Young, Loaded and Fabulous:

Secrets & Liars

Kate Kingsley

Published by Headline

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

young,
loaded
&FABULOUS

SECRETS & LIARS

Kate Kingsley

headline

Copyright © 2009 Brubaker & Ford Ltd.

The right of Kate Kingsley to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in Great Britain in 2009 by
HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7553 4587 8

Typeset in New Baskerville by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
An Hachette UK Company
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.headline.co.uk
www.hachette.co.uk

Chapter 1

The Rochester family's rain-streaked Bentley looked utterly out of place as it pulled up on a grimy East London street, and so did the angular face glaring out of its backseat window.

'This is *it*?' Alice Rochester sniffed. She was scrutinising the cracked concrete façade of Formica, Dalston's hippest new music venue. 'Could this place be any less glamorous? What the hell were they thinking?'

'Babe. Chill.' Natalya Abbott, Alice's best boarding-school friend, twirled a strand of white-blond hair round her fingers. Slumming it on the frontier of civilisation once in a while was fine by Tally; she'd grown up most of her life in Russia, and compared to Moscow, London was tame. 'It's the boys' first ever gig. What were you expecting – the Royal Opera House?'

'Well, I wasn't expecting a royal dump.' Alice squinted harder into the street. The only streetlamp actually working kept sputtering on and off but that didn't hide the knot of arty-looking east-Londoners huddled next to a skip. They were smoking rollies, of course. *So* alternative. Whatever. Alice started to size up one of the girls

in the group who was wearing metallic leggings with crumpled red ankle-boots, and an oversized brooch pinned above her left boob. But just then, a bark of laughter ricocheted down the street and her eyes darted to its source. A long-haired boy, smirking at the Bentley, was nudging his mate and pointing at the car's peak-capped chauffeur.

Flushing pink, Alice shrank back from the window.

'Er, Marshy,' she leaned towards the front seat, 'be a darling and drop us off in that alley round the corner. Would you? Please?'

'Tell me another one,' the driver snorted. 'In this area? You'll get mugged just crossing the road. Have you gone mad?'

'*No*.' Alice recoiled defensively. 'I just feel like stretching my legs a little. Exercise is important. God.' She stroked her cream leather armrest. 'Anyway, it feels a bit rude blocking the street like this. I wouldn't want to obstruct people's view of all those run-down warehouses.'

Tally giggled.

'Very considerate of you,' Marshy remarked, leaning back and folding his arms. 'But you're getting out *here*. Not in some dodgy alleyway.'

'Ugh. Fine.' Snatching her Miu Miu handbag, Alice poked one kitten heel, then the other, onto the cobblestones and shivered slightly. Tally caught the movement.

'No need to be nervous babe,' she soothed. 'I'm sure it'll all be fine with him tonight. After all, he invited you.'

Alice recoiled. ‘I’m not nervous. Why would you think that? Don’t I look calm?’

Rolling her eyes, Tally surveyed their surroundings. The antique diamond ring her grandfather had given her last summer in Moscow flashed with each blink of the defective streetlamp. ‘I’ve been dying to come out in Dalston for months,’ she changed the subject. When Alice got into one of her moods, there was nothing else to do. ‘I’m so unbelievably bored of all our usual clubs. Mayfair. The King’s Road. Blah, blah, blah. Same crowd, same champagne, weekend after weekend.’

‘Tals!’ Alice cut in. ‘For fuck’s sake, watch out!’

‘What? Shit!’ Tally shrieked. ‘Help!’ She’d slammed her purple Luella ruffle skirt in the Bentley’s door and was being tugged backwards. ‘Marshy, stop, please, you’ll rip my new outfit! Stoooppp!’

Tottering alongside the car in her four-inch heels, she pounded at the window, her white-blond hair whipping her face. The brakes screeched.

Alice glanced up and down the street. Thank god the smokers had disappeared inside. This was typical Tally, causing some crisis at the last minute. At St Cecilia’s, the exclusive girls’ boarding school where the two of them ruled the Lower Sixth, Tally was constantly in chaos. She rocked up late for lessons, spilled caffè lattes all over her prep, and only made her bed if Alice forced her. Lately, she’d come up with a disaster of a whole new magnitude – falling hopelessly, embarrassingly in love with their hot new English teacher.

But that was a different story altogether. And Alice had more important things to think about right now. Such as her own love life.

Nervously, she scanned her reflection in the club's frosted glass door, checking that her olive skin still sparkled with gold shimmer, that her deep-set, catlike eyes were still outlined in dramatic black and that the shorts of her green silk playsuit still just skimmed the curve of her bum-cheeks. Perfect. There was room for improvement in the lips, though; the more kissable they looked, the better. She slicked on more scarlet Chanel lipstick and pouted seductively. But her eyes remained uncertain. Would he go for it? Would this be her lucky night?

'Nooo!' wailed Tally's anguished voice.

Alice jumped.

'It's ruined! Ali, don't just stand there, help!'

She waddled over like a bedraggled peacock, strips of lace trailing behind her.

'Complete disaster,' she moaned. 'Look.'

'For fuck's sake!' Alice gawked at the sheer pink thong that was the only thing covering Tally's bum. In fact, *covering* was an overstatement. 'You can't go inside like that. Your entire arse is exposed.'

'Seriously?' Tally's expression glinted with mischief. 'Marshy must be mortified,' she whispered. 'Which knickers am I wearing, the Agent Provocateurs? The La Perlas?'

Alice raised her eyebrows. 'Oh, hang on a sec, I'll just

check the label, shall I?' She dragged Tally to one side. 'Back against the wall.'

'Girls.' Marshy's muffled voice sounded from the car boot, where he was rifling through some sort of rag pile. 'Tally, dear, have a look at this. I've found something to cover your, ahem . . .' – he frowned severely – '. . . bottom.'

Tally snorted with giggles and reached for the rumpled garment. 'Ewww!' she squealed, dropping it as a shower of dirt poured out. 'No, no, no. What the hell is that?'

'Only Hugo's rugby kit!' Marshy retrieved the bundle from the gutter and held up a pair of shorts, streaked with grass stains and matted together with dried mud. 'A bit of muck never hurt anyone,' he declared bracingly. 'It's better than looking like a stripper.'

'Not,' Tally muttered. Looking like a stripper most definitely had the edge over wearing Alice's fourteen-year-old brother's dirty shorts into a club. 'I mean, thanks and everything Marshy, I know you're only trying to help, but those aren't coming anywhere near me. I'd prefer to rip off all my clothes and go in naked.'

'Bad idea, bad idea.' Alice shook her head rapidly. She knew Tally too well to dismiss those words as an empty threat.

Something beeped inside Marshy's navy blue chauffeur jacket.

'That's your father, Alice. I've got to go collect him from the von Holstadts' cocktail party. Right, girls, er . . .' Marshy cast a glance at Tally, who'd folded her arms

stubbornly across her chest, as if someone might try to thrust the rugby shorts on her at any second. 'Have fun. Go straight inside, and call me when you're ready for a lift home. You'll never find a cab round here.'

Alice watched, shoulders slumped, as the car door slammed and the Bentley rolled off through the rain.

'Now what are we gonna do?' She glared at the skip. What a mess. Tristan's band went on in five minutes and she was stuck out here with a half-naked exhibitionist. This was not how she'd pictured the evening.

Tally wasn't listening. Instead, she was staring at the pavement under her purple patent leather stilettos – and something sharp and delicate was winking back – a large black and white brooch in the shape of a rose. The same one Alice had seen on the girl with the pointy boots.

'Brilliant!' Tally beamed. 'How lucky is that? Pin it to my skirt, Al. It'll hide my thong.'

'What . . . ?' Alice stared. 'We can't just nick something off the street – it belongs to that girl. We should give it back.'

Tally twisted the brooch to and fro. 'The black and white'll really stand out against my skirt,' she gushed. 'And I can wear it pinned to my winter coat as well. How chic!'

'Tally!' Alice snapped. 'Get a grip. That thing's high-quality vintage – it was probably her grandmother's or something. Anyway, it's not *yours*.'

'It is now.' Tally's jaw was set. 'It's just like I always say

about men: finders, keepers. Babe.' She elbowed Alice in the ribs. 'Lighten up.'

Alice clenched her jaw. Lighten up. What the hell was that supposed to mean? She knew how to have fun – and she knew it better than anyone else in her clique. Just because she was careful not to get into trouble for it did *not* make her a goody-goody. She set her jaw.

But there was no time to be pissed off. Suddenly, inside Formica, the music fell away and the crowd cheered. Shadows milled behind the glass doors.

Shit. They must be gearing up for Tristan's set now. He was on next. She had to get in there.

'Fine.' Alice held out her palm. 'Give it.'

'Wicked!' Tally beamed. 'I knew you'd come round.'

'Whatever.' Taking a deep breath, Alice stuck the brooch into the skirt's splintered lace. Then she swung open the door.

Chapter 2

'Darling!' squealed Sonia Khan as Alice's tall, thoroughbred figure appeared in the viewfinder of her £10,000 digital camcorder. Sonia had been filming the crowd, waiting for her friends to arrive, and now her tiny ski-jump nose – recently re-designed and sculpted by the Khans' celebrated plastic surgeon – crinkled in delight. She'd only seen Alice a few hours earlier at school, but that didn't count. When their crowd was out partying, the social clock got automatically re-set.

'Where *were* you?' Sonia demanded petulantly. 'I've been fighting for the past half-hour to save our spots.' She gestured at the ocean of club-goers that was tossing and heaving her like a dinghy on the waves.

Alice shrugged and inspected their surroundings. Formica's interior more than made up for its lame façade. A cavernous ex-coffee warehouse, the place had been recently refurbished to look like a party house for hippies with trust funds. The main room had lofty ceilings, giant skylights and concrete floors spread with woven rugs. Off to the sides, comfy lounging areas were furnished with restored vintage couches and coffee tables. Candles

flickered on every surface. Tangled fairy lights and a spidery antique chandelier illuminated a low stage at the back. And, true to the venue's name, a long Formica bar dominated the section of the room nearest the entrance. The place was clearly beneath police radar, too – a few people were daring to smoke indoors, and Tally could definitely smell weed.

In answer to Sonia's question, she twirled and shook her bum. 'Wardrobe malfunction.'

'Oh my god,' Sonia tittered, covering her small, heart-shaped mouth with her hand. 'I would not go out like that if I were you.'

'Well you're *not* me. Thank god.'

'Whatever. Hold my drink, I've got to interview Alice for my music-video-documentary-special.' Sonia thrust out her cocktail, which was pale green and stuffed to the brim with some kind of vegetable.

'Umm, what the hell is that?' Alice pointed. 'A ritual Indian concoction? Did you bring it especially from home? Mummy's favourite recipe?'

'No, it's a cucumber gimlet.' Sonia was training her lens on Alice's face, ignoring her friend's barb, as always. 'House speciality. Have that one, Ali. I'll buy another. I don't mind.'

'Well I *do*. Keep that thing away from me.'

Sonia peered harder through the lens, trying to hide her hurt expression. Doing favours for Alice Rochester was one of her most cherished hobbies. In fact, it was her only hobby – besides shooting artistic documentaries, and

anyway, that was more of a *career*. Back when Sonia and Alice had both joined St Cecilia's at age eleven (three years before Tally had been shipped over from Russia) Sonia used to follow her idol round, lugging her satchel to lessons and buying things for her from the tuck shop and agreeing with everything she said. The reason Sonia had done those things wasn't that Alice was the cleverest, or the funniest, or even the most stunning girl at school. It was that Alice was the coolest. And years on, now that they were sixteen, she still was. There was something about her that made everyone crave her approval. Whenever she entered a room, people shut up and listened.

'Right,' Sonia put on her professional director's voice, '*action*! Hello, I'm here with Alice Rochester. Tell me, Alice, how do you feel about the debut performance of the Paper Bandits? After all, you've known the boys longer than any of us.'

'Well, Sonia,' Alice batted her eyelids at the camera, 'I'm very proud of my boys and I'd like to wish the entire band the absolute best of luck. All my love, Paper Bandits!' She blew a kiss.

'Ooh, Ali, do that again so I can zoom in! It'll be my closing shot.'

Tally rolled her eyes. 'I hate to butt in, Sone, but aren't documentaries meant to be, like, un-posed?' She took a sip of Sonia's gimlet and made a face.

'For your information, there's a difference between *posed* and *refined*.' Sonia glared. 'Not that you'd know.' She swung her camera round to face the stage. 'Oh. My. God.'

Through her lens, Seb Ogilvy had appeared. He was tuning his bass guitar, his skinny jeans and skinny white cord jacket clinging to his lanky frame. 'Fuck. Fuck,' Sonia was practically drooling. 'He is So. Incredibly. Fit.'

'I see you've got over your crush then,' Alice snorted.

'Shut up! He might hear. Have you ever seen anyone more gorgeous?'

'Um, yeah – like, every other guy in this room. Come on, it's *Seb*. How can you fancy him?'

'Al, keep it down,' Tally hissed. 'He's less than a metre away from us.' She shook her head. 'I cannot *believe* the boys are in a band. I mean, what if they turn out to be famous?'

'We'll be their groupies.'

'I'll be Seb's groupie anyway,' Sonia sighed.

'If you can run fast enough,' Tally smirked.

Sonia ignored her. 'Hey Ali, where's Mimah, by the way? She's about to miss everything.'

It was true. Jemimah Calthorpe de Vyle-Hanswicke, their other best friend and the fourth member of their crew, hadn't shown up all evening.

Alice shrugged. 'She's not coming. Said she had to go to dinner or something.'

'Dinner? With who? Everybody's *here*.'

'I know. She was being totally cagey.'

The lights dimmed.

Seb leapt into place. Tom Randall-Stubbs materialised and perched at the drum kit.

Tally pinched Alice's arm. 'Doesn't Rando look

professional? *Rando!*' she squealed. Tom Randall-Stubbs jerked up his head, caught sight of Tally, turned bright pink and dropped his drum sticks.

But Alice didn't notice. She was staring straight ahead, holding her breath.

Where was the one person she'd come to see?

A split second later, her heart went wild. There he was: Tristan Murray-Middleton. His arms were strong and suntanned from captaining the Hasted House Lower Sixth rugby team. His face was nervous yet determined beneath his unruly quiff. Tristan looked smouldering at the worst of times, but now that he was on stage Alice hadn't a hope in hell. She traced one of her white peep-toes over the scuffed floor, suddenly back in the Easter holidays last year, when T had first decided to start a band. He'd hauled his guitar to her house one night and the two of them had stayed up till the sunrise, drinking red wine and making up ridiculous song lyrics and falling over each other with laughter, the way they used to do when Tristan had been nothing more than her oldest, closest friend in the world.

Alice sighed. Things were different now. They'd been different for over a month, ever since the beginning of term – ever since the night that Tristan had kissed her in secret in the fields between their two schools. The two of them had smoked a joint together and rolled in the grass for ages, breathing in the smell of pot and earth and each other. Alice had fallen for him, harder than she ever had for anyone. But things

had quickly gone wrong – and now she was dying to get him back.

Tristan cradled his guitar in his hands.

'Hello everybody,' he spoke tentatively into the microphone. 'Thanks for coming. We're the Paper Bandits.'

'Woohoo!' someone cheered. Tristan chuckled.

'I'd like to sing a song.' He flushed nervously. 'Actually, I mean, I'd like to sing a few.'

The audience laughed.

'Cute!' Tally mouthed to Alice.

Sonia was staring at Seb, her mouth hanging open.

'It's called,' Tristan cleared his throat, '"If This Is Love."'

Alice stiffened almost imperceptibly between her friends. That title! *She* was the only girl T had ever been in love with – she knew it. He must have written this song for her.

Tristan struck a chord on his guitar and Alice waited, hardly breathing.

'Your kisses thawed
My hibernation,

Your love's beyond
Imagination.'

As the lyrics filled the room, a smile broke over Alice's face. Yes. It was true – *beyond imagination.* No one could love Tristan like she did. She'd known him her whole

life. They shared everything – all their secrets. All their ambitions. All their insecurities. Everything.

'But you take so much
I don't want to give.
Why can't you just
Live and let live?'

Wait a second . . . That wasn't right. Alice's eyes narrowed as the drums kicked in for the chorus. Tristan rocked his head to the beat.

'If this is love
I'll do without it.
If this is love
I think I'll pass.
I don't want love
No doubt about it.
Thought love was slow
But you're moving too fast.

No, I don't want love.
I'll do without it.
Your love's iron.
Mine breaks like glass.'

The room span. Alice reached out to steady herself but there was nothing to hold. *'You take so much I don't want to give'*? *'If this is love, I think I'll pass'*? What the hell

were those lyrics supposed to mean? Was this how T felt about her?

'Need some air,' Alice muttered to Sonia, swinging on her heel.

There was only one thing for it: to get drunk and forget about everything. But before she could even start, things went downhill. Towards the back of the crowd, Alice's gaze was arrested by a familiar figure. A few metres away, a girl was gyrating to the music, hips undulating, blond hair shining under the spotlights. Alice stared.

What the fuck did Dylan Taylor think she was doing here? That American bitch had a talent for cropping up in inconvenient places. Dylan had burst into Tristan's life over the summer holidays, seducing him while he'd been visiting his uncle in New York. Then she'd followed him back to London, barged into Alice's year at St Cecilia's, and insisted on flaunting her balloon-sized boobs to anyone who'd look. Thank goodness Tristan had dumped her. Fine, he'd subsequently dumped Alice too, but that wasn't the point. The point was, what would it take to make Dylan go away for good?

A swarm of girls was blocking the last few metres to the bar, and Alice began to shove her way through.

'This band is bloody *fit*,' a leggy redhead was squawking in a ridiculous faux-cockney accent.

'Oy, hands off,' ordered her mate – a snaggle-toothed blonde. 'The lead singer's mine. Ten quid says I can pull him before midnight. I swear he just winked at me from the stage.'

'You lucky bitch, Lulu. Did he really?'

'Yeah. He wanted me. Badly. Ouch!' Lulu yelped, rubbing her ribcage as Alice's elbow landed a particularly good blow.

Just then, a hand seized Alice's shoulder.

'Excuse me!' demanded a posh male voice. 'You there! Where do you think you're going? Haven't you ever heard of a queue?'

'Haven't *you* ever heard of a loser?' Alice wheeled round. Oh shit. The boy she'd just insulted was film-star hot. His deep green eyes flashed from under his cropped brown hair. Sexy stubble softened his manly jaw.

'I didn't mean—' she mumbled.

'Shhh,' the boy pressed a finger to his lips. 'What's your poison? My treat.'

Alice gaped at him. Then she melted into a smile. This might turn out to be her lucky night after all.