send you running for the hills, but you convince yourself that one night with him wouldn't be too bad. I mean, that's what I would think if I wasn't always thinking about Lorde and wishing she was sitting across from me instead of this ass.

Daddy officially has dementia if he thinks I'm going to marry this guy. He's such a sleaze in his coded words and mannerisms that I don't doubt he's seeing another girl right now. He would probably see quite a few during our fake-ass marriage. Meanwhile, I would be an eternally pregnant, doting wife. Yay.

It's okay, though. He understands the position I'm in. He also understands what those photos of Lorde and me were about. Do you know what he says? "I'm not so old-fashioned, Daisy. I'd be shocked if my wife was a virgin in this day and age. Let bygones be bygones, right? I know your family is super traditional, though. So if your father ever asks, I'll protect your honor and tell him that without a doubt you were a virgin on our wedding night."

This guy's a winner, folks.

Right in the middle of dessert, Cristiano's phone rings

"Sorry, I have to take this." He winks at me. "Could be a few minutes."

Take all the time you need.

Except.

Except.

When I take out my phone to check for messages in his absence, he bends down and kisses me – right on the lips!

I'm too shocked to shirk him off. Here I am, minding my own business in a restaurant, and the guy the whole world thinks I'm engaged to kisses me in front of God and all his laughing angels.

I sit here, mouth agape, as he wanders off full of himself. Cristiano disappears around the corner, and I hope I don't see him again for the rest of the night.

In fact? This seems like a great time to leave. I'm gonna pack my bag and stiff the douche with the check. (Like he wasn't going to pay all of it anyway.) I'll tell Daddy that, hey, I tried, but I don't like this guy and he's completely disrespectful to me. Do you think he'll believe me? Or care? It's all I've got to go on right now.

That and the fact some woman is sitting down in Cristiano's place across from me.

Lorde!

Am I seeing things? Have I lost my damned mind? Is my need for this woman so great that I am manifesting her in front of me during one of the most torturous dates of my life? Haha. Who am I kidding? This is Lorde Sheen we're talking about. She is the one person in the world who would crash one of my dates to rub something in.

"Lorde..." I put my phone down. Before I can say anything else, she raises her hand to silence me.

“Hi. I only stopped by to ask you one thing.” She’s too serious. Lorde is never supposed to be this serious. “Is it true?”

“You mean the engagement?”

“No, Daisy, I mean that hideous dress you wore on the Fourth of July.” So she’s checking for me in the magazines? “Of course I mean the engagement. What the hell else could I mean?”

“If you ask anyone but me, yes, I am engaged to the stuffiest assface in Italy.”

“I’m asking you.”

“No,” I mutter. “It’s not like that at all.”

“That’s what I thought.” For that tone in her voice, she sure isn’t as animated to match it. “I told myself it was ludicrous for you to suddenly be engaged to some schmuck like that. He looked handpicked by your family. You know what? It was easy to convince myself that you weren’t involved with that guy. Then I saw that display of affection between you two.”

“He kissed me without permission.” Something dawns on me. “What are you even doing here? Happen to be in the area?”

“Actually, yes.” Lorde points to a far corner I can barely see. “I was already sitting there when you two walked in. Happy coincidence, huh?”

I wish I could agree. Having Lorde sweep in and change my fate is exactly what I need, but I have a feeling that’s not what’s happening here. “So, you were watching me on my date...”

“Sure. Let’s go with that. I was going to leave well enough alone. In fact, I kept telling myself that I should leave, but I didn’t want you to see me. So I was waiting for you to leave. Then that fucker kissed you and left you high and dry.”

“Ah...”

“Tell me the truth.” She lowers her voice. “Were you screwing with me? Or did we have something special?”

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I bow my head. In shame? I guess. “This whole thing is my father’s machination. There has never been anything, and there will never really be anything between me and Cristiano. Please. What can I do to make you believe me?”

She smiles. “Run away with me, Daisy.”

We can’t leave fast enough. Partly because Cristiano could come back at any time, partly because we’re that desperate to be together.

Chapter 12

Lorde

Until a few moments ago, I was a woman wallowing in self-pity unlike ever experienced before. I couldn’t even tell you why. Here was this gal I never even had sex with, unless you count what we did in the movie theatre as sex. (When you’ve been with as many women as me, you start upping the ante with yourself. I often don’t even add them to my memory unless we’re grinding or something is vibrating.) All I had done was kiss and finger her. What should have been an old hat for me turned into something that constantly drove me insane.

I’ve never been one to commit. Can’t say I ever thought I would. So why did it hurt so much when I thought she was cheating on me with some guy... how could she be cheating on me when we weren’t in a relationship? Hey, wait, was she cheating on the other guy with me? Ouch.

The tabloids and gossip sites have been full of photos of her lately. After the initial

scandal of us kissing, she went back to this Italian dude.

Cristiano. His name alone makes me want to break his teeth.

As much as I tried to convince myself that I didn't care... I did. I do. I want Daisy for myself. I want to feel her warm lips on mine... and on other parts of my body. I want her attention, her touch, and her love.

I had been robbed of that by some dude named Cristiano, for fuck's sake.

What hurt the most was the fact she never tried to explain.

After we went our separate ways in that alley, I thought she hadn't tried to contact me once. Didn't call. Didn't e-mail. She still hasn't accepted my friend request! As it turns out, she did try. I don't know why I didn't get the messages.

I kept telling myself that I didn't care. Not once did I believe that.

Daisy DeMonte has been on my mind 24/7. Torturing me. Consuming me.

But now? Now? Holy shit. She's here. She's with me. We're running away together. Maybe only for the night, but I'm damn happy to have her.

"Run away with me, Daisy."

I don't know where to go. I suggest my place, but she aptly decides that it would be too risky. We definitely can't go to hers. What a pair of lives we live when we can't even run away to our own homes.

"A hotel?" I slyly ask as we sit in my car, far away from prying pap eyes.

Daisy sheepishly looks away. What? This young lady who has boned her fair share of lucky people and was ready to rough ride my face the second time we met? The one who was no stranger totouching me in a packed movie theater? She's suddenly got some sheepish morals? Ha!

"Okay," she says. "If you can think of a nice one that won't turn us over to the paps."

I know what that means. Nice hotels come in two flavors: those with scrupulous employees who can't wait to say what celebrity has come to stay the night, and those that are so popular that paps are always camped out there.

"How about the Caesar? It's on the outskirts of town, and I've never had a problem."

She raises an eyebrow as I start the car. "You would know, huh?"

"Hey, when money isn't a problem, you take all your dates to the same hotel."

"Uh. Huh."

"Wanna know a secret?" I whisper, leaning in close to her as the car revs up beneath me. "I haven't even thought of another woman since the day I met you."

I have no way to know if she believes me or not. It's dark, she's wearing sunglasses and a hat, and her face is away from me. Finally, Daisy turns her head, teeth nipping my chin. "I'm going to be the last girl you ever take to that hotel. You got it?"

Oh, I've got it.

For being on the outskirts of the city, the Caesar is a relatively short drive away. Don't care. I'm glad to have Daisy here with me. We could be going to the middle of the desert, a landfill, or her grandmother's house and I would be ecstatic by the

prospect.

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I look at her before shutting off the engine. Last chance, Daze. Do you really want to keep going?

Please say yes.

Oh.

She said yes.

Chapter 13

Daisy

For the first time since my initial foray into the carnal world, I'm nervous about being alone with someone I'm attracted to.

This isn't like when I went to her apartment, blazing in anger, and things happened. This is premeditated. I know now that I can't be alone with Lorde without something happening. That's both exciting and nerve-wracking!

I stay in her car while she goes into the lobby and gets us a room. This place looks nice, although I've never stayed here before. It's a four-star hotel, and my family only stays in five stars. Lorde doesn't care about this. She had a point, after all. There will be paps staked at all the five-star hotels, and apparently, the staff here has been good to her so far.

For a moment, I fear that I'm just another girl in her life. Maybe she only likes me

because I've been playing hard to get. As soon as I give it up? (Wow, remind me to never phrase it like that again.) She'll be over me and move on to the next girl she manages to seduce into bed.

Panic settles in. Oh, God. This is a terrible mistake! This time tomorrow, I'll feel like the biggest fool in the universe. Normally, I don't care if a fling is a mere one-night stand. With Lorde? It's different. I want this to last beyond one night.

I want it to last many, many nights.

My worries abate when she emerges from the hotel and comes back to her car with a room key. Every time I see her, I feel... safe? Is that the word I'm looking for? I've gone from being enraged at this girl's mere presence to wanting to jump her bones every time I see her. Maybe I am falling in love with her.

Still, I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. I'm not going to let Lorde Sheen embarrass me. I concoct a plan on our way to the back entrance of the hotel. This plan will satisfy me in many ways... and leave me frustrated in so many others!

We'll see how long I truly last around Lorde Sheen.

Our room's on the third floor of the hotel. Lots of privacy up here. I don't doubt she's asked for this specifically. Maybe we don't even have neighbors. When you're Lorde Sheen, you can ask for the exact room you want – even if that room is only given through description.

“Hope they have something good on HBO,” Lorde quips as we enter the room. I still have my glasses and hat on. Here's hoping the paps never catch wind of this. Lorde may have never been bothered before, but this is the first time she's here with me. I tend to change everything.

The room is smaller than what I'm used to, but the bed is big and clean, and the TV is sizable enough. I suppose there is some sparse, beige furniture to fill things out. I don't care about the view from my hotel room for once in my life. I know nothing is interesting to look at out there. If I had my choice of hotel, it would've been a downtown affair that has epic views of the river, the commercial business district, and even the airport. Something is soothing about watching planes taking off and landing.

Like something is soothing about the way Lorde wraps her arms around me from behind and starts kissing my cheeks. She rips my hat and sunglasses off. I don't know where they land.

She's hungry. For me, of all people. I know I play myself up a lot... the mighty Daisy DeMonte. Yet even I'm shocked that I've enthralled a woman like Lorde Sheen to the point she's stalking me on my dates. To have her whisk me away to a hotel so she can start making out with me? It almost feels unreal.

"Lorde..." I begin, wondering how I can keep this good feeling alive while also gently pushing her away. "I want to make one thing clear."

Her eyes are already glazing over in lust. "What is it? You got hard limits? We all have hard limits. Lemme hear 'em."

That's... I do not doubt that you have hard limits, Lorde. I'm sure you have many, some I've only heard of on the internet. "I want to do these things with you, but I don't think we should go all the way tonight."

I sound like I'm in high school. In truth, I want to know how she reacts, let alone if she intends to respect my wishes.

If I'm going to potentially throw away my image and good name for you, Lorde, I want to make sure you're a woman worth doing that for.

“What do you mean by that?” She’s not angry. Confused, yeah. Blindsided, a bit. “You’re talking to another woman here, Daze. What a woman considers ‘all the way’ is going to wildly change from person to person.” She laughs. “Don’t tell me you’re the type to consider what we did in the theatre to be anythingbutsex.”

I furrow my brows, if only because she’s the type to not consider some fun fingering in the dark sex! “Consider this, Lorde,” I say with a Daisy DeMonte bite. “Whatever you consider ‘going all the way’ with another girl? Half that.”

“Oh, man.”

“Mmhmm. Whatever you’re imagining when you’re thinking of me...” I turn my whole body toward her, amping my wiles, my charms until her only focus is on my face – and what’s beneath, let’s be real. “Your wildest, hottest fantasies about what you’re doing to me...” I do not doubt that Lorde is the Top of Tops, and it’ll only be after I’ve filled out my punch card with her that I’m allowed to boss her around for a while. The freebie, if you will. She does the doing. At least in her head, she’s the Queen of Deeds, and I’m the recipient of her royal decrees.

If she thinks I’m a prude, I can’t tell from her reaction alone. She does look way more confused, though. “Well!” she suddenly exclaims, putting her hands on her hips as opposed to around me again. That sweet grin erupts on her face. Okay. Now I’m the confused one. “Good thing there are other things we can do!”

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Is she playing off being mad? Or is she really okay with what I said?

There were so many ways that could've gone. Lorde could've pointed out that she paid for a hotel room. She could've pointed out how far we've gone before tonight. She could've called me several things based on how "easy" I was with others I've been with. To my pleasant surprise, she doesn't do any of that. When I first met this woman, I would've expected nothing less.

"You're okay with that?" I tilt my head in disbelief. "I was afraid you would be angry."

Her hands touch my shoulders. "Why would I be angry?" she asks. "I want to be with you, Daze. I don't care what we do. We could rent some video games to play for all I care. You want to have sex? I am so ready. But if you're not comfortable with that right now, we don't have to... as long as..."

Uh-oh. There's that tone in her voice. The one I usually get angry at. "As long as what?"

She pulls me firmly into her embrace. "As long as I get as many kisses as I want."

One kiss quickly turns into frantic lovemaking. The kind of lovemaking you experience with someone who truly matters. It doesn't even have to include taking off your clothes, although Lorde's hands paw me like she can't wait to rip off my dress and have her way with me. As we kiss, I think of how I want her to do it. I want it hard. I want it fast. I want it rough. I want this terrible playgirl to have me every which way to the next day. Every time I've fantasized about what Lorde can do to

me, I've gone from 0 to 60 thinking about the way she could throw me down on a bed and make me feel like the most owned woman in the world.

That's one of many reasons I don't think I'm ready tonight. I'm so emotionally vulnerable after all that's happened that I don't think my heart could handle it, even if my body could. I want things to slow down. I want to see how this woman makes love.

"Do you like kissing me?" she murmurs, hands pulling up my skirt and tugging on my silky underwear. "Because I've noticed that once you start, you have a hard time stopping."

"Same thing could be said to you," I retort. All this talking means less kissing. So not fair. "You're a good kisser, but you knew that already, didn't you?"

"Hey, it takes two to make a great kiss." She pulls away, her last kiss still lingering on my lips. "I can't pull all the weight around here. Your ability to put in your share is noted."

Lorde pulls her shirt up over her head. Hello, cleavage. I haven't seen you since the day I went to your apartment! Starting to rethink my policy tonight...

"Now you're trying to entice me."

"You mean I have to try?"

I put my hands on her chest, letting them roam the top curves of her breasts in her bra. "When do you get the time to work out?"

"I only take two days off a week for rest." Lorde's playing with my hair, although I think it's an elaborate ploy to get to my zipper. "Otherwise, I spend at least two hours

a day in the gym. It's one of my favorite things to do. Helps clear my mind. And it scores me chicks."

She's looking at me with that knowing gaze that says Like you, Daze. Yeah. Like me. I feel like such a cliché when I say that a girl with a body like this turns me on. Lorde is a healthy balance between staying fit and looking like a professional bodybuilder, which isn't my type. Strong, but not going to crush me, you know?

"I need to work out more. I'm not going to have this metabolism forever. What if I wake up on my 25th birthday and I've gained thirty pounds?"

"You would still be hot. In fact, I will pencil it into my schedule to make sure that's the first thing I tell you after happy birthday."

"You're already planning that far ahead?"

"Hell yes, I am."

I'm only twenty. That means Lorde's already thinking about being with me for another five years... maybe longer...

That's it. I'm unzipping my dress and joining her in the no-shirt club. Boom. Before Lorde can say "nice rack!" the bust of my dress is dropping to my waist. I hope she likes navy blue bras, 'cause I sure do.

"Nice. Rack."

It's a pushup bra, so you know what that means... I look way bigger in the chest than I am. When I look at myself in this type of bra, though, I feel so sexy, even if it's for me. I may be a C-cup, but my weight is distributed in a way that makes me look smaller than that. I don't doubt that as I get older, things will fill out more, but for

now, at the ripe age of twenty and a few months in change, I'm gonna give myself all the boosts I can get, especially if it makes this amazing woman lust after me.

"Glad you appreciate the female form as much as you do." I act like I'm going to shimmy out of my dress, but I'm doing it purely to make my breasts shake in their cups. I catch my reflection in a nearby mirror. Shit, I'd be into me right now! "Except I don't want to give you the whole package tonight. Take off all the clothes you want, Lorde, but my bra is staying on. Cups up and everything."

"But I can rip off your panties?"

"You can rip them off and keep them." I lift my skirt so she can see my black pair of delicates. "Let's leave something to the imagination, though."

"Don't know how. Your nipples stick out like crazy."

I look down. She's not wrong. I'm already so aroused that my nipples are pitching tents in my bra like Lorde's are about to put up a whole campsite inherbra.

“You like?”

“I love ‘em, Daze.”

I approach Lorde, my dress still hanging from my waist. “Remember that time at the premiere?” My hands touch her – my arms encircle her. I want to feel her strength surging against me, but I know now is not the time. “You licked me right off your fingers.”

“How could I forget? I’ve been thinking about it ever since the day it happened. The thought of that bastard getting to do that to you...”

Like I want to think about Cristiano – or any man! – right now. “You could do that again, you know.”

“Third base? Nice.” Lorde squeezes me, and instead of fearing for my fragile ribcage, I feel that surge of power that I’ve been craving. No way am I going to protest that. “Do I get anything for my glorious efforts?”

“Besides my pussy all over your face? I’m sure we could swing something for you, Lorde...” My hands wander to her jeans. I know the denim is obscuring a lot, but I remember how slick and... ahem... she felt at the premiere. Things better go farther tonight. I don’t want to just get her off a little. I want to feel her come.

With my mouth.

Before that, though, Lorde is going to fold me into her arms and parade me to the

bed. I laugh in adventurous glee as she gently places me in the center. I laugh even harder when she slams her face into my cleavage and covers my skin in hard, wet kisses.

It's like a switch goes off. Again. Lorde and her switches.

"Oh..." I'm not laughing any longer. I'm moaning. Now that I feel more comfortable around her, I really let it loose. Not only the moans, but the undulations of my body, the heat ripping through me, my hands covering her head as I push her farther down toward my navel – which she plunders with her tongue. "Eat my pussy," I whimper. "Do whatever you want to it with your tongue. Make me come."

"Not just my tongue, Daisy." That growl is back in her voice. Kill me! Fuck me, too, while you're at it! "I'm going to make that night at the premiere feel like child's play."

She better make good on her promise, because I'm about to lose my damned mind!

Lorde Sheen is a damn tease. I don't want to hear anything from anyone else. You could present me with a long list of women she's slept with, and every one of them could say, "She's totally not a tease, though," and I would call bullshit. Because the next five minutes? Some of the most frustrating of my life! Don't get me wrong. It feels great, but when you've got one of the hottest women in the world constantly rubbing your slit through your underwear and kissing your inner thighs as she inhales your scent like it's the strongest aphrodisiac she's ever encountered... you're going to be frustrated! There's no getting around it. Not that you want to get around it.

"Oh my God, Lorde!" My hands yank on her hair as she pulls aside – rips aside – my undies and feasts on my waiting pussy. I've never had anyone go for it like she does. Most of the people I've been with act like it's an obligation. Oh, well, it's probably time to go down on her. Half-ass it. Secretly – or not so secretly – hate it and think it's

beneath them. Not Lorde. This woman loves to devour some pussy. She's all up in there, tongue slamming against my clit and dipping deep into my center. Her lips wrap tightly around one of my nether lips and sucks. I've never had anyone do that before! When Lorde's gaze meets mine, my back arched as I hold myself up and watch her go down on me, I completely come undone. "Yes!" I cry, breathless. "Make me come!"

She tilts her head so her tongue touches my clit. Her finger dips into my wetness. Then another finger. My legs instinctively spread wider so both of her fingers can go deeper. Deeper. My hips rise to make this easier for her.

"Fuck!" I slam my head back and close my eyes. Between her fingers furiously fucking me, pounding my pussy until I swear to the cosmos I'm losing my mind, and her tongue making hard and heavy love to my clit... I'm gonna explode. "Harder! I know you can do it harder!"

My fantasies of her taking me hard and rough return. If Lorde's mouth wasn't occupied with better ventures, I'd beg her to talk nasty to me. She's the only one I've met who I think could do that and not make me feel like shit. For the briefest moment, I think about telling her to go ahead and do whatever she wants to me and take me like I deserve to be taken. Yet I manage to hold to my convictions. It helps that I've already started coming when Lorde's fingertips find my G-spot.

The bed covers come undone thanks to my grabby hands. The whole room is a dark blur as I squeeze my eyes so hard that I think I've gone blind. I'm pretty sure my heart stops. All it takes is two seconds of a blissful stillness to overtake me before I thrash beneath Lorde's weight and come harder than I ever thought possible with anyone.

"Don't stop!" I cry, hips thrusting against her face, her hand. "Fuck me, Lorde!"

It's the longest orgasm ever. The intensity never stops. Honestly, I think I'm starting to have an out-of-body experience. Women aren't meant to take this level of passion for such an extended period!

I only come down from Heaven because Lorde finally relents. A gasp erupts in the room as she comes up for air. She shakes out her hand after pulling out her magical fingers. I'm still shuddering in orgasmic aftershocks. With my legs lazily spread open, my wetness easily drenches my skin and the lingerie Lorde has already claimed for herself. Part of her plan.

"Shit," I gasp. Is this real? Is this Earth? Why is Lorde straddling my stomach and hovering above my face? Oh. She's going to kiss me and make me breathe my sexual scent. Fuck that's hot! I can taste myself all over her lips and tongue. Her mouth is nothing but me.

"You're so fucking hot." Lorde squeezes my breasts. I half expect her to rip my bra off, but she behaves. I've found the one who honors my wishes even when she's being a shit! "It's taking every ounce of restraint to not fuck you mad, Daisy. You don't know how much I want to. Can you hear me? I want to fuck your pussy until you know I own it."

Yeah.Yeah, that sounds pretty damn good.

"So, you better make what you're going to do for me good. If you're lucky, I won't come on your face in the first few seconds. I sure as hell can't make any promises right now."

That's what I planned on giving her anyway but hearing her demand it is turning me on again. My legs close. My hands lightly grasp her toned arms. My voice weakly says, "Tell me to do it, Lorde. I love it when you take control."

She gets off me and plops onto the end of the bed. Her thighs are already spread by the time I get my act together and crawl over to her. “Get on your knees, Daze. I didn’t say those things to reporters because I thought you were actually a good girl.”

Lorde has no idea how nasty I can be. Especially since this is probably the first time I’ve ever been excited to kneel on a hotel room floor and bury my face between someone’s legs.

Her scent hits me before I even touch her—raw, earthy, overwhelming in the best way. The Daisy who used to hate this woman would’ve gagged. The Daisy who wants to be ruined by her? She’s practically drooling. Holy shit, is she a slobbering mess to start licking everything she sees before her!

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“That’s right.” Lorde coils my hair around her hand as my lips move toward her slick heat. I don’t even know where to begin, so I let instinct guide me. My lips land at the crease of her thigh, then trail inward. “You’re a naughty girl, aren’t you? Look at you. Kneeling between my legs with your dress half off and your underwear wet. If that’s not a bad girl, then I don’t know what is.”

Call me a bad girl one more time, Lorde. Make me earn it.

I look up for her approval as I press a kiss to her folds, then lick a slow stripe along her slit. Her taste is unreal—sweet and sharp and perfect. I’ve eaten out women before, but never like this. Never with this kind of hunger. Never with this kind of ache building in my own body. She’s already made me come with her tongue, and I’m still fantasizing about what else she can do to me.

I’m not disappointed. She sings my praises with low groans and muttered curses, one hand fisting my hair and the other braced behind her on the bed. “Keep going,” she murmurs, voice rough with need. “You’re the hottest fucking woman to ever touch me like this.” She’s been imagining this since the day we met. Me, kneeling and eager, lips wet, tongue desperate for every drop of her. And now she has it. Has me.

“That’s it, Daisy.” Lorde tugs harder on my hair as I find her clit and suck gently. Her hips twitch. Her thighs tremble. She’s soaked – her arousal slick on my tongue, and god, I want to drown in it. “Make me come, baby. I want your face buried in me when I lose it.”

She’s already so tense that I know it’s not going to take long. This will be her first orgasm in my presence, won’t it? I don’t doubt she’s spent considerable amounts of

time thinking about me as she touches herself. How hard does she come when she's fantasizing about me? I hope it's as hard as she is about to come all over my face. I won't accept anything less.

Besides, I need to make her come so hard that she'll be satisfied for the rest of the night. Do it, Daisy. Make her know that you're the hottest shit to ever eat her until she cums.

Sure enough, her thighs close in around my face. My lips become one with her pussy. She's long stopped talking dirty. All Lorde can manage now is a few curses and groans that are a medley of sexual pleasure in my ears.

Those moans rise to the ceiling. I keep going, even as she starts to shake. Even when she says, "Fuck, fuck, I'm gonna come – right now."

God, the way she sounds when she comes. Ragged moans dragged from her throat, breathy grunts, and choked-off gasps. She rides the edge for what feels like forever, hips grinding on my mouth, her fingers locked in my hair. I feel every ripple of pleasure moving through her body. Every quiver. Every crash of sensation as she tips over into pure release.

I hold her through it, tongue slow and reverent now, soothing her as she shudders through the aftershocks. When I finally pull back, her thighs are slick, and my mouth is wet with her. I kiss the inside of her leg, then look up.

She's a mess. Glorious. Disheveled. Glowing.

And she's looking at me like I rewrote every rule she ever followed.

I spend most of our afterglow with my forehead pressed against her thigh. Her hands lightly massage the back of my neck and my shoulders. We're so frozen in the

moment that there's no way either of us can move until we eventually snap out of it. As long as I can taste her on my tongue, I can't.

Sometime later, we're lying side by side on the bed, hands entwined. Lorde raises mine so she can kiss my knuckles. She rolls onto her side and murmurs in my ear.

"I think I love you, Daisy."

I didn't think I would cry tonight, but the hormones – yeah, let's blame that – are making tears swell. "I think I love you too. It's the only way to explain how I feel and act around you. Doesn't that seem silly, though? We barely know each other."

"You can't fight fate. I normally don't believe in that stuff, but from the moment I first saw you, I knew you were special. I simply didn't know in what way yet."

"Do you know now?"

"The kind of special I want to wake up next to for the rest of my life."

Now I am crying, but not because of what Lorde has said. I'm remembering the shit my father has pulled. The man I ditched on one of the worst dates ever.

How do I get myself out of this mess and date the woman I want to be with?

"I don't want to marry that man." I hide my tears in the crook of Lorde's neck. "Not that I ever would, but I don't know how to break free from the corner I've been forced into."

She cuddles me until I can finally breathe again. "I don't know right now, Daze. I'm going to try to come up with a way, though. Count on me. I want to be with you, and I want to openly be with you. No secrets. No hiding. You and me, scandalizing the

press for the rest of our lives.”

I want to believe her, but she doesn’t know my father at all. Lorde’s not the respectable kind of man my parents would want me to be with. They barely tolerated the boys they knew about, and that was because their public images were “clean and gentlemanly.” (Yeah, right. Most of those guys were assholes who wouldn’t have thought twice about being anything but gentlemen if they could get away with it.)

“Let’s sleep for now.”

It’s amazing how easy it is to fall asleep in the arms of the woman you love, even if your whole world is crumbling outside of your bubble.

Chapter 14

Lorde

It’s a balmy evening as I have dinner with Angus, who has returned from a two-week trip to the Caribbean to do nothing but flirt with beautiful women day in and day out. (And drink a ton of rum, I’m sure.) He had invited me before he left. In the old days, I would have happily gone, at least for part of the time. Yet with Daisy DeMonte consuming my thoughts? I couldn’t.

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He spends most of our dinner talking about this woman and that young lady with some rather randy visuals. Luckily, the breeze is blowing his words in the other direction of other diners. I've spent most of the time thinking about what happened with Daisy two days ago, anyway. We may not have gone as nuts as I initially wanted, but it left me with such a warmed heart that listening to bestie talk is in no way appealing anymore.

Angus naturally catches on to this and asks me what's up.

"You've got to face the facts," Angus says while downing his second beer of the evening. "Her father's marrying her off to some sleazebag and would make your life hell if you intervened. I know you want to be with her, and she doesn't want to be with that other guy, but..."

"I know," I grumble. "Believe me, I know!" I've spent more than my fair share of time trying to come up with a solution for Daisy's dilemma. "But it's..."

"No, girl." Whoa, where did that stern voice come from? So not like Angus. I don't like it. "Listen, at the end of the day, she's another fling. I know she's gorgeous, funny, a good time... I know you keep thinking about her, but there are so many girls out there. You'll find someone else. It's best to cut her loose and let her fight her family in a way she knows how. It's the 21st century. She doesn't have to marry someone she doesn't want to."

"But..." Angus can fuck right off, yeah? "I don't want anyone else."

It's true. All I want is Daisy. The Italian beauty with legs for miles, silky soft hair,

and a pouty, feisty mouth that's always begging me to kiss it.

"The only way you could make this work is if you convinced her father of that. You're not exactly the upstanding country clubguy man like Marcello DeMonte is going to want for his only daughter. You'd have to do more than convince him to give you a shot. You'll have to charm him into thinking you're already family. And, you know, the whole gay thing."

As if the Heavens have opened up and God has stricken me with a bolt of creativity, I've got the craziest idea in the world.

It's a long shot, but it might work.

"Hey, Angus, I've gotta go." I slap some money down on the table before grabbing my jacket and slipping out of my seat. "There's something I need to do."

He grins. "You're a goner, girl. Good luck. I'll come to your funeral when DeMonte is done having his bodyguards maul you to death. Maybe it'll count as a hate crime!"

"She's worth it." I jog to the valet. I need to get to the jewelry store before it closes and I lose my nerve.

My plan involves a very expensive ring. I hope I know Daisy's tastes well enough!

Chapter 15

Daisy

"I need to take control of my life." I squeeze some lemon into my iced tea. The sun is shining bright on this hot July day. Even though Ashleigh and I sit in a cabana at one of the dock's nicest restaurants, I still fear for my tender skin. This tea better cool me

down. “This whole thing with Cristiano confirms that. I mean, I barely know what I want to do after I graduate college. My parents make it sound like I’m going to get a degree to keep up appearances and then get married right away to start my life of unhappy homemaking. As if.”

Ashleigh is squeezing every citrus fruit that grows in the sun into her water. She’s on a diet again. I keep telling that girl it’s about lifestyle changes and not fasting for days at a time, but does she ever listen to me? “I have no idea what I’m going to do, either. My parents want to either marry me off or have me do something impossible.” She scrunches her nose. “Like be a doctor or a lawyer. Why does it always have to be a doctor, lawyer, or wife? Ugh. My brother gets everything... and he’s younger than me!”

I know that feeling well, and it’s a common occurrence in our circles. Even though I’m the only DeMonte child, my parents have done nothing to secure my inheritance outside of some trusts. What I mean is that I was never prepared to take over the company. If I had been a boy? I would’ve been in the main DeMonte office from the time I could read. Ashleigh’s parents at least have a son to use as an excuse. The fact he’s three years younger than Ashleigh, though, is so telling that I want to hurl.

Thing is, though, I’m not sure I want to do Daddy’s job, anyway. I don’t imagine myself being some CEO or managing a huge company like DeMonte’s. I don’t know what I want to do. My whole undergrad career has been me screwing around in general ed. I have to declare a major this year. Right now, I’m about to pick English, because I don’t know what else to do!

Until recently, I didn’t let any of this bother me. Now? Since my father decided who my future husband will be? It’s like a storm has erupted in my head. It’s not only about the husband thing, although that was the impetus. I should be allowed to pick my romantic partners. I should be allowed to do whatever I want with my life, within reason, of course. I like to think I’m an intelligent girl. Bullheaded and stubborn?

Hell, yes. I hear my grandmother was a right asshole until the day she died. It's a DeMonte thing.

Ashleigh squeezes the life out of one more orange slice before deciding her water is edible. "Maybe you should pick a good role model for the kind of woman you want to be." She picks up *The Daily Social* and flips through the pages. "Although, I can't think of anyone like us who isn't partying and floating all day long."

I fold my arms on the table and sigh. My memories keep going back to Lorde and the way she cradled me in that hotel bed. Who knew a girl like that could be so tender? She may have called me dirty things while I ate her out, but we went to sleep with mutual respect I have never experienced with someone before.

If only my parents wouldn't flip their shit if we dated.

"Holy moly! Look at this ring!" Ashleigh slams the paper in front of me. A yellow ring highlights a blown-up photograph. "That's so vintage. I'm jelly."

I pick up the paper and stare at the ring. The photograph is grainy, but I see a pretty blue ring that looks like it may have come from the forties. Don't know. I'm not as hip to vintage as Ashleigh is. I'm a sleek and modern type of girl.

"Don't you like that lady?"

Finally, I look at the rest of the article. My mind has been so clouded that I don't even register anything beyond the ring. Now, I see some cute photos of Kathleen Allen and her partner out for a walk in... Paris? It's Paris. City of Love. Sigh.

The article implies that the ring is an engagement ring since Kathleen is wearing it on her left hand. "Could a wedding announcement be in the air?" On one hand, I want to swoon, on the other... last thing I want to think about is marriage.

“Yeah, I like her. Don’t personally know her, though.”

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“She seems like the kind of woman who knows what she wants to do with her life and does it with or without her parents’ permission. Isn’t she an heiress?”

“Yeah. Before our time.” What a sad thing to think about a woman who isn’t even thirty yet. I put the paper down. “She’s a philanthropist. Talk about not giving a fuck what your parents’ legacy is. My parents would shit themselves.”

“Mine too. What do her parents even do?”

“No idea.” The Allen family goes back farther than mine in this country. There’s a reason Kathleen is one of the richest women anyone knows. She doesn’t need a “real” job because she’s already wealthy in her own right. Must be nice. Maybe I should take some of the money from my next trust payment and invest like I’m serious about my future.

Hmm. Might not be a bad idea. You know. In case I finally snap at Daddy and he cuts me off forever. Better have a backup plan that isn’t “shack up with Lorde and hope for the best.”

My phone rings in my Chanel bag. I reach in and languidly pull it out, only sitting upright when I see my mother’s name flashing on the screen.

“Hello? Mama?”

“Daisy!” It’s not unusual for my mother to sound exasperated. At the same time, she’s usually not this exasperated. “You need to come home right now!”

“Why? What’s wrong?”

My mother tries telling me at least a hundred times. No, nobody is hurt. No, a calamity hasn’t occurred. Something is going on at the house, though, and I needed to be there five minutes ago.

I say goodbye to Ashleigh and immediately call my driver. I’m almost afraid to find out what’s going on this time.

Chapter 16

Lorde

“Name!”

I roll down the window of the 1956 Alfa Romeo Giulietta Spider Classic I “borrowed” from my mother this morning. It’s as red as the blood rushing through me as my nerves start to take over. “Lorde Sheen.”

The security guard looks at his clipboard. I already know what he’s going to say before he opens his mouth... and he already knows what my answer is going to be. “Do you have an appointment, Ms. Sheen?”

“No, sir.” Before I get waved away, I say, “But I need to see Mr. DeMonte, if he’s in.”

I can tell from the security guard’s expression that such a thing is a fat chance in hell. The whole me getting in to see the man of the house thing, that is.

“It has to do with his daughter. Trust me. He’ll want to hear this.”

At least the guard steps back into his booth and makes a call. I idle in front of the main gate for more than a few minutes. Finally, the guard steps back out, the gates opening.

“Go right on ahead, Ms. Sheen.”

“Thank you.”

There’s a reason I chose this car for today. Classic Italian. A man so proud of his heritage will surely be impressed with (cough, my mother’s) tastes. He’ll like my outfit even more. Got my Valentino turtleneck in this thrice-damned heat and Armani trousers. Both were tailor-made the last time I was in Europe. Never thought I would wear this turtleneck, but even a girl like me knows how important it is to have such a piece in her wardrobe. I’m glad for my foresight today.

I park in front of the entrance and am greeted by the head butler. His accent is thick and his mannerisms a bit gruff, but I can tell he fits in with this place nicely. Time to already be on my guard. I sling my leather knapsack over my chest and look like some Yale schmuck as I take the front steps one at a time. The butler says he will lead me to Mr. DeMonte’s office.

Here we go.

I’ve rarely seen Marcello DeMonte. He’s not exactly a public personality like his daughter. You only see photos of him in the business papers – boring – and sometimes in the social pages if it’s a gala or fundraiser. Not the kind of man you look at and go what a handsome fella! He’s not ugly, but you can only tell that he’s related to Daisy because of the cheekbones and a defiant chin. Otherwise, he’s broad-shouldered and stout. A formidable man. I can see how he has a lot of clout in the business world.

He's in his office. The man stands and says hello, although the confusion on his wrinkled face implies that he doesn't know why I could be here. Someone approved of me coming onto the property, though. If not him, then who?

"Mr. DeMonte." I extend my hand across his desk for a firm shake. The butler closes the office door behind me.

The man has the blankest look. His hand hangs limp by his side after we're done shaking. Don't blow this, Lorde. "Do I know you?" He's losing interest already.

"Lorde Sheen." I clear my throat. "Yeah, that one."

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The butler returns with a tray of refreshments once I introduce myself. He then stops halfway into the room. No wonder. Mr. DeMonte has gone from pure indifference to being prepared to rip my ovaries out of my body.

Like I said... I'mthatLorde Sheen.

"Sir," the butler says with a clear tone. "Should I...?"

Marcello flips some papers over. Whatever he uses to freshen up his office smells a lot like my sweet Daisy. Honeydew. A little cinnamon. Sweet and spicy. I also know for a fact that she tastes pretty sweet.

How about I not mention that to her dad?

"That'll be all, Andre. Ms. Sheen and I need privacy for a few minutes. This is sensitive."

"Yes, sir." The butler bows before excusing himself. I swear I hear the door lock.

Look, I am not usually one to play into stereotypes, but this has the feel of a mob hit about to go down. Great. The cops are going to find my body wearing this preppy bullshit. I even smoothed my hair down today and put on a touch of makeup! Shit. I'm such a poser.

"Why are you here?" Marcello growls, slowly sitting in his office chair. His look says that he's heard it all. With a daughter as gorgeous as Daisy? I'm sure he has. Does it make me sound like an idiot to hope that he'll make an exception for me? You know,

the girl fucking up his daughter's tastefully arranged engagement? While being female too?

"I came to speak about your daughter, Daisy."

Holy shit. That is legit fire burning behind his eyes. Whelp. Goodbye, life. We had a good run.

"Lorde Sheen." He draws my name out in a tired drawl. "You're that movie star's daughter, right? The girl the papers say has a new 'girlfriend' every week?"

"Yes, my mother is Camilla Sheen." I don't comment on the other stuff.

"You're the girl my daughter was caught kissing a few weeks ago."

I try so hard to keep a straight face as I nod. You'd be squirming too if you had a hot white light shining on you! "Yes, Mr. DeMonte. I don't know if Daisy has told you, but we've been seeing each other for a while."

That look on his face. The one wanting to kill me? Guessing Daisy hasn't told him.

"I want to clear the air, Mr. DeMonte. Daisy and I are very much interested in pursuing a serious relationship together. I've come to ask for your permission to date your daughter." It feels so weird saying that. Not just to a woman's father, but to a guy so traditional that he actually tries to betroth his adult daughter to a stranger. And probably, you know, doesn't think much of the whole queer thing. At best, he's indifferent on a personal level and thinks it gets in the way of him crafting the family he wants. At worst? Oh, boy.

"Daisy is engaged." He clears his throat. "And not dating women. I don't know what this world is trying to tell you, Ms. Sheen and the good Lord knows it's none of my

business what you do with your life, but in this house... well. We're Catholic!"

His somber tone has transformed into a formidable growl. The protective Daddy is pacing in front of his lion's den and prepared to snap at the heels of anyone looking to get in. Don't I know that Daisy is reserved? I bet DeMonte is the kind of guy who thinks his daughter is some chaste waif who doesn't know her urethra from her vagina.

"I know, sir. I was as shocked as she was to find out."

Uh-oh. Bad, Lorde, bad! Don't piss him off!

"That is to say... I don't think he's the right person for her. Sir. If I may say so. Ahem. Sir."

Look at me. Losing it. You'd think I consider this man my future father-in-law or something.

Speaking of something... that something is burning in my pocket right now.

At least Marcello doesn't rip my head off. Instead, he sits back in his seat. Upright, but too far away to choke me out. "What makes you think that, Ms. Sheen? I don't have to assure you that my wife and I have done our due diligence in picking a good match for our daughter."

Parents always like to think that, don't they? From what I've dug up on Cristiano, however, he's a bigger playboy than some of my acquaintances in Hollywood. He'll be true to Daisy for as long as the honeymoon. If that. Maybe until they have their first kid by the time she's twenty-five.

I lean forward. I want this man to see the whites of my eyes. "Have you ever been in

love before, Mr. DeMonte?”

He doesn't answer. According to Daisy, her parents' marriage was arranged... but that doesn't mean this gruff guy has never been in love. I'd find it impossible to believe.

Time to play my hand.

“I'm in love with your daughter, sir. I'm pretty sure she loves me, too.”

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He's not smiling. He's also not killing me. I might be on to something here!

"Listen, sir, I'm definitely no expert. I've never been in love before Daisy... I didn't even know that's what I felt until very recently. She's a special woman."

I think I see the man slowly nod. Good. Good, Lorde, keep going!

"So special that she's managed to make me look at my life in a whole new way. I know what those papers say about me. They're not flattering. I didn't love any of those women. That's why I was always looking for a new one to fill the void. With your daughter, I don't feel any void. She's my perfect match. It's like a whole new day has dawned every time I look at her." I remember how I felt when I woke up with her still beside me. Relieved. Happy. I've woken up next to many women before. I was never relieved to see them. "We both know that your daughter is beautiful on the outside. I admit I think that, too. But she's also gorgeous on the inside. She has a fire to her that I can't resist. I'm a dowdy moth compared to her. She's got big dreams, and I want to help her make them come true."

He grunts.

"I haven't known her for very long, it's true. Sometimes, though, you know that it's right, yeah? I do. This time around, I feel that spark. I want to know everything about Daisy. For goodness sake, I want to know what her favorite time of day is, so I can make sure I'm always there to see her smile when it appears."

I think I have him. I think.

“She’s engaged. To a man.”

If I didn’t think it would tank my chances, I would smack my head against his desk.

Instead, I pull what I have out of my pocket and place it before Marcello.

His eyes widen. His mouth parts. He looks like he wants to say that better not be what I think it is.

It is.

“I want to marry Daisy.” My throat is filled with apprehension, but somehow, the words come out. “I’m serious, sir. I want to call her my wife. I know I can be a good spouse to her... and a good daughter-in-law to you.”

I think he’s going to throw me out of his office and tell me to never come back. Know what I get instead?

“You don’t even have a father, Ms. Sheen.”

So, we begin.

I’ve heard tales of these conversations. Bartering. Making demands. Promising payment. Asserting oneself for the sake of a woman. For thousands of years, men have been proving themselves to their future fathers-in-law so they can have the women they love. Few made it.

Now, it’s a woman’s turn.

I’m too stubborn to know when to call it quits. Not that I’ll ever call it quits for Daisy. I’ll elope in Vegas with her before I’ll let her marry some twit like Cristiano.

Still, it feels so anachronistic. Why the hell am I having this discussion!

Marcello tears me apart regarding my heritage. Not only is my father absent from the records, but my mother is some tawdry (award-winning, excuse me) actress who has shown her tits on the screen multiple times. She posed in *Playboy* once. What kind of legacy would I be creating for my future children?

Nevertheless, I knew this was going to happen. Everything I researched about this family told me that appearances, money, and heritage were everything. So I've spent the past few days putting together a personal résumé of sorts. All the reasons I would be a good match for Daisy DeMonte, heiress to one of the biggest shopping empires in America.

I came prepared.

I may not know anything about my father's side of the family, but I can easily dig up my mother's, thanks to detective work she had done years ago. I can also put a case forward for myself. You know, as someone who threatens the conservative appearance of the DeMonte's?

They can't be that conservative if Marcello is hearing me out. He's made it clear that he knows I'm a woman. I don't doubt for two seconds that he dreams of his daughter making babies with some guy of impeccable pedigree. He's an old-school Italian Catholic. He wants the big white dress for Daisy and the Italian tux for the well-bred man.

The guy who will, inevitably, be adopted into this family and inherit a department store empire during an age of online shopping and inflation.

"My great-grandfather on my mother's side was Italian," I point out, showing the genealogy report to Marcello. "Piero Russo, of Florence."

He looks up from the paper with mild shock. “My ancestors are from Florence.”

Excellent!

“Russo... that’s a strong family name. Many brilliant Russos in Florence.” Marcello nods. “What else you got?”

Are we... are we doing this? We're doing this!

Okay. Now that we've cleared I come from excellent Italian stock, there's the matter of my funds. I show him my portfolio and copies of my bank accounts. Very sensitive information, but if you want to prove to a man that you can provide for his daughter, you bring the receipts. Literally. My net worth is tens of millions of dollars. I don't want for anything. At the rate my investments are going (which have been going since my birth, thanks, Mom!) I'll be set for life in five more years. My mother is one of the wealthiest actresses in Hollywood. I don't have a lot yet. I can fix that. Gold, stocks, whatever. I'll do it all. Show me your financial planner, Marcello, and I'll show that firm their next big customer.

Next, I talk about my future. Before Daisy, I didn't have a career in mind. Professional drifter, I guess. When you grow up as rich as I did, you don't need career ambitions. That's not going to work for Marcello, though. He wants someone he can train to inherit his company. If Daisy will let me, I would like to inherit with her. I would have to go back to school, though. Lots of business classes are in my future. I already have a pending acceptance letter from Harvard Business School. What? You think I didn't do well in school? I partied and fooled around with a lot of women, but I did my damn work. My mother would've killed me otherwise, and I can be a real baby when it comes to her being disappointed.

"I swear to you, Mr. DeMonte," I conclude my spiel with. "I will be the greatest spouse your daughter could have. I'll work every day of my life to prove that to both of you. I want to be with your daughter. I know she wants to be with me. We may be young, and we don't have to get married for a while yet but at least give us a chance. Unlike others you may have thought of for the position," I think of Cristiano, with his

crazy family connections and self-interests, “I will be completely dedicated to your family and its preservation. I admire your legacy. I want to continue it and make it stronger.” Babies. I want to have babies with your daughter one day, and it’s scaring the piss out of me! “You’re right when you say I have no father. I want to change that. I want to be such a great daughter-in-law that you don’t even think of me that way.” I pause for effect. Here we go. “I’ll think of you as the father I always needed. And I hope that you’ll see me as part of the family. One you never knew how you lived without.”

I can play his games. Who knows? Maybe I’ll be in his position one day. Daisy and I could have some gorgeous daughters that tear up the world by storm. They’ll have all the partiers coming to call, and no matter how well I think I’ve prepared them for dating, I’ll still worry for them. Like Marcello worries for his young daughter right now.

He wants to know that I can provide for her. He wants to know that his family’s legacy won’t die with him. That I will respect and take care of his feisty girl until death do us part.

Something changes in his eyes. Gone is the stony façade he built up the moment I entered this room. I’ve touched a crucial part of his heart. His fears.

He looks up and gazes over my head.

“So, with your blessing, sir, I would like to be with your daughter. And your family.”

He smiles, wanly. “Why don’t you ask her about it yourself?”

I don’t have to ask. I’ve known she was there for at least five minutes. Standing silently, but resilient. That’s my girl.

Sure enough, I turn to see Daisy standing in front of the door, her mother a pace behind her. Her eyes are wild with confusion and fear. For me? For her? For all of us? Yeah.

“How much did you hear?” I ask her.

Those glassy eyes wipe the pout from her lips. Instead, they curve into a smile that matches her father’s. “Something about becoming my sister.” Her smile is cheekier.

I snatch the box off her father’s desk. “Before that?”

“Hmm...”

“Oh, I would love to see this,” Marcello grumbles. “Prove you mean it, Ms. Sheen. Go on. No future daughter of mine would be scared to do what you’re about to do.”

He’s right. No one in this family can be scared of anything, least of all professing eternal love to a woman one’s barely known for several weeks. So here I go, standing up long enough to get down on one knee in front of Daisy. I open the box. She gasps. Her mother has another one of her infamous strokes.

How do you pick the perfect ring for a woman whose tastes you’re still learning? I’m not gonna lie. It was impossible to the point I kept the receipt, in the hopes that the worst that would happen is an exchange for something more to her liking.

For the time being, I chose a simple silver band encrusted with three beautiful diamonds. Daisy wouldn’t want something that could easily snag on her outfits, but she’d still want something pretty that she could show off to the cameras, of course.

I wouldn’t expect – or want – less. My vivacious Daisy will look stunning in whatever engagement ring I buy her.

“Daisy DeMonte,” I say, trying not to tremble on this bended knee, “will you marry me?”

She’s frozen. Her face, her body, even her hair refuses to move. Mrs. DeMonte covers her mouth with her hands and starts to cry. Fuck, I wanna cry, too!

Me. Lorde Sheen. Proposing to the woman I insulted to hell and back not even two months ago. Me. Lorde Sheen. Proposing to any woman at all!

I don’t regret a single moment of it.

Especially when her frozen lips break out into a grin and she emphatically nods. “Yes,” she squeaks. Then, “Yes! Holy shit, yes!”

I leap up and hug her, my beautiful Daisy finally in my arms again. In front of her parents, even! Where are the paps now? They would eat this up.

Our celebrations are cut short when she breaks from my hold and says, “What about Cristiano...” she looks at her father, trepidation coloring her cheeks.

Marcello’s demeanor remains unchanged. “I’m sorry. Who?”

I think Daisy is going to pass out when her father gets up, rounds his desk... and smacks me right on the back.

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“As long as you two don’t give me a reason to regret this, I’ll give you my blessing.”
He looked between us. “No wedding until you’re both finished with schooling.”

Daisy’s eyebrows go up. “Both of us?”

“I’m, uh, kinda getting an MBA at Harvard.”

“What!”

“How lovely!” Mrs. DeMonte cries. “This is wonderful! Look how happy she is, Marcello.”

“Yes.” Finally, a real smile. “It’s good to see you so happy, Principessa.”

“That’s because I’ve found my princess.” Daisy wraps her arms around me and brings me down for a kiss. No tongue in front of the parents, of course. Yet I hope they can feel our passion all the same. This is real. “The best one there is,” she mumbles on my lips. I take her left hand and slip the dainty ring onto her daintier finger. Wow. This is happening.

Marcello’s chuckles quickly turn antagonistic.

“No sex before marriage,” he growls into the space between us. “I don’t care what gender you are, Ms. Sheen. We still have somedecorum in this family.”

Yeah. We’ll see about that.

Mrs. DeMonte suggests we all have a big dinner together, but Daisy smartly says that would be better planned for tomorrow. Tonight, she and I should go out and celebrate our engagement. Alone.

Marcello still growls in my direction.

“Your daughter and her dignity are safe with me, sir,” I reassure him. Until we get back to my place, anyway. Then all bets are off. “Come on.” I take Daisy’s right hand. “Let’s go tell the world.”

“I’ve got some calls to make myself,” Marcello says with a sigh. “You two have fun, but not too much fun. Be back here by tomorrow night for dinner. There are people you need to meet.”

Wow. Wow.

Daisy leads me out of the office and down the empty hallway toward the front door of the grand DeMonte mansion. Her mirth is palpable, and I drench myself in it. Even when she turns around, making sure the coast is clear before she whispers into my ear, I’m losing it in serendipity.

“You’re taking me back to my place and fucking me until I can’t scream anymore.”

Um. Okay!

“Capiche?” She tugs on my hand. As we emerge from the front door and head toward the Alfa Romero, we come upon quite the... scene.

Paps. Six of them, leaping over the fence and making a mad dash while security chases after them. Petulant bugs, aren’t they? Daisy and I hurry to the car so we can make a break for it. Already the paps are firing shots at us in front of her family’s

house.

Daisy hesitates outside the passenger side door. Before I know it, she's flipping off the paps with a giant smile on her face. "Eat your hearts out, bastards!" she cries.

That's when I realize it's not her middle finger in the air. It's her engagement ring she's showing off. Guess she likes it, huh?

Chapter 17

Daisy

This is the highest I've ever been in life. This morning, I woke up a confused, nearly broken woman who had no idea what to do with her life. Now, I'm not only engaged... but with the woman I've always wanted to be with.

Yes, even when I hated Lorde's guts, I wanted to be with her. I'm such a cliché. We're such a cliché. I can't give a rat's ass. The top is down on this classic car and I'm finally alive!

"I love you!" I scream at the top of my lungs as Lorde guns the gas back into downtown.

"I'm quite fond of you as well, Ms. DeMonte!"

I laugh. My reflection in the mirror is one of a happy woman in love. I'm going to remember this day for the rest of my life, aren't I?

God willing. There's still a lot more to come.

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We arrive at my apartment as the police are chasing off a swarm of paps. The police ain't shit for this stuff when they're camped out on public property, but I guess the paps were trying to trespass in my building and the management finally got sick of it. Good. They'll get a few pics of Lorde and me going inside the lobby, but we're out in the open now. Later tonight, my engagement ring will be plastered all over *The Daily Socialblog* for every other heiress to salivate over.

Lorde and I are truly alone for the first time when the elevator doors close. Not only that, but we're off to do something that I've been wanting to do for a very long time. Are those nerves starting to fill me? Hopefully, they won't be the only things filling me soon enough.

My girlfriend – fiancée? – comes closer, hesitant. Finally, she pulls me to her, our bodies crushing together in a tight embrace. Oh, boy. She's a bit grabby.

"Fuck, Daze," she hoarsely whispers into my ear. For the first time, I love that nickname. She's going to be the only one in the world who can call me that. "I've been waiting for this for too long."

"It hasn't been that long since that night in the hotel. Are you really that impatient?" I hope my smile is cheeky enough for her.

It is. Her hands find my ass – and goose me, making me shriek in delightful surprise. "When it comes to you? Definitely."

I lead her to my apartment near the elevator. Not until I open my door – which I have to try three times because my hands are shaking – do I realize this will be her first

time seeing where I live, what I have made my abode. It's... a bit feminine. Nothing frilly or lacy, since I'm not my mother, but nothing like her utilitarian paradise.

"Nice," she says, stepping into my living room and taking in the furniture and trimmings. "But you're nicer."

Lorde wraps a gentle arm around me and nuzzles my ear. Is she holding me like I'm made from porcelain? This really isn't what I had in mind at all, but as we get closer to my bedroom, slowly but surely, I giggle in excitement.

"We don't have to do anything you won't want."

"Are you kidding me?" I squeeze her arm. "I meant what I said back at the house. I want you to fuck me senseless, Lorde."

She pushes against my stomach. Yes. That's what I want. Now give it to me, Lorde. My legs are shaking, not out of nerves, but because I crave you that badly. "You're demanding for my girlfriend."

"You don't get it." I tell her about the fantasies I've had ever since we met. How I want to feel her brute strength against my body. The way I imagine us getting kinky when the moment calls for it. How I bet that she's a pro with every matter of toy and implement, and I want her to teach me everything. This is the woman who marched into my father's office and did something no other could do: make him see reason. That's the kind of hottie I want fucking me up in bed! "I know you can give it to me like that."

"Right now, though?"

"Why? You wanna wait? You think I can't handle it?"

She rubs the side of her head. “I’m used to doing that with girls I barely know. You’re different. I’m kind of in love with you.”

“Good. That means you really want to give it to me.” I pull up my miniskirt, showing her my black thong. Yeah. A thong. You’d think I knew what was going on today! “Don’t tell me you don’t want to take this pussy in ways only you can.”

Her eyes glaze over in erotic thought. My hand grazes her thigh. It’s enough to make her snatch both of my arms.

Lorde leans down and whispers in my ear, hot and demanding.

“I’m going to want to do it every which way with you. Thought you might want to go slow first.”

“You’re not a woman who likes to go slow, Lorde.”

“How do you know? Besides, you’re a special case.”

“Not that special. Come on, I’m permitting you to be wild and rough. You telling me you don’t want to...”

She silences me with a long, determined kiss. It demands more than love from me. It demands that I be a good girl who listens to everything she has to say. I don’t doubt she’ll test me a bit first, though, to make sure I meant what I said. Lorde’s not the kind of woman to do whatever she wants without me saying yes.

I whisper her name against her lips as she walks me the rest of the way into my bedroom and to my neatly made bed. It won’t be very neat for long. I want to see scratch marks on my headboard by the time we’re done.

Lorde sits on the edge of the bed with me standing between her legs. Her hands rest on my hips, one curling around the left side of my ass. Oh, fuck yes, here we go.

She slowly slides my skirt down my legs and lets it pool at my feet. I kick it away, ass moving in her palm. Lorde squeezes it. Hard. I close my eyes and gasp.

“You’re perfection from top to bottom, aren’t you?”

Her hands tug on my shirt to bring it over my head. I titter like a shy girl. “Not fair,” I say. “I need to see some of you too. You know how this works.”

Ten seconds later, her shirt is on the floor next to my skirt. My hands go to her chest, feeling it for the first time in what feels like forever. Now she feels even better. Because today? She will be mine.

And I'll be hers.

Now she rips off my shirt until I'm standing in nothing but a thong and bra. She only has eyes for my face – and my breasts. No wonder. I didn't let her see them last time. Lorde lifts herself high enough to kiss my collarbone, light and fleeting, driving me insane with want for more. She slides a bra strap off my shoulder. I moan when her lips hit the sensitive area of my décolletage.

“Lower,” I beg, raspy.

Her lips move slowly down my bra cup. “Here?” she teases, licking my sensitive spot.

“Lower!” I tremble with the expectation of her lips on my breasts.

She moves my bra out of the way, unsnapping it in a split second and throwing it on the floor. She looks right into my eyes as her lips find my hard nipple, taking it in her mouth.

Lorde growls. Me? I come undone.

I moan again, pressing my body against her, straddling her leg. Her whole body shudders against my thigh.

The anticipation is killing me!

“Please.” This time, my begging is light and airy. I'm done. I'm hers. My desperation

is mounting me before she has the chance. “Give it to me the way I need, Lorde. You said so yourself. You’re the only one who can fuck the priss out of me. Why do you think I insisted on coming back to my apartment instead of going to yours?”

The hungry look in her eye... she understands.

Lorde smacks my ass until I’m off her leg and stumbling in front of her. She touches my hip in a way that makes me get down on my knees. I’m still between her legs.

“I’ve got a feeling no one can fuck that priss out of you, Daze,” she says, pulling down her zipper. “But I’m going to try. Starting with your mouth.”

Here we go.

Chapter 18

Lorde

I must be dreaming, because there’s no way Daisy DeMonte is asking me to give it to her rough moments after she’s accepted my haphazard marriage proposal.

We barely know each other, really. We haven’t even done some of the freakier stuff I’ve been fantasizing about since I met her. I was starting to think she would make me marry her first.

I would have. Probably. This girl got me to do crazier shit first.

Don’t think I don’t know why she brought us back to her apartment. This whole apartment is Priss with a capital P. The furniture is so neat and tidy that I believe she cleans it instead of the maid. Her clothes are neatly hung up in her closet, the door open far enough for me to see it color-coded by the day of the week. This bedspread

is lavender.Lavender.Hey, I've fucked in pink beds before, so this ain't nothing. Simply painting a picture here.

Now, I've got her begging for me to give it to her good and hard. Anywhere. She'd probably be down with me fingering her ass to tease her. Having her get on her knees to test these waters she's begging to swim? If she can handle me coming all over her face, then she can handle the other stuff, maybe.

Look, I've been plenty rough with other girls. Lots of girls. It's amazing how much women love it when you go wild animal on them. Tell them what to do. Toss them around like your doll and take everything they offer, one by one, sometimes more than once. I've had girls beg me to come. Makethemcome. They think I'm some sex goddess who can go all night regardless of carpal tunnel or the need to, you know, sleep.

Maybe I am a sex goddess. We'll see.

Fuck, I need her! I knew I was going to get in her the moment we finally entered her apartment, but I was ready before that, too. Now I'm dying to be freed from these clothes and inside her. I should do it. I should throw Daisy on her bed and ravage her like she's asked for. Yet this is our first time together doing this properly. I should make it somewhat special, yeah?

No surprise that I'm wet like a goddamn rainstorm. I pull down my jeans far enough for her to get the hint. I'm practically begging her to give me some attention.

She does. I don't have to tell her to get her tongue in there again. Daisy just does it, starting with her lips on my mound before sucking on my clit until I whine. "Shit, Daze," I mutter, kicking off my jeans. "Put it all over your mouth. Now."

Daisy licks my slit and squeezes my damned thighs before rubbing her face all over

my cursed pussy. It's like the other night. Only better, because I can now say that this woman is going to marry me. Soon.

Her eyes look to me for approval. "Am I doing good? Is this what you want? Tell me I'm doing good." I do. Since she liked it so much the other night, I pull her hair and watch her wince and hear her groan against my cunt.

"Don't stop," I growl, my need to fuck her face growing to the point it's a miracle I'm not slamming my whole pelvis against her cheekbones. "Look at me. I've gotta see those eyes."

I want to see it. The adoration. The way she gazes at me as her thumb strokes my clit when she comes up for air and then she's back to eating me out, her beautiful hair falling to the side and her perfect nails lightly grazing my skin. I grab her by the back of the head to maintain control. Trust me. My hips only care about one thing right now. If my stupid cunt had its way? I'd come on her tongue again.

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Like I'm wasting a perfectly good orgasm like that this time.

"You getting wet?" My thumb rubs her forehead as she obediently keeps up the pace. Her tongue darts inside me at a steady rhythm. I can't tell you what her lips are doing. I don't even know how to describe it. Her throat? Moaning for me. Like other parts of her, I'm sure. "Is your pussy getting ready for me?"

Eyes still on me, Daisy groans in the affirmative. Or at least those eyes say it's a hearty yes.

"Touch yourself. Make sure you're dripping by the time I fuck you."

This is as much for her as it is for me. 'Cause let me tell you... when your girl is rubbing her slit while eating you out, you're having a good time. Plus, it makes her whimper all over me and her eyes struggle to stay open. Hell. Yes.

This is my girl.

This is my girl.

Sure, Daisy would make me call her a woman – and what a young woman she is – but there's something about calling her my girl that makes it feel so much more intimate. Can I also confess that I've never thought of another woman this way? From the time I started running around in my teenage years, I've been waiting for the perfect gal to call mine.

I've found her.

Holy hell, have I found her. Now, I'm finally putting that feisty, pouty mouth of hers to good use. My body agrees. I hope she appreciates the taste I'm leaving all over her tongue. Glistening.

I need to go further.

I know she can do it. She did it the other night. She makes no protest holding her head against me, my fingers clutching the edge of her bed. Her concentration has increased, so she looks away.

"No, Daze, look at me." When she does... holy shit. That's pure surrender in her beautiful eyes. She'll do whatever I want. She'll go along with whatever I want. There is no hesitation between us. This is a woman who will let me have whatever I want.

Her.

I want her.

You know how.

"I can't," I finally confess, pushing her off me, catching one of her arms, and pulling her up to the bed. I crash my mouth against hers. Tasting myself. Tasting her as she has interpreted my body. "I have to have you now," I mutter on her lips. "Now."

Chapter 19

Daisy

I've never had a woman push me onto a bed like Lorde does. My mouth is barely full of air for the first time in five minutes, and already her tongue is shooting into it, her

naked body slamming down on top of me in ways I didn't know could feel so right.

I want her to do it. I want her to fuck me like this, with my back hard against the bed, my head digging against the pillow behind me. I want her to take me so hard that I can't walk tonight. Then I want her to do it again. Again. Again, until my stupid body can't take anymore.

There's that gleam in her eye again. She keeps pushing this more and more. The more I acquiesce, the faster she'll realize I'm not fucking around. This is what I want.

This is what I need.

But she doesn't give that to me. Lorde lands on the bed beside me, her nudity screaming to touch me even though she doesn't.

"Get on top of me."

That's an order if I ever heard one. The way her voice crashes into me is surreal. I never thought in a million years I would beg a woman to treat me like this. It's not like that with Lorde, though. I'm trusting her with this fantasy of mine. I know that she's the only woman who can make me feel like something more than the perfect heiress. Today is the day I unleash the dirtiest sides of myself. I'll start by straddling her abs and bumping my ass against her mound. My hands will wander across her breasts. My lips will part and ask, "Is this what you want?" My aching pussy searches for her. Now. I need her now. I've been waiting for this day longer than I've been waiting for Lorde to fuck me, but now the two desires are colliding, and I'm about to go mad.

She grabs my hips and immobilizes me. I'm on top, but she's controlling every movement. One of her hands meanders toward my thighs. I made sure I was ready for her to the point I drenched my poor thong. I don't know what happened to that piece

of fabric. Abandoned on the floor with everything else, probably.

“Please, fuck me,” I whimper, rubbing my entrance against her curling knuckles.

“Please!”

“That’s right. Beg for me. Tell me how much you want me inside of you. Make it convincing. I’m reveling in my victory down here.”

The cad. The beautiful bitch! She’s been thinking about this since meeting me too! Oh, I bet she liked those fantasies. Bet she touched herself to them. She was always the type. Goes up against a girl who has the brains and guts to take her on, and she instantly starts thinking about how to tame me. Well... she’s got a point. That is what I want. I tell her as much.

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“For the love of...” My toes wiggle on the bed, my knees bent and hips struggling to catch her hand. “Fuck me!”

Did I tell you that she’s a bitch? Because she is. Her finger doesn’t merely tease my entrance. It draws circles around it and tickles my clit. I’m shaking and shuddering all over, my wetness dripping not only down my thigh but down her freakin’ hand. Does that work, Lorde? Does that prove to you how much I want you? You put this rock on my finger. Come get your spoils.

She finally releases me. My pussy drops down, swallowing her fingers so quickly that I cry out in both relief and shock. When I’ve completely taken her fingers inside me, everything stands still. Me. Her. My heart. Her words.

I grind against her hand, taking her deeper with each rock of my hips. We don’t look away from each other. I accidentally lift too high. Her fingers nearly slip free.

“Don’t,” she growls. “Ride them, Daze. You can’t hurt me.” A smug smile nearly tears me asunder. “Why do you think I strength train? Gotta keep my wrist ready to take you on.”

Oh, I do. I slam my hips back down and completely lose myself in the moment.

The sensation is incredible. I mean, obviously, she feels good, delicate but skilled enough to fuck me exactly how I need. But it’s her, too! Lorde has my hip with her other hand, but it’s a loose hold, and her fingers thrust hard and deep into me as I brace myself against her breasts. She fucks me so hard that I’m afraid of losing control and falling – but I don’t, so I stop being afraid. I let my body move freely, my

breasts bouncing for both of our enjoyment. The way she looks at them makes me thrust down harder, faster.

Before I can completely disappear into my mind, Lorde sits up and holds me to her chest, her fingers still plunging into me. Yet now her tongue is in my mouth, my ear, on my neck... her breathy groans carry with them the same dirty whispers from the other night. She calls me things.

Tells me I'm the type of sullied girl who's easy, who doesn't respect where she comes from and what something like this could do to her family. It's all the shit I've been so afraid of hearing for as long as I've been conscious of who I am and what that means. It makes me kiss her. It makes me moan, whimper, cry. I've never experienced anything as freeing as Lorde Sheen fucking me and calling me her slutty little heiress.

Once those words leave her mouth I come for the first time today. I scream against her lips, my body shaking in her lap as my pussy clenches around her so tightly that I'm wordlessly begging for her to lose herself with me. Now. Now, Lorde. Now's the time to come unhinged with me.

She doesn't. Instead, she does something better.

She shoves me down and takes me.

I don't think our bodies have separated in over fifteen minutes. Sweat pours down her skin, and mine. The longer we go on, with her holding me down and grinding against me like it's nothing, the more I feel that barbaric side of her come out. Slow and sensual my ass. That would've been so boring. So... uninspiring. I would've continued to crave her for all the wrong reasons. If this is the woman I might marry one day, she better deliver the first time we do this.

“Shit, you gorgeous girl,” she says with increasingly heavier grunts. Lorde’s thrusts slow, her hips grinding against mine, my pussy aching for hers. My body teeters on the edge of another orgasm, teased into oblivion. “Look at this perfect body. It’s all mine to take.”

“Yes,” I murmur, eyes fluttering shut. Except shutting my eyes means shutting out her amazing body and that look of pure pleasure on her face. “Take it. Tear me apart!”

Her rhythm shifts again. Hard. So hard. My bed is creaking and hitting the wall. I didn’t know it could take this kind of abuse from my sex life and still survive. Good. I want to hear the bed of this prissy goody-goody go under and be rebuilt into the bed of a promiscuous harlot. I may be a promiscuous harlot for one person – that I am engaged to, no less – but it’s the principle of the thing. After today, Lorde is going to know that she can have me whenever she wants. However she wants. She’s the only one who gets to have me, and I know she’ll make it count.

She must be so close to coming, but she still finds the energy to grind us together, her slick thigh pressing into mine, her pelvis rocking with enough pressure to make my eyes roll back in my head. Lorde also doesn’t shy away from more of those filthy words and names she calls me. Each one goes right into my ear and turns my body on more. These are words I could imagine the Lorde I hated calling me. Instead, it’s the Lorde I fell in love with. I feel so dirty. So used. In all the best ways possible.

My name is Daisy DeMonte, but I am no longer that Daisy DeMonte. I will dress and act much of the same way in public, but my heart and soul are free. I don’t have to be the perfect heiress anymore. I can be who I want. This woman... this amazing woman... will ensure that.

First, this equally amazing sex we’re having. You know. The sex that’s got me screaming in pleasure again because the friction of our sweaty thighs grinding

together is setting my nerves on fire. Our hips slap, our moans blend. She's got to be coming. I know I am!

"Oh my God! Lorde!" Her hand clutches my shoulder before pressing against my collarbone. She's not going to relent. Hard. Hard. Slow. Hard. Slow. I'm quivering all over my body as I scream that I am hers. Her girl. Her bride. Her filthy harlot who is available to her 24/7, because that's the kind of girl I am now, thank the stars above!

I see those stars now. When I fall back down from Heaven, it's to see Lorde's still desirous face.

She's not done.

It doesn't matter if I am or not. I won't say no, no matter what. I'm tired. I'm sore. I've come twice already, and with any luck, she'll make me come again. It doesn't matter. My brain is so addled with sex that it means nothing to me if she flips me over, pulls my ass into the air, and nestles her hungry mouth into my folds, slick lips meeting mine with a shuddering slap of desire.

Lorde holds me by the shoulders as I brace myself again. I can't keep my eyes open. My hair falls in my face as she soundlessly eats me out from behind, the grind of our bodies producing obscene sounds, sticky and wet and perfect. I really am a toy now. Her strength alone makes me a willing thrall to her every whim. The way she spans my ass and calls me her girl makes me forget who I am entirely.

Even though I know there will be many more opportunities for sex like this, I can't help but want to make every moment count. As I feel my body tense and hear that familiar gasp rise in her chest, I throw myself into one last orgasm, hoping the rhythm of our lovemaking sends her over the edge with me.

It does.

Oh my God, does it!

“Don’t move.” I’m face down on my bed, my legs zipping together as Lorde mounts the small of my back and humps her pussy against my skin. She’s so deliriously hot to the touch that all I can think is that she cools me down while I lift my head enough to let her hear my words of encouragement. Come on, baby. Use me, baby. Fuck me, want me, need me.

We’re all wet and wanting more. But not as much as I want her to come all over me, knowing that it was my body that did this to her.

“Fuck, Daisy!” She pushes me down against my bed and slams her entire body against mine, hips trembling as her climax overtakes her. At first, it’s that same glorious friction we’ve been sharing, but then it’s the shuddering, shaking, gasping mess she becomes on top of me that makes it all so delicious. She clings to me, rides it out, and moans my name like it’s a prayer.

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I bite the edge of my pillow. My whimpers shake my whole body as Lorde comes down from her well-deserved high. Her movements soften, but they don't stop. She stays wrapped around me, hips twitching, pussy still grinding softly into me with a deep, exhausted pleasure.

Lorde stops. I don't move. I can't. My woman is all over me, touching me, coming down from me, taking me over. I'm frozen. Too tired to move even as she collapses beside me and nibbles my ear.

"That was amazing," she says, gently rubbing the back of my neck as I remain pointed away from her, catching my breath. Hers isn't much better. "You're..."

I use the last of my strength to look her in the cloudy eyes. "I'm the girl you tripped."

She manages a smile and kisses me. "You're the girl I fell in love with as soon as I laid my eyes on you." Another kiss. "You're the girl I see myself loving for the rest of my life."

After all that nasty shit she said while we were having sex... I think this is my favorite.

I bring her down for a real kiss. Again. And again.

We're not leaving this bed until I fully explore what she means to me.

Chapter 20

Lorde

The next morning is so calm that it lulls me into a false sense of security. You know the type. You know there's a reason to be worried, but you can't remember why. All it takes is fully waking up to remember, and you refuse.

Except I do fully wake up – and the calm remains.

Daisy sleeps beside me, her body tangled in silk sheets, her mouth half-open in the silliest way. A true fly-catching moment. Her skin is speckled with marks I don't regret leaving. She's mine. I don't care if it's possessive or juvenile or way too much after two months. If she wanted gentle and temporary, she shouldn't have looked at me like that in New York. She shouldn't have kissed me like she was already mine.

But here she is.

And here I am, watching her sleep like a creep, wondering when all this is going to get ripped out from under us.

I don't believe in peace. Not really. I believe in pauses between storms, most of which I've instigated. I believe in the way Daisy curls closer when I slightly move. In her body responding to mine like we were forged from the same clay before we were even born. But peace?

Her phone buzzes somewhere in the room, but she doesn't wake. I slip out of bed quietly, pulling on a robe that smells like something floral. I walk across the room, find her phone, and check the screen even though I shouldn't.

Seven missed calls from Marcello DeMonte.

Three from her mother.

One from Cristiano.

I don't open any of the messages. I think I know what this is about.

I'm halfway to putting the phone down when it pings again with a fresh text. This one's a preview I can't avoid reading.

"We need to talk before this goes public. Call me. Please, Principessa." It's her father.

I open her messages. Yeah, I know. Bad girlfriend behavior. Bad fiancé behavior, if I let myself hope. But I need to know what I'm dealing with. For the love of God, her numerical password is her birthday. I get in on one try.

"We can spin this. But we need to be smart. Take a step back from Sheen. Let things cool off before Cristiano's father pulls the plug."

The air feels colder. I look back at Daisy, still sleeping like she doesn't know she's about to be asked to choose between her family's empire and the woman she just screamed herself hoarse for.

I know what this is. I've lived through this script before. Fame doesn't shield you from it. Money definitely doesn't. When the world decides you're inconvenient, when your love becomes an obstacle, they start sharpening the knives.

I make coffee.

I drink it on her balcony in one of her oversized sweaters that fits me naturally, my bare legs freezing. I stare out at the street, the calm of it this early in the morning so complete it's making me more jittery than this coffee. I want thunder. Fights on the sidewalk. Fuck it, I'll take paps lining up to catch a snap of my mug on Daisy DeMonte's balcony, wearing her clothes and with bedhead.

When Daisy finally stirs and steps out to find me, her hair is also a mess.

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“Hey,” she says softly, shivering in the early morning breeze. “Why are you up?”

“You got some messages.”

That gets her attention. “From whom?”

“Your family. Cristiano.”

Her spine straightens and her lips dry. The calm breaks.

“I haven’t looked yet.”

“I did.” Might as well not lie about it. “By the way, your birthday? Really? With all these paps about? You need a better access code.”

Daisy flinches, but only for a second. “What did they say?”

“That some deal’s falling apart. They’re panicking. You need to break up with me to buy them some time.”

She doesn’t say anything. She merely walks to the balcony railing and stares at the street the same way I did.

After a long silence, she whispers, “It’s because you’re a woman, isn’t it?”

I don’t answer right away. Then, “No. It’s because I’m not useful to them. If I were a billionaire heir with a dick, they’d have put a ring on me themselves.” Instead, I’ve

got two tits and a womb. Really, whatwerethey thinking? Yesterday already feels like several months ago.

Daisy turns, red in the face and still dry in the lips. “Youarerich. Youaremore powerful than half the weirdos they fawn over.”

“Yeah, but I’m nottheirs.”

It lands. Her face crumples for half a second before she catches herself.

“They can’t make me leave you,” she says. “I don’t care what they say.”

“They’re not trying to makeyouleave. They’re trying to makemewalk.” I touch her cheek. “They know you’re stubborn and that I’m a liability. This isn’t a business move. It’s personal. They’re using you to punish me. If I love you, I’m supposed to back down. Let you go so your family stays afloat.”

She shakes her head. “That’s not fair.”

“Since when is any of this fair?”

“Lorde...”

“I won’t do it,” I say. “If they think they can scare me into giving you up, they’ve forgotten who the fuck I am.” I sniff. “Camilla Sheen had a kid out of wedlock at the height of her career and didn’t let it stop her from being one of the highest-paid and most sought-after actresses in Hollywood. You think this is gonna stopmefrom doing what I want?”

Daisy crashes into me and kisses me hard, messy, like she doesn’t know what else to do with the panic crashing down on us both. I kiss her back, swallowing her silent

noise and grounding her.

When she pulls away, her eyes are glassy.

“They’ll go after everything,” she says. “The press. Your reputation. They’ll leak something if they have to. Try to twist it into a scandal and pressure me into breaking up with you just for that.”

“Then let them,” I say. “I’ve survived worse. You have too.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt because of me.”

“I’d rather get hurt than give you up.”

She exhales, trembling. “What do we do?”

I brush my thumb across her cheek, and she softens her face and looks at me like she’s never been so in love before. God almighty. What have I gotten myself into?

“Okay,” I say, “so, obviously your family is a disaster. We knew that. I simply didn’t expect them to besoon-brand about it.”

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Daisy gives me a faint, frazzled laugh. “This isn’t funny.”

“It is a little funny. They’re trying to break us up so they can sell you off to a mediocre man named Cristiano. If this were a telenovela, I’d be the seductive lounge singer they underestimated.”

She rolls her eyes, but I see the corner of her mouth twitch. Progress.

“Listen,” I take her hand, “I’ll go to them.”

Her eyebrows fly up. “You’ll what?”

“I’ll go to the house. I’ll look them in their cold, money-soaked eyes and explain, very slowly, that I’m not going anywhere. That I love you. And that if they want to save their precious deal, they’re going to have to accept the terrifying reality that their daughter is dating someone way hotter and richer than Cristiano will ever be.”

Daisy blinks. “You think that’s going to help?”

“Absolutely not! But I’ll also be polite. I’ll wear a blouse. One with buttons and everything. Nice step up from yesterday. Yesterday, I wanted them to think I could compete with men. Today, they’ll know that, no, a woman was given your hand in marriage!”

“Oh, my God.”

“I might even brush my hair.”

Daisy chokes on a laugh. “Stop.”

“I’m serious.” I bring her knuckles to my lips. “Let me go to them. I’ll be good. You know me. I’m irresistible when I turn the charm up to full blast.”

“Lorde, they’re not fans. They’re not journalists or party people or half-drunk heiresses. They’re my family.”

“I know,” I say. “But I’ve handled worse. I followed my mom’s press tour with three exes in the same hotel once. Compared to that, your father is a walk in the park.”

She bites her lip like she doesn’t want to smile, but it happens anyway.

“I don’t want you to get shredded by them,” she says. “They’ll pick apart everything. They’ll say you’re after my money, that you’re manipulating me. You’re just bored.”

“I am bored. With everyone who isn’t you.”

Her cheeks flush. God, she’s pretty when she blushes. All that sharpness whittled down to something smooth.

“I’m not going to hide,” I tell her. “Not from them, not from the media, not from anything. But I’ll play the game. I’ll show up and smile and prove I’m the best thing that’s ever happened to their dynasty. Who knew that queering up the DeMontes was exactly what they needed to come into the 21st century? Sales will be up!”

Daisy tilts her head. “And if that doesn’t work?”

“Then I’ll bribe them.”

“For fuck’s sake.”

“I’ll slide your dad a check and say, ‘Let’s call it even.’”

She laughs again. “Lorde Sheen,” she says, wiping her face, “you’re insane.”

“Insanely devoted.” I steal another kiss. “Don’t worry, Daze. I’ve got this.”

Daisy sighs. “Fine. But you aren’t bribing my father.”

“We’ll see how the meeting goes.”

She buries her face in my shoulder. I wrap my arms around her, and for a second, I feel that calm again.

Underneath all the snark, I know my truth – I’d fight anyone for her. Her family. The press! I’ve played my whole life like love was optional. But this? Daisy?

She’s my endgame.

Chapter 21

Daisy

The place I grew up looks like something out of a glossy home interiors magazine, one of those spreads with the caption quiet luxury written in cursive across an aerial drone shot. It's calm, elegant, and sterile – much like the family that raised me.

Lorde stands at my side as we approach the front doors. Her hand is in mine, her thumb brushing slow, soothing arcs into my knuckles like she's either preparing me for war or proposing an impromptu interpretive dance. Knowing her, it could be both.

"I've had root canals with better ambiance," she says. "InHollywood."

I don't get a chance to say more. The door swings open, and there's my mother, every inch the perfect woman in tailored navy slacks and a pearl-button blouse. Her expression softens when she sees me. Then it hardens when she sees Lorde.

"Daisy." She opens her arms and pulls me in for a quick embrace like she wants to prove she still loves me, but only in brief bursts. "Your father's in the sitting room. Come."

We follow her into the house. Lorde's hand slips from mine, but not before she squeezes it one last time. I swear she mouths swan dive before letting go.

Daddy is seated in his favorite, large chair in the sitting room. His blazer is draped over the arm, and his sleeves are rolled to the elbow. That means this is serious, but

not catastrophic. We have a chance. After all, just yesterday, he was hugging Lorde and claiming he would see her as the other child he never had. So, what is it, Daddy? Regrets already?

“Daisy,” he says with a nod. Then to Lorde, “Ms. Sheen.”

“Mr. DeMonte.” Lorde maintains her coolness.

We sit. I perch on the edge of the leather sofa like I’m still ten and my feet can’t reach the carpet without help. Lorde, by contrast, lounges like she owns the place. One leg crosses the other. Her arm slings along the backrest behind me. “Sure. This will all be mine one day,” she broadcasts to the room. My parents definitely notice.

Daddy leans forward. “We’ve hit a... complication with the Antonettis. You know. Cristiano’s family.” He’s already grimacing to bring that man back up. “Do you remember that big deal your daddy signed? With the Italian luxury conglomerate that will bring a ‘new era’ to the department store?” He’s quoting some of the marketing materials I’ve seen throughout his office and in the downtown bus stop ads. “That was with the Antonettis. So happened that their son Cristiano was available to marry and your mother...”

I interrupt him. “That deal went through last month.” Even I knew that, even though I’m largely kept out of business stuff.

“It was supposed to,” he replies. “But the Antonettis have expressed concerns. Not with the deal itself, but with our family image. They don’t want their name associated with controversy.”

“And by controversy, you mean...?”

Mama answers, “They’ve asked if the rumors are true. That you turned down their

son's proposal. That you're... involved with a woman."

Lorde doesn't flinch – only gives my mother a look that could melt glaciers. "I'm sitting right here, you know."

Daddy exhales. "We're not here to start a fight. But they're threatening to pull out. This isn't only about your relationship, Daisy. It's about the future of the DeMonte name."

Something doesn't sit right in my stomach. It's been ages since I've had heartburn, but there it is. I need an antacid.

My mother jumps in, her voice gentler. "Darling, we love you. We adore you. But this family's future rests on more than one love story. What you have with Lorde... it's sweet, but it's new. You've only known each other a few months."

"We're in love." I hate how defensive I sound.

"Love doesn't always last," Daddy says. "But a broken partnership with a billion-dollar luxury house? That damage will last. And if the media gets wind of it—"

Lorde finally cuts in. "You think your daughter's happiness is less important than handbags?"

"Watch your tone."

"I'll lower my tone when you stop treating her like she's the problem."

"Lorde," I warn, but she's already wound up.

She sits forward, elbows on her knees, looking directly at my father. "Do you know

what my life was like before I met your daughter? I was aimless and without purpose. For God's sake, we met on a double date with our friends, and I laughed at her falling! Daisy is the first thing in my life that's felt like it mattered, and you think I'm some PR disaster?"

"You are a public figure," Daddy coolly says. "Your image is part of the problem."

"So, what, you want me to disappear?" she snaps. "Let her go so you can get your overpriced linens into the store?"

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“We’re not asking for forever,” my mother interjects. “Just... time. A pause. Let things cool down. Let the Antonettis see that you’re still open to their son. Or at least not publicly defiant of our values.”

I stare at her. “You want me to pretend to be interested in him?”

“Long enough to keep the deal intact.”

“Do you hear yourselves?” My heart is racing as I defiantly stand up to my parents. “You want me to lie to the world to keep your shelves stocked?”

Daddy frowns. “It’s not like that.”

“Then what is it like? Because to me, it sounds like I’m only acceptable when I’m convenient. You’re okay with me being in a sapphic relationship as long as I’m quiet about it. As long as I don’t embarrass you.”

Lorde stands beside me, hand brushing mine again. The tension vibrates off her. She’s a bomb ready to detonate. I’m only slightly more stable.

Daddy looks tired. “I raised you to be strong, Daisy. But being strong sometimes means sacrifice. If you love this family—”

“I do,” I say. “But I also love her.”

There’s a long, painful silence.

My mother speaks again. “You’re young. You might feel differently in a year.”

“I might. But right now, I don’t. And if you’re asking me to walk away from the first person who’s made me feel like love is real... then I can’t do that.”

Daddy nods once. “Then we’re at an impasse.”

We leave without another word.

Outside, I don’t cry. I almost expect to, but I don’t. Lorde’s the one who breaks the silence.

“Well, that went great.”

I snort. “Was it the part where you told my dad his soul was for sale, or when I announced I was queer like I was slamming a gavel in court?”

She grins. “Definitely the gavel. Very dramatic. Ten out of ten, Daze.”

We get into the car. It takes a minute before either of us says anything.

Finally, I say, “That was probably it. I’m pretty sure they disowned me in the most polite, Italian way possible.”

Lorde’s hand finds mine again. “I’m proud of you.”

“I’m terrified.” I look at her, this ridiculous, stubborn, impossible woman who somehow loves me back. And I realize something. “I think we should do something stupid.”

Her eyes light up. “I love stupid. And it’s been a whole day since I did something

reckless. Starting to get withdrawal, Daze.”

“I meanreallystupid.”

“If this is your way of proposing we rob a bank, I’m already halfway to the ski masks.”

I lean back in my seat and whisper, “Let’s get married.”

She laughs. Soon, she realizes I’m serious.

“What the fuck, Daze.”

“Let’s fly to Vegas. Get hitched. Make it real.”

Lorde’s smile grows until it splits her whole face.

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“You’re out of your mind.”

“I know.”

“I love it.”

She kisses me right there in the car, crazed and hungry, acting like she can’t wait for a pap to catch us tonguing in my family’s driveway.

The DeMontes might have their image. But I’ve got Lorde Sheen.

And we’re about to light the tabloid world on fire.

Chapter 22

Daisy

By the time I realize Lorde was serious about the jet, we’re pulling up to the private airstrip in a car I’m fairly certain belongs to someone richer and more powerful than my entire family tree combined. The driver hasn’t spoken more than a word since we left the house, and I’m not sure where Lorde even got him. The part of me that thinks I should ask some questions is at odds with the part that is down for spontaneity.

“Please tell me this isn’t stolen,” I say as we coast to a halt in front of a sleek white Gulfstream.

Lorde’s already halfway out of the vehicle, sunglasses on, hair wild in the wind like

she's auditioning for an action movie because nepotism is wild in Hollywood. "It's not stolen!" she shouts over the wind whipping up around us. "I leased it. For six hours. Legally." She turns, grinning at me. "And relax, the pilot's union-certified and everything. My accountant's going to scream when he sees this bill, but we'll all live."

I clutch my bag closer. Not because I'm nervous about flying. No. I'm nervous because I asked her to marry me now. I'm eloping with Lorde Sheen, an international celebrity kid who is one-part chaos and two-part softie with a sex drive like a Roman goddess. I declared love. We're doing this.

It's terrifying. It's exhilarating.

We board the jet. Lorde makes a joke about the champagne being "only mid-tier" and I roll my eyes so hard I nearly blind myself before I'm seated. There's no flight attendant, no one to judge us or offer warm nuts. Just us, a stocked fridge, and about five feet of plush carpeting between us and the cockpit.

Once we're seated, she finally glances over at me. Her sunglasses are off. "You okay?"

I laugh, but it comes out weird. "I think I'm having a heart attack."

"Good. That means you're alive." She leans over to kiss my cheek. "I promise, no one dies in Vegas unless they ask for it."

"Uh-huh."

The jet lifts off smoothly. I press my forehead to the cool window and watch the coast of New England shrink behind us. Somewhere down there, my parents are pretending I don't have a mind of my own. Somewhere, Cristiano is explaining to his

parents why the heiress they tried to barter for decided to run away with a woman who once appeared in a magazine spread wearing nothing but smiley-face boxers and a sheer crop top.

Sorry, Daddy. Your Principessa is making deals with the devil, and her name is Lorde.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

Lorde doesn’t miss a beat. “You’re doing this because it’s what you want. You’re stupid but brave. And because you finally realized you’re way too good for a family that wants to sell you off like a Birkin in the store’s luggage department.”

“They didn’t want to sell me off,” I say, although yeah, okay, maybe they kind of did. “They... thought they knew what was best for the family. For me. See, if Mama could find a manshechose, and Daddy signed off on a man who would live under his thumb, I’d be safe, right? They wouldn’t have to worry about me.” I feel bad, thinking about it. For all of my parents’ traditional values, there was a twelve-hour period there where they accepted Lorde. Daddy met her and clapped her on the shoulder and said, “Sure thing, kid.” Even though she was a woman. Even though I’ve never once heard my parents say anything nice about gay people. It’s why I’ve never come out to them as bisexual.

Then again, they never said anything rude, either. Guess I thought it was them being polite and assuming it wasn’t any of their business. Until their daughter made it their business, you know?

“They wanted you to abandon the first person who’s ever made you feel this alive.”

Sudden tears sting my eyes. “And you’re that person?”

“Obviously. Did you miss the part where I leased a jet to marry you in front of a bunch of Elvis impersonators?”

I giggle through my blubbering lips. “I thought we were going classy. Like, understated wedding dresses and a tasteful bouquet.”

“Oh, baby,” she says, leaning in close, her lips brushing my ear. “We can get classy after I make you come so hard you forget what state we’re flying over.”

“Goodness gracious.” I wipe another tear, laughing. “Jesus.”

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“No, it’s me.” She leans back. “But you can pray if you want.”

I shoot her a half-hearted glare, then glance toward the cabin door. “Are we alone up here?”

“Totally. Just us, a busy pilot, and the weight of your family’s disappointment. What do you say we make this jet ours?”

“You are not seriously trying to mile-high me right now.”

“Oh, but I am.”

Something inside me – something feral, feminine, and furious – doesn’t want to push her away. It wants to dive deep into her dark eyes and remember last night, when she got on top of me and rubbed herself all over my back, my hips, my soul. Maybe this is infatuation, you know? Maybe I’ll regret this in a year. But...

That same something inside of me remembers how Cristiano’s name sounded like a brand being forced on me. Something that remembers my mom scouring all of Italy for someone “good enough” for her baby girl. My father... thinking he can keep me being a girl for twenty more years.

Something that burns with the need to take all of that back and say, This is mine. This is who I am. This is who I choose.

I straddle Lorde’s lap with a breath that almost won’t leave my lungs. Her arms come around me, hands settling on my waist, possessive but reverent. She leans up, lips on

mine, and for once she doesn't joke.

"You sure?" she asks.

"I want to take my life back."

Her lips crash into mine with all the hunger I've come to love. We kiss like the plane's going down. My hands are tangled in her hair, hers slipping beneath my blouse. I gasp when her fingers find bare skin.

"How the hell are you always this warm?" I tease.

"Sexual tension," she groans, kissing me back. "And pent-up devotion."

I laugh, breathless. "That sounds fake."

"Shh. Let me worship my future wife."

I melt into her. There's no space between us. My hips grind down instinctively, rolling against her thigh. Her hands slide beneath my skirt, tugging my undies aside with ease. She growls against my mouth as her finger slides inside of me.

"Yes," I whisper, body clenching around her. "God, yes."

We move in sync. For a second, it's pure bliss.

I ride her fingers slowly at first, savoring the way she moves. She kisses down my neck, murmuring things I can't even process, just possession. My shirt slips from my shoulders, bra undone in a blink. Her mouth finds my nipple and I moan, head falling back as I almost lose my balance.

I forget about the plane. Vegas. My last name. Who I fucking am.

All that exists is her. And me.Us.

It builds too fast. I try to hold back, to stretch the moment out, but she knows exactly how to wreck me. Her thumb finds my clit and it's over. I come, hard, grabbing her hair and gasping her name.

She holds me through it, stroking my back, kissing my temple. When I finally slump against her, she blows hot breath against my ear.

"Daisy DeMonte," she whispers, "you are the hottest, most daring girl I've ever met."

"Shut up."

"I mean it. You should hijack private jets more often. It's totally your brand."

We stay tangled together for a while, wrapped in this strange cocoon thirty thousand feet above our old lives.

"What if I call my mom tomorrow and she tells me she's cutting me off?"

"Then I guess we live off our trust funds and praymymom is more understanding."

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“And if she tells me she’s sorry?”

Lorde shakes her head. “Tell her it’s okay, but not if it means crawling back into a closet. This isn’t their era anymore. Trust me when I say we’re gonna be okay.”

“You’re really not going to let me run, are you?”

“Baby,” she says, arms tight around me, “I’ll chase you to the ends of the earth. But if you run in heels, I’ll be doubly impressed.”

This time, I don’t cry. Not because I’m not overwhelmed. Not because I’m not scared.

Vegas is two hours away. And for the first time in my life, I will completely own who I am.

Daisy DeMonte, scandalous heiress.

Chapter 23

Lorde

I’ve done some reckless things in my life. Posed nude in a beach shoot. Accidentally flirted with a mafia don’s daughter when he was right there. Played chicken on an ATV for a YouTube collab.

But marrying Daisy DeMonte in Las Vegas with enough adrenaline to kill an

elephant?

Yeah. This is my masterpiece.

The jet touches down, and I feel that momentary shift. Gravity has pulled us down back to Earth. It's metaphorical and literal, and it hits me square in the chest. I glance over. Daisy's looking out the window, in awe of the Strip only a few miles away. Almost as if she'd never seen it before. Impossible. I know this is where all of her friends have their birthday parties.

God, I love her. Two months ago, all I could think about was teasing her until she was red in the face. Fucking the priss out of her. Knocking this princess off her diamond-encrusted throne.

She catches me staring. "Not backing out, are you?"

"Merely marveling at how hot you look when you're rethinking all your life choices."

"Sooo mature."

"But accurate." I lace our fingers together. "Now, come on. I have a cabal of queer wedding elves on speed dial. It comes with having a famous Hollywood actress for a mom. The gays love her."

"You do not."

"Watch me."

We end up at a boutique two blocks off the Strip. It's run by a drag queen named Diamond Eyes who's already cried twice and offered us CBD gummies. The cash I've slipped her is for her silence to the paps that crawl up and down the Strip. But I

guess she thinks the gummies are worth it, too.

“I love a Vegas elopement,” she says, clapping her large but dainty hands. “You two are giving runaway royalty. I’m obsessed. Twirl! Again!”

She’s not wrong. We’re half-dressed in two separate curtained booths while tailors work at lightning speed to ensure we look like a million dollars when photos inevitably leak. Just because it’s Vegas doesn’t mean I’m going to look like a dumbass. I’ve got a reputation to protect. Even Daisy agrees that women must continue to crush on me after I’m married. It’s part of her attraction to me, you see.

I lean out of my booth and catch Daisy mid-laugh. Her cheeks are pink, hair pulled in place by a dozen black pins.

“You good?” I ask.

She nods. “You?”

I pretend to stretch as if I’m not overwhelmed with butterflies. “Totally. Simply wondering if I should go with the classic white and black or peacock-madly-doing-a-mating-dance.”

“Peacock that shit, babe.”

My stomach ties itself into knots. Somewhere behind the sparkle and high-speed tailoring, there’s a voice whispering this is too fast. That she deserves more. That I’m a mess in designer sunglasses pretending to know how to love someone because I’ve decided to.

So I step out of the dressing room, take out my phone, and dial the one person who might remind me what this means.

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“Lorde?” My mother answers on the first ring, suspiciously alert for someone who usually answers video calls in a robe and a cucumber mask.

“Hey.”

There’s a pause. “What did you do?”

“Why do you assume I did something?”

“Because you only call when you’re in either the drunk tank or telling me you can’t make it to my birthday soiree because you’re taking a pair of Spanish twins to some villa you’ve rented undermyname.”

“Okay, whatever, sorry for all that. I need a favor.”

“Does it involve bail money? Oh, honey, there better not be a yacht involved.”

“Nope. But it does involve Vegas. And a wedding.” I clear my throat. “Mine.”

Why the hell is this the first thing out of her mouth: “You’re pregnant? I always knew you and Angus were suspiciously close.”

“Jesus, Mom, no. Gay wedding. Remember? I’m the lesbian daughter. They compare me to Katherine Moennig.”

Another pause. “I worked with her once. Lovely person. Always had groupies hanging around the perimeter of the shoot. Oh! Like you! Except you don’t even have

a job.”

Come on, Mom. “You always said if I ever settled down it’d be with someone insane or someone perfect. Daisy’s the latter.”

“I want to meet her. Bring her by after the honeymoon. I have a TV guest spot shoot this weekend but should be available from Tuesday.”

“I want you to be my witness.”

There’s a longer silence this time. Suddenly, she’s realized I’m dead serious. Years of cracking jokes and sneaking snark with my mother (who taught me everything I know) have taken their toll. “You sure about this, hon?”

I swallow. “No. But also yes. I feel like I’m skydiving and I’m about to pull the pin.”

My mother chuckles. “Text me the chapel. I’m booking the next flight out of LAX.”

By the time we’re zipping across town in a vintage white Cadillac provided by Diamond’s mother – who is also her manager, apparently – those butterflies have increased.

Daisy squeezes my hand. “You’re quiet.”

I glance over. Her dress is tea-length, vintage ivory, off-the-shoulder with a scandalous slit and princess-like heels peeking out from beneath. Everything about her is straight out of my fantasies of the perfect girl I’d like to fuck-up. Except instead of showing her a good time and ensuring she never forgets me, I want to never forget her.

“You look like the girl I didn’t know I wanted to marry,” I say. “It’s fantastic.”

She grins. “You should see yourself. You look like something Cristiano would wear to my funeral.”

“That is the hottest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

We both dissolve into laughter. The nerves don’t go away. But they start to morph – from what if this is a mistake into what if this is the first thing I’ve ever done right.

The chapel is a converted police station with soft lighting, a neon sign that says Love is Never a Gamble, and two officiants: one in a top hat and one in a velvet suit. We pick the one in velvet. I can’t look at the top hat and not start laughing.

The waiting area has a record player spinning old love songs and a stack of rainbow marriage certificates bound in glitter ribbon. Diamond is hovering, handing out tea, and slapping people’s wrists if they try to use flash photography.

My mom shows up fifteen minutes before the ceremony, wearing something she stylishly slapped together for either a high-end wedding in the Hamptons or a drunken rager in a biker bar. She’s the kind of flawless beauty who can pull off either look in one outfit.

She kisses my cheeks before pulling Daisy into a hug like they’ve known each other for years.

“You’re braver than I was at your age,” she whispers to Daisy, loud enough for me to hear.

“Wow. Way to make my elopement about you.”

She winks. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

The ceremony is short and sweet.

We stand hand-in-hand in front of a painting of two women in dresses dancing in the moonlight. The officiant reads something poetic that I barely hear. Too busy zoning out halfway through, staring at Daisy’s face, her smile, the way her fingers tremble against mine like she’s going to pass out at any moment.

When it’s time to speak, I panic. Words evaporate. I’m hardly the smooth talker who would normally take Vegas by storm and forget most of what I did.

“I’m sorry, Daze,” I say. “I didn’t think of any vows. Between falling asleep with you on the plane and everything leading up to this since then, shit, when would I have had the time? Fuck it. Love you. Can’t wait to tell our kids about this so they can be appalled.”

She laughs. So do I. The officiant doesn’t give a shit and Diamond says she’s going to steal it for her next show. My mother rolls her eyes with a shrug, but she’s smiling again, holding back her laughter. This woman has seen more Vegas weddings than she has the inside of casinos, probably. I hope she’s having a good time.

Daisy and I kiss. Who the hell needed words, anyway?

The applause is real. The photographer Diamond hired for us – her cousin, of course – snaps Polaroids. There’s glitter in my bra that sticks out of my white silk shirt, and I don’t care.

I'm married. We're remarried.

We sign the certificate with borrowed pens. Diamond throws a handful of flower petals at us and says something about eternal blessings. My mother poses for a couple of pictures and takes some selfies with us on our phones. She promises to leave first, in case there are paps outside. Her wedding present to us is leading them away.

Perfect timing. My wife and I have places to go.

Later, while Daisy's stealing a donut from the chapel's complimentary snack table, I find my mom near the bar, sipping something pink with a slice of lemon on the rim.

"You're really married," she says.

"Apparently."

She studies me as if we've never met before. "I didn't think you'd do this. Not like this. Did you even get a prenup?"

I shrug. "I didn't think I would either. But then I met someone who made me want to show up. Without a prenup."

Laughter tickles her shoulders. "You always did love a grand gesture."

"Says the woman who once proposed to a stranger at my seventh birthday party."

"Exactly. It didn't work, but it was dramatic as hell."

What do I even do with that? "You think I'm doing the right thing?"

"I think you've done a lot of wrong things. Lord knows that as your mother I've had a

few strokes along the way. Shoulda knew you'd end up like me. Thank God you weren't a boy. Or that you're gay. I don't know which I'm more grateful for."

"So, you're saying you're glad that pregnancy was never on the table."

I don't realize I'm choking up until she touches my shoulder.

"You're not me, Lorde. You're not what's-his-face who gave me you after a one-night stand at a wrap-party..."

"Joey Pete. My dad is Joey Pete, Mom. We did a blood test and everything."

"Do things your way, honey. It's the only way to live."

Damn knots in my throat... clogging up the works...

"Thanks for coming," I croak.

"Don't thank me yet. I'm sending you a crockpot and a reference to my old relationship therapist."

"God, you are so West Coast."

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“And you married New England.” She grins. “I hope you like all the lobster that old money can buy. Ooh, especially department store money. Dotry to hook me up with a discount, would you? DeMonte’s has decent tableware.”

I glance over at Daisy, who’s trying to feed Diamond a bite of wedding cake with a fork made from gold plastic.

“I think it can be arranged.”

We raise our drinks – hers pink, mine still fizzy – and toast to whatever comes next. Harvard, probably. After we take on the DeMonte’s when we get back home.

But I’m not thinking about that yet. I’ve got a wedding night to attend to.

Chapter 24

Daisy

The honeymoon suite Lorde booked is perched high above the Strip. The windows overlook the Bellagio fountains, which are mid-performance with Lady Gaga thumping in the background. It’s surreal, hearing it muffled through the glass while I’m standing in a cloud of tulle and borrowed lipstick, married to the woman who pissed me off so badly I had to have her.

Lorde kicks the door shut with a shoe falling off her foot. She drops our overnight bag with flair. "Madam DeMonte-Sheen," she says, offering me her hand like we’re about to ballroom dance. "Shall I carry you across the threshold, or will we both

acknowledge I'm not that good?"

I take her hand anyway. "If you try to lift me, you'll kill yourself and ruin our first night of wedded bliss. Also..." I squeeze her hand. "Didn't you negotiate with Daddy that you'll be changing your name, Mrs. DeMonte?"

"Whoa. You're right. Lorde DeMonte. Hell of a fucking name."

Inside, the suite has a delicate balance between romantic and practical. There's champagne on ice. Chocolate-dipped strawberries. A hot tub the size of my family house. Everything's bathed in the glow of the Strip's neon membrane.

The heels are killing me so I kick them off. I'm buzzing from sugar, adrenaline, and the fact that I just went against my family and probably my friends. Because even Ashleigh doesn't know about this. None of them do.

Lorde loosens her shirt, coming closer. "So, I tried to plan something romantic. You know, candles, rose petals, me dramatically feeding you chocolate until you end up in the ER. But something tells me you have other plans, based on how much time you spent glued to your phone on the way here. Couldn't even get you to kiss me."

She could tell? "Oh, I definitely do."

"Should I be afraid?"

"You should be excited." I grab the package someone from the concierge left for us on the big table. My wife (teehee –my wife) was right. I was up to something on the way here. You know... arranging a special delivery?

I don't unwrap it right away. It's more fun to let her imagination work overtime.

"Tell me that's not the world's fanciest toothbrush."

"Nope."

"Is it..."

"A strap-on."

Her mouth actually falls open, which I'm going to keep in my back pocket forever.

She recovers quickly, though, looking at me as if she's either very excited about being married to me or about to go grab an annulment. "You brought accessories to your wedding night?"

"I want to remember this as the night I finally fulfilled one of my biggest fantasies with Lorde Sheen." I spread my hand in front of me as if I'm surveying the entirety of my treetop kingdom. "Whom I'm married to. Didn't know that would happen first, honestly."

Her expression changes, humor giving way to lucid seduction that traps me in her warmth. She steps forward, hands gentle but possessive as they land on my waist. "You've been full of surprises lately, Daze."

"You haven't seen anything yet."

The first kiss is more urgent than I anticipated. I back her up toward the bed, unbuttoning her shirt between kisses, tugging the hem out of her slacks like I'm unwrapping my wedding shower gift.

She groans when I push her down onto the soft duvet. "Is this the part where I'm torn apart and ruined by my blushing bride?"

“Hell yes.”

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I give her a show as I strip off my last-minute wedding dress. When I slide out of the last of my gown and walk toward the bed wearing nothing but a silk bralette and a horny grin, she stops breathing.

The lights of Vegas shimmer against her skin, flashing pink and gold across her cheek. She reaches for me, but I shake my head. “Back, Sheen. I’ve got something to do.”

“Bossy.”

“Married.”

I unwrap the harness with deliberate care, sliding the straps into place and giving her plenty of time to watch me transform. Is it dawning on her yet? Has she figured out what my fantasy is? Aw, she thought I wanted her to pound me? Ha! Who has time for that when I need to start my new married life off by asserting that I can top, too.

Lorde props herself up on her elbows. “You know this isn’t fair, right? I was going to seduce you with strawberries and a hot tub.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll still be all hot and wet.”

That earns me a full-body shiver. She’s already halfway out of her pants when I crawl on top of her, the strap-on pressing against her thigh.

The kiss this time is slower as if she must rethink her game plan. Her hands are everywhere – my waist, back, and hair. When I finally settle between her legs, she’s

panting, eyes wide enough to swallow me in.

“Tell me what you want,” I say.

“You. Just you.”

I guide it between her legs, watching her eyes flutter closed as I slide it against her, teasing her until she gasps.

“Do you know how to use that thing?” She’s stalling. “Because I do, and I could give you some pointers.”

“I do know what I’m doing, thanks. Now, behave before I make you roll over and eat the pillow for our first time as two married assholes.”

Lorde’s fingers dig into my arms, but I take my time. I want this to last. God knows I am going to drink in the crazed look in her eye and the steady moans she’s already eliciting before I’ve even penetrated her ravishing pussy. Hmph. It still looks as good as the day I first tasted it. Wasn’t that like three days ago?

Kinda hard to taste it now. It’s occupied.

I press forward, slow and steady. She whines but trusts me to keep going. Her face flickers with disbelief and desire. Two things that look mighty fine on her.

She suddenly looks right at me with great clarity. “You’re mine now, you know.”

There is no resistance. My woman’s been wet since we got here, but I bet she never anticipated this.

“That goes both ways,” I say.

Lorde stills, the tension in her body growing tauter under my touch. I kiss her, reverently, and her façade slips away. No more of the practiced seductions she usually throws at women. I'm peeling open her heart and not only getting her to spread her legs for a femme like me. This is rarer than love for her.

Her hands curl against the satin sheets. Right. I was so caught up in how gorgeous she is that I almost forgot what I was doing to her.

"This is wild," she murmurs. "You're a font of surprises."

"Good," I say against her skin. "Give it to me. Take me. Whatever."

My palm runs over her hip, then lower. Lorde Sheen, who can charm any woman with a wink, is squirming under my body like she's never been undressed this way. And maybe she hasn't. Maybe no one has ever seen her like this. But I'm not interested in her image.

I'm in love with her realness. The way her laugh sometimes breaks when it's too honest. The way she presses her lips together when she's scared that she's said too much. The mischief in her eyes when she thinks I'm not looking.

Oh, and the way she struck me down with one glance at a double date. She wanted to fuck the priss out of me? Great. Now I get to fuck the player out of her.

I'm not fast. Not rough. Just deep. Intimate. With the kind of tenderness that is probably driving her bonkers.

Her back arches as she lets out a low, ragged moan, the sound of a woman unraveling. Her hands find my waist, then my shoulders, gripping like I'm the only thing tethering her to the life she's chosen to live.

“Oh, myGod, Daze,” she pants, legs wrapping around my hips.

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Let her feel every second of it, every inch of it. I can see it in her face – how good it feels, how happy she is that it's with me, how she didn't know we could do shit like this together after everything else that's happened. A few days ago I wanted to take things slowly. Now here I am, already thinking of the day I get to rail her with this thing.

And maybe we can switch. You know. Throw a bone to my bad girl.

Her moans turn more feral, her mask slipping. The bad girl. The untouchable. The wild card. Gone.

"Harder," she whispers. "Please."

I obey, hips grinding in deeper, angle shifting until she cries out again, biting her lip like she's trying not to come already. My hand is on her breast, fingers splayed across her heart, feeling it thunder beneath my skin.

"You're mine," I say. "Say you're mine. Tell me nobody else can have you, Sheen."

She nods. "I know." Her eyes slam shut as she pries at her shirt. It's not coming off anytime soon, but I want her bra beneath those buttons. I'll flick my tongue against her nipple and make her scream my name. "Fuck! I know!"

I pause only to reiterate, "You're not saying the thing."

With my fantasy playing out right beneath me, she says, exasperated, "I'm all yours, Daze. This goddamn pussy is definitely yours. Absolutely insane."

I kiss her. Her fingers dig into my back, and I swear she's trembling from the inside out. I drive into her with more force, giving her exactly what she needs – not only pleasure but an invitation to surrender. And she does, moaning my name in my mouth as I use some of the last of my strength to fuck her to orgasm.

She starts to shake, muscles tensing, thighs trembling, a sound caught in her throat. I slow down. Let all the focus be on what I see.

Her whole body arches and her cry is hoarse, primal, ripped from somewhere buried deep. I feel her clench around me, her hands fisting the sheets, eyes shut tight as she comes undone from my touch.

I don't stop moving until she collapses into the mattress. I ease out of her and press soft kisses down her throat, her breast, the bit of hair above her belly button.

She's quiet. She's been rewired. Finally, she speaks, voice hoarse.

"No one's ever... I mean, not like that."

I lie beside her. "Not bad for your wedding night, huh?"

"Oh, babe, if every night is kinda like this I might die an early death. Too much sensation."

I slip the harness off my hips, kicking the strap-on to the side of the bed. "Well, take a breather, Mrs. DeMonte. Because it's my turn to die an early death."

She's on me like a hurricane blowing gale winds through the room. I barely have time to come up for air for the rest of the night. It's all a blur. Like these two scant months we've known each other.

It's crazy. We're fucking crazy. I'm only twenty. She's a little older than me.

But I'm in love. And girls like me do crazy things when we're in love.

Chapter 25

Daisy

It's dusk when we pull up to the DeMonte estate. I can barely see three feet in front of me as we get out of Lorde's car, because the air smells like rain and a fog might be rolling in. Great. Set the mood even worse, why don't you, Mother Nature?

The gravel crunches under the wheels of the car, the same one I've taken to proms, funerals, and boardroom meet-and-greets. But never for anything like this.

My hand clutches my wife's. Her thumb moves slowly across my knuckles. She's pretending to be calm, but I know she's not. Hey, I might have only known her for a hot minute before we eloped, but I know this much about her. She's only calm when everything is going her way, like seducing me. Or my parents. No, not that way.

This is a bit different. This could end with us being kicked out of my childhood home forever. A thought that has me rethinking everything we've done the past two days.

What if I can't come home again? What if I'm throwing away everything because my brain says I'm in love? Because the sex is too good? Because she's hot? Because...

"Ready?" Lorde asks.

"Nope," I answer. "But let's get this over with."

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The front door swings open before we even knock. Rosa, the housekeeper, stands frozen in the doorway. Her eyes flick from me to Lorde, then to our clasped hands. Her face flushes with something that's almost delightful before she catches herself and steps aside.

"Your parents are in the parlor," she says.

Lorde smiles at her. "Thanks. What's your name?"

"Ah... Rosa, Miss."

I grin. "Rosa has been with the family for years. Since I was a kid." This is the first exciting thing to hit since we've arrived. "She's from Turin. A cousin of my mother's friend."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Rosa. I'm Lorde."

"Oh! I know who you are." Rose motions for us to come inside. "You're Camilla Sheen's daughter. I'm... I'm a big fan of her movies."

Her grin lures us inside. Lorde thanks Rosa for the compliment as she closes the door. After another smile, she scuttles toward the kitchen. I'm left alone in the foyer with Lorde, whose hand is still in mine. My left hand in her right. We still don't have any rings but the engagement ring she got for me, and I wear it now.

My parents are exactly where we were told, sitting in silence across from each other, flanked by two untouched glasses of wine. Mama reads a paperback novel. Daddy

peruses his tablet, jaw set in stone and eyes pulsing from behind his reading glasses.

“Hi,” I say.

They both look up. Their eyes fall on Lorde first, then our hands. Then the ring.

“Daisy,” Mama says, uncurling her legs and setting her book aside. “You’re back. We didn’t hear from you...”

“I know. That was the point.”

Daddy gets up. “Is there a reason you’re walking in here holding hands and wearing that ring? Because something tells me you’ve spent all last night thinking up ways you can get out of your family duties, Daisy.” He clears his throat when he looks at Lorde. “I know we discussed other things, but...”

I swallow. Lorde doesn’t flinch. Her posture is perfect. It makes her taller than I’m used to because she usually slouches in that ineffably careless way.

“There’s a reason we’re walking in here like this, Daddy.” I step out before Lorde, showing my father that I’m still his daughter, still his Principessa even if I’m grown and calling my shots with someone else. “We’re married. In Vegas. Last night.”

Silence.

Oh, boy. It’s not just silence. It’s a complete, utter shutdown. Mama’s wine glass slips slightly from her fingers but doesn’t spill. Daddy lowers himself back into his chair like the weight of what I said has shoved him in the chest.

“You did what?”

I relocate my voice after it attempts to retreat into my stomach. “We eloped.”

“You eloped?” my mother repeats as if I told her I joined a cult.

“It wasn’t a whim,” I say. “We love each other.”

“And the Antonettis?” my father snaps. “Do you think they’ll see this as love? Do you think Mr. Antonetti will call this a charming detour?”

“I don’t care what he calls it,” I fire back, hating how much recent events have made me yell at my own daddy. “This isn’t a business arrangement. It never was.”

“You threw away the deal,” he says, voice rising.

“Maybe the deal deserved to fail,” I retort. “You were so concerned about tradition that you forgot I’m a person, not a pawn.”

He leaps up again, fists clenched. “Do you have any idea what you’ve risked?”

“Yes,” Lorde says, jutting into our family feud. “She risked staying silent about who she is. I know that’s inconvenient for your portfolio, but it’s the truth.”

He fixates on her. “You think you’ve conducted your Hollywood revolution? That you’ve liberated her from us?”

“No,” Lorde says, her voice slightly cracking after Daddy says such a thing. “I think she liberated herself. I just held the door open.” Oh, dear. Here comes that puff of laughter after she’s impressed herself. Not now, Lorde! “Like a proper gentle lady.”

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Mama rises, trembling as she takes a step forward toward me. “You didn’t even ask us. You didn’t invite us.” Her bottom lip quivers. “We were supposed to help you plan a wedding. We dreamed of that. Of giving you the celebration you deserve.”

I falter.

This part hurts more than I expected. Because under the status and image obsession, Mama didn’t want me to be happy with someone that made me excited to get married. We never prepared for the day I brought home a girl. Even though there was a chance it could have been the boy of her dreams, could I have stood it? Even if I loved him? Hiding that part of myself from my family? From my own mother?

“I didn’t think you’d support it,” I reply.

“Didn’t think?” she snaps. “You didn’t ask.”

As Lorde attempts to keep my hand in hers, I break away, facing my mother. “Because I was afraid you’d try to stop it. You’d say something about how I was embarrassing you and that this wasn’t the kind of love worth honoring because it didn’t fit some perfect, traditional script you brought over from Italy!”

Her eyes fill with tears, and she looks away. “You think so little of us. Of me.”

“No, Mama. I think so much of you that I had to take a Xanax to come in here to tell you because I knew it would probably end with all our hearts breaking!”

The air is heavy with everything we’ve been dancing around for years. Daddy quietly

stares at his Italian loafers. Mama wipes her cheek and finally looks at Lorde—really looks at her.

“You love her?” she asks my wife.

Lorde nods. “More than I ever thought I could love anybody.”

“And you didn’t do this for publicity? For a laugh?”

“I don’t find anything funny about this,” Lorde says. “We did it because she’s the only one who has ever made me think I could be with one woman for the rest of my life. Trust me, she wasn’t exactly the one I thought it would be when we first met. You’ve raised a helluva spitfire, Mrs. DeMonte.”

The awkward silence expands. A clock ticks on the wall and the air conditioner kicks on in the corner of the parlor.

Daddy grunts. “The Antonettis are still in town. Mr. Antonetti is... not thrilled.”

“I’m sure he isn’t,” Lorde says.

Mama puffs out her cheek, the rouge on her skin making her look like an apple. “He expected an engagement announcement. Instead, he got a tabloid leak about a Vegas elopement.”

“Then let’s meet him,” Lorde says. “Let’s tell him what’s happening and why I’m the one who is perfect to represent the DeMonte family in the coming generations. Because, if you didn’t know, I still plan on taking her name and leaving the Sheen life behind me.”

They both gape at her. “Lorde—”

She interrupts me. “You’re my wife, right? Sure, we got married a lot faster than we ever thought, but it’s the right thing for us to do. Now the Antonettis can’t do a damn thing about it. But they can save their asses by agreeing to meet with me.” She turns to Daddy. “Just me. Let me handle it. If I can’t, if I blow everything up, then you won’t have to see me again. Daisy and I will leave you to it and go live our own lives in Hollywood.”

I gasp. “Lorde!”

“That won’t be necessary!” Mama interjects. “Look, feelings are quite high right now.” She glances at Daddy. “Aren’t they, Marcello?”

He grunts again.

“Let’s have dinner. We’ll tell Rosa to set two extra plates. We’re going to talk about everything as rational adults. After all, they’re married! They can talk like rational adults!”

The fact that Mama is kinda freaking out right now while saying that is not lost on any of us. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her get up in the middle of a fight and lay everything on the line. “So, we’ll talk. About how things are going to be while we move forward. As a family. Because I don’t know about the DeMontes, but in my family, we never threw anyone out for any reason! You could have murdered a whole village and we’d foolishly protect your butt!”

Mama said butt. I can’t take any of this seriously. But I don’t have a choice.

Dinner it is.

Chapter 26

Lorde

I am no stranger to the kinds of rooms where entire lives are made or destroyed. My ass has seen split dresses backstage at major fashion shows, complete with the words, “Get out of my design, you fat cow!” coming from a coked-up designer. I’ve even been in a boardroom where someone was given the thumbs up to invest in a major rideshare app that went on to change the world and “disrupt” the delivery industry.

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This is the first time I've walked into a boardroom thinking about my future. Not only my next headline, the next girl, or Daisy. Even though my new bride is definitely on my mind as I enter.

Fuck. I'm building a future. No histrionics, okay? No, I'm telling that to myself. It's very important I don't blow this. I've gotta go in there pretending I already have an MBA from Harvard and know what the hell I'm doing. These people won't know the difference, right?

The DeMonte department store's head offices downtown are located in one of the oldest skyscrapers. Therefore, it's not the tallest, but it's a historical building that features the name DeMonte prominently on the marquee subtly lit up above the main entrance. The flagship department store is two blocks from here. I bet if I went over there right now, I'd see Daisy posing in summer wear. She's one of their most prominent models, going back as far as advertising their toddler clothes on sale.

Old money oozes from the brickwork and tiled marble floors. Art chosen to make you feel like you should know the artist without a name on the plaque hangs on the walls. Quiet power, the kind that looks down its nose at you when you're not looking at it, judges me from one of the security cameras perched in the corner by the elevators.

It smells like family shame in here. Ugh.

I swung by home to change before coming here. Last night at dinner, Marcello dropped his final ultimatum – if I succeed at this, then I might have a shot. I could tell he had little to no faith in me. At least he made sure to tell me it wasn't "just" because

I'm a woman. It's my image, you see. Everyone might know who I am by name and face, but they know my mother's. Have I mentioned Camilla Sheen is huge in Italy? Some scandal rag there once claimed she had the "best breasts for the summer" in 1997.

So, I must not look entirely like my usual self. Or my mother, for that matter. I had the pants for the occasion, but Daisy ordered a navy blouse and gray jacket from the department store to complete a businesswoman's look. Before I left, she combed down my hair so it hangs straight past my ears and flirts with my shoulders. No eyeshadow today. A touch of lipstick and eyeliner. She agrees with me that I look my most professional with "less is more." Probably because I'm showing up in tabloids wearing leather, chunky jewelry, and enough cleavage to make Mrs. DeMonte scream.

This is all. The armor of a woman who knows exactly what she's walking into – and how she's gonna win the weirdest battle of her life.

I've already got the girl, you know. Now I have to build a family with her.

Cristiano and Mr. Franco Antonetti are already seated at the long wooden conference table when I enter. Both in charcoal suits, sporting a signature expression of tolerance stretched thin.

"Ms. Sheen," Franco greets me with a clipped Italian accent that is more noticeable than Cristiano's. It's a lovely reminder that I'm dealing with a more old-school dude who is used to things being his certain way because that's how it's been done around him for decades. Cristiano at least gets out of the house.

"Mr. Antonetti." I greet the man who hasn't received the update that I'm a DeMonte now. "Cristiano."

He doesn't return the greeting. All Cristiano says, probably on his father's behalf, is,

“Marcello informed us that you would be coming to speak of our lingering deal with DeMonte’s. Quite the contrast to what we expected when we hashed it out over the phone the other day.” He grumbles something in Italian to his father. The father and son raise their eyebrows in a silent language with no accent. “Seems a lot has changed in a few days. Why are you here?”

I place a leather folio on the table in front of me and meet his judgmental gaze. Right. This guy thought he was marrying my Daisy. How did you used to look at her, huh? Did a mere picture, her image in a bathing suit by the front entrance of the flagship store, make you crazy? Too bad, bud. I’m the one who is taking her to bed tonight. And every night after this. “To talk business, of course. On behalf of DeMonte’s.”

Cristiano leans back, arms crossed to lock in his irritation. “You married Daisy.”

“I did.”

“Without her family’s blessing.”

“If you choose to see it that way. At the moment, we as a family have an understanding.”

“Remember, family is everything,” Daisy had said while brushing lint off my brand-new jacket and ensuring all the tags were removed. “Keep bringing it back to you being an immutable part of the family. Be confident. You’re a gay woman who eloped with the girl everyone thought Cristiano would be marrying. You will have the absolute biggest balls in the room.”

“You expect us to pretend everything’s fine?” Cristiano grinds his teeth as he holds back from telling me how he feels. Come on, bro. I’m not saying I can take you since you’re like twice my size and my idea of self-defense is going right for the eyes, but if he thinks I can’t deal with an angry dude getting in my face over a woman we both

want... well, he doesn't know me very well. That's my Saturday special. "Do you think we can walk away from this event with any level of grace expected of us back home? The Italian papers are already reporting on it. It's causing quite the stir considering you're..." His eyes look me up and down. "You."

"I expect you to look at the full picture," I say. "You're businessmen. Look at the numbers. Look at what we can do." I chuckle. "By that, what Daisy and me can do...together."

Cristiano opens his mouth, but Franco lifts a finger. "Let her finish."

Nice. Somebody wants to clean this up and get the hell out of here. "I'm not asking to be coddled. What I'm asking for is to be acknowledged for what I bring to the table. I've built a brand. I've turned my name into social equity. Public opinion can shift with a single photo, post, or headline – and I know how to shape those. We're not a liability. We're an asset."

Cristiano snorts. "Your idea of stability is an Instagram story?"

"No." The confidence comes easily to me now. These men aren't so different from some of the police officers I've dealt with after a hard night on the town. Or the disapproving lawyers who had to clean up a few of my more benign messes after I turned eighteen. "My idea of stability is keeping your company relevant. You think a deal between two international dynasties matters to the average consumer? It doesn't. But a love story? A power couple that people want to follow and cheer on? That matters. Especially when one of them's a known, bold face of their generation."

"And what if the older generation isn't interested in being bold?" Franco Antonetti asks.

"Then they'll get left behind, like the countless generations before them. The people

who are remembered well past death are those who cemented a legacy worth talking about. Those who took chances in a changing, modern world.” I can’t put it simpler than that. “Your competition isn’t waiting. Legacy won’t save you if you refuse to evolve.”

His fingers tap the table. He’s calculating every word I said into a formula that only he understands right now. Even Cristiano is looking at him for an answer.

“You want the Antonetti-DeMonte deal to go through,” he says.

“Naturally. I’ve got a stake in it as well now.”

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“And what do you offer, beyond... attention?”

Are these men used to a womanly smile that isn't trying to flirt with them? Or get out of trouble? Because I have no intention of being anything but assertive. This isn't only my chance to shine a new direction for my life to follow. I could actually help Daisy's family stay relevant and make some much-needed changes to their business. God knows I know enough people in the industry.

“I offer commitment. I'm in it for the long haul with Daisy. With her comes the DeMonte legacy. I'm going to help you shape the next decade of your brand with international intention.”

Cristiano frowns, still skeptical. “We're supposed to believe you've matured overnight?”

“I'm not here to prove I've matured. I'm here to act like it. You can watch and decide for yourselves.”

A pause suddenly bursts between us. Franco Antonetti leans back slightly, studying me like I'm suddenly the best thing to come out and amuse him. Like this is a circus and I'm a dancing monkey. He's already made up his mind, huh?

“You're bold,” he finally says. “But bold can be dangerous.”

“Bold built both of your empires. Daisy and I aren't the exception. We're merely the new generation coming in and saying how things are now. Look, instead of fighting it... well, the best success stories happen when multiple viewpoints are willing to

work together, right? You bring in new people for new ideas, but it's the old guard with experience who sometimes knows when to step in and say no, not right now. But you also have to be willing to fail sometimes."

Franco looks at Cristiano, then back at me. "And if we go forward with the deal?"

"Then we do it as partners. No backroom negotiations trying to undo my marriage. No pressure on Daisy to walk away from me. I won't stand in the way of business being business – but I also won't let business bulldoze my wife."

Cristiano keeps his mouth shut. It's clear he still doesn't like me one bit – for obvious reasons – but if he won't drag me through the mud for the sake of his family, then I've already won.

Franco rises. "We'll consider your offer. Privately."

It's my turn to get up. "Thank you."

"Don't take it the wrong way if you don't hear from me directly. I'll be in contact with Marcello since he's still the one in charge. I'm sure he'll follow up with you. After all..." He sighs. "It sounds like you're the other daughter he's never had."

Cristiano lingers as his father steps into the hallway. I meet his gaze, ready for him to start something.

"I get it," I say to break the silence. "You thought I was a phase. But I hope I've made it clear that I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to make it work with Daisy."

He doesn't reply. But his silence says more than any snide remark would have. He's been humiliated. But he's not going to take it out on me. No, I'm the interloper who got caught up in this as well. Ultimately, this was him and Daisy's father promising

things that were never going to happen, and this poor guy believed it for a few days.

When I head downstairs, I come across Marcello sitting in a side room by security. He's nursing a cappuccino when he sees me. I smell Franco's cologne, implying I'd missed him down here.

"I didn't think you had it in you," Marcello says when he sees me standing in the doorway. I've got the leather folio dangling from my hand and a giant lump in my stomach. Finally, the stress is catching up to me.

"I didn't either," I admit.

"You kept your wit on a leash."

"Barely."

"You did good." He pauses. "You showed up like someone who actually wantsto be part of this family. You know, like an old-school job interview."

Naturally, only he would equate the two. "It's almost like I..." No, come on Lorde, keep the snark at bay until he's officially made you part of the family. "I do. It's because I do."

Marcello nods and holds up his cappuccino cup at me.

"Welcome to the table, Sheen."

I don't respond with a joke. This is too much of a heartfelt moment crashing into me. As I accept a cup of cappuccino – I don't even like this stuff! – I think about all that's happened in the past two months. The pastweek.From single, flirty, and thriving to married and part of an Italian family department store dynasty.

What the fuck.

I slump in a plastic chair at the folding card table that stands in for the concierge and security's break room. Marcello holds out his pinky as he wobbles his cup in his hand. We say nothing as I sip from my cup and wonder what the fuck I've done.

Besides the obvious. Like, fallen in love and beholden myself to a woman like Daisy – and her father, a man who knows people who knows people.

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At least life will remain interesting after I've settled down! Nothing worse than boredom.

I honestly don't know how I could ever be bored again. I've got all the ingredients for a perfectly acceptable but crazy life.

The perfect girl.

A great job.

And a whole future of making our lives ours.

Now, how do we break the news to everyone that Daisy and I are married? Suppose that's what I'll negotiate with Marcello once we finish our drinks. But for now, it's us sitting in silence with a giant industrial fan humming in the background, creaking on plastic chairs and sipping cappuccinos.

Like I said. Far from boring. Right my style.

Epilogue

Daisy

I'm at my "engagement" party.

My parents have thrown Lorde and me an engagement party as a way to introduce us to the world as a couple.

To be fair, the media sort of forced their hands after publishing spread after spread about my new relationship. For about two weeks, Lorde and I dominated every relationship page, much to the relief of others like us, I'm sure. One of the country's prettiest heiresses suddenly engaged to an Oscar-winner's bad girl daughter? Oh, we dominated the gossip. My parents, being the proper people they are, responded with alacrity by saying they gave their blessing and kindly asked the media to give us our privacy as we went about our lives. Yeah, right.

Camilla thinks the whole thing is hilarious since she didn't even know I existed until like a month ago! Now she's acting like we're best friends. She's the one who took me shopping for my party gown, a sweet royal purple sheath dress by one of her favorite best friend designers. Lorde warned me that relationships with her mother are tenuous. It's true. Camilla comes by when it's convenient to her, but she likes me, and that's what matters most from a future mother-in-law – even if it's my family that is dominating everything. The only real problem with Camilla is that she's one of the other people who know Lorde and I are “legally wedded” already and she's almost spilled the beans more times than any of us like to admit.

Because we have a plan, you see. Nobody aside from our parents, the Antonettis, and a Vegas drag queen knows that Lorde and I are married already. (And as much as I enjoyed Diamond's help, we did fly back to Vegas for a part honeymoon, part make-her-and-everyone-else-sign-NDAs adventure, as spurred on by my family. In return, we promised to invite them to the “real” wedding.) We're still presenting as “recently engaged” to the media and even our friends. Ashleigh doesn't know. Angus doesn't know. Ashleigh fawned all over my ring and cried to hear the story of Lorde sticking up for me so hard, and Angus... well, he's agreed to be Lorde's best man. That's all I know about him.

Otherwise, only a handful of us know the truth – that Lorde and I eloped in Vegas. We're already married. We're working on a post-nuptial agreement that makes everyone happy. (Honestly, that's between our lawyers. I don't really care.) Lorde

and I still technically live separately to maintain an image, but we spend most of our nights at each other's places and are already shopping around for our own condo. If we find the perfect one, we're jumping on it and moving in together. What could Daddy and Mama possibly say against it? We're married!

Everyone asks us when we're having the wedding. We give them the same stock answer. "We don't know. Sometime after we finish school." Lorde is starting Harvard in the spring, and I'm back at school for my junior year. With any luck, we'll finish our degrees around the same time. I'm still trying to decide what I want to do. I'm not stressing out about it. Besides, this will give us plenty of time to grow our relationship and get to know each other more. We're getting along great. Some days are easier than others, of course, but I've never gone to bed angry at her and she's been nothing but what I need... whether that's sweet or rough.

I don't have to tell you that the sex is fantastic. Sometimes every day. Sometimes multiple times a day. We spent a week in the Bahamas and didn't leave our room once. Oops.

For now, I'm enjoying my life for what it is. Lorde seems pretty happy, too. Her reputation as a promiscuous bad girl has been dashed... but she's still my bad girl. At least twice a week she says something to rile me up. Not that it works anymore. I know it's how she flirts.

I love it. Keeps my wits sharp. Us bantering is a mating ritual at this point.

"Oh, my God, Daisy!" Ashleigh approaches us as we greet our party guests at my family's house. Mama always said we don't get to use the ballroom often enough. "Look at you! An engagement party!"

"Look at you too," I say, spotting Angus not far behind Ashleigh. To think, we had these couplings all wrong in the beginning. "It's my maid of honor."

Every time I call her that, Ashleigh squeals. I'm not starting any wedding planning until we have a date set, but Ashleigh takes being my maid of honor as a huge point of pride.

More people file in. Some of them I know. Most of them I don't. Daddy invited most of them. This may be our party, as I'm reminded every time Lorde squeezes my ass, but Daddy is wandering around the ballroom shaking hands and holding up a champagne glass every five seconds. At least he and Lorde are cool. They even go golfing sometimes, much to Lorde's great and hilarious chagrin. (She's the wrong kind of athlete for golf. The woman can run a marathon, lift weights, and ride a skateboard, but golfing? Her handicap is... generous. Or so I hear from the manager of the flagship store.)

"Daze," Lorde says, stealing my attention away from my half-drunk father and pointing to our next guest. "We're still playing hostess."

I love how she says stuff like that. We're playing hostess. When we have kids, she'll be saying we're pregnant.

I turn.

"Good afternoon." Fuck me! What is Kathleen Allen doing at my engagement party? Granted, she looks fresh from the airport or hungover, but still, what? "Congratulations on your engagement." She extends her hand for us to shake, then yanks it back again so she can rip off her sunglasses now that she's inside. She probably decided to come at the last minute, but I don't care. I'm fangirling right now.

"Hi!" Wow, her hands are so soft! And her nails. Where does she get them done? Bit disappointed she's not wearing that vintage ring, but I see a gold band on her right hand. Doesn't compare to my engagement rocks, though. "Thank you for coming!" I

jam my elbow into Lorde's side. She shakes Kathleen's hand next.

Who invited her? Was it Daddy? Is she here on behalf of her family? I need to get on Daddy's level.

Before she can pass on into the ballroom for however long she's decided to stay, I say, "This might sound weird, but I've always wanted to meet you. Now here you are at my engagement party!"

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She's taken aback. To be fair, that was silly of me... "Thank you? Any particular reason?"

I blather about absolutely nothing, although I manage to get her charity work in there. I think I've lost Lorde. She's talking to someone else now. I'm sure she'll tease me to hell and back later about having a crush on Kathleen, the "older woman" who isn't that much older than Lorde.

"Really? Are you interested in that sort of thing?"

"Well, I..." Am I? "Never really thought about it."

Kathleen opens her clutch and hands me a business card. "In case you ever get around to thinking about it. Enjoy your party." She enters the ballroom with nary a turn of her head.

"You leaving me for another chick?" Lorde and I are alone again. "'Cause that might be hot." I'd be down with that."

I show her the card. "You think I should get into non-profit work?"

"Baby," she says, circling her arm around my midsection and bringing me in for a kiss. "You can do whatever you want. I'm the one who's going to Harvard to show off for your dad." She kisses me again. "Now, how about you and me take a five-minute break from this snore fest to have a quickie in your old bedroom?"

"Will you dance with me when we get back?"

“I’ll dance with you wherever you want, Daze.” She spots a photographer in the far corner. “I even know how to show off your good side for the press.”

She knows me so well. I’ve got a feeling this is going to be a long, adventurous relationship, and I can’t wait to see where it goes. After all, I’m no longer “just” an heiress. I’m Lorde’s wife. I’m getting a degree and forging my own future.

Where this takes us... The family business, kids, hosting charity galas... I have no idea. All I know is that none of it is happening right now. Because this moment belongs to me, sneaking off upstairs with my frisky wife, who loves having her secrets with me.

And I love the secrets, too. Catch this, paparazzi!

THE END