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Written by Lucy Lord

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LUCY LORD

Revelry

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To my husband, with love.

Last summer was meant to be perfect. Unbridled sunny hedonism with all my favourite people in Ibiza, Glastonbury and the rest of the latter-day Sodom and Gomorrah hotspots we creative, *civilized* people have colonized over the last few decades. How we were looking forward to indulging in excesses that Nero's subjects might have considered over-the-top, smug in the knowledge that tiresome, bourgeois rules didn't apply to professional free spirits like us. As I say, it was going to be perfect. But somehow, somewhere, something went wrong.

Chapter 1

Let's start in Ibiza. It's the beginning of June and we've hired a villa for a week to coincide with the Space and Pacha opening parties. A fairly loathsome thing to do, I'm sure you'll agree, but some of my friends have started to think they're so cool it hurts. The renovated *finca* is a typically Ibicenco whitewashed cuboid affair, with roof terrace, tropical gardens kept verdant with horribly eco-unfriendly sprinklers and a big floodlit pool. Divided by ten, it wouldn't have been too pricey were it not for the dreaded strong euro. But hey – that's what credit cards are for.

In varying states of undress, sobriety and attractiveness, my fellow revellers lounge around the pool. To my right, talking nineteen to the dozen, feet dangling in the water, is my oldest and dearest friend Poppy. We were new girls at school together and bonded at the age of ten over a shared love of Frazzles and Enid Blyton. The rest of the class thought we were weird.

Tiny, with long, straight, honey-blonde hair (dyed, but not obviously) and smooth golden skin, Poppy's the sort of girl you could easily hate if you didn't already know and love her. After getting a first in History from Oxford,

she travelled round the world on her own, bribing bent Colombian border guards, replanting rainforests in Borneo and volunteering in a Zimbabwean lion sanctuary. She's now doing very nicely thank you in TV production. Her apparent fragility belies enormous resources of stamina. How she manages to combine outrageous partying with her high-flying job is anybody's guess.

I suspect she's still pissed from last night. It's just gone 2.30, we haven't been up for long, and she should, by all rights, be feeling like death. Instead, she's babbling away like nobody's business, and – sure enough – finishes her sentence with '. . . I think the sun is well and truly over the yardarm by now, don't you?' She jumps to her dainty little feet, making for the bar the other side of the pool. I hear a heavy sigh and look up to see Alison rolling her eyes at Alison.

Alison and Alison are a pair of killjoys if ever there was one. Not people I'd ever have chosen to come on holiday with, they are the girlfriend and fiancée of Charlie and Andy, who have been my brother's best mates since their Cambridge days. Max and I unwisely decided to hire the villa together, to share with our respective friends – then the bugger bowed out at the last minute over a bust-up with his latest boyfriend.

Skinny Alison is in full-on Bridezilla wedding planning mode. If I hear another word about bridesmaids, flowers or seat placements, I won't be responsible for my actions. And somebody really ought to tell her that the strings on string bikinis are adjustable for a reason. I'm itching to give her boobs a good hoick.

I'm not normally such a bitch, honestly, but the Alisons have been determined to ruin everyone's holiday from the moment we arrived. Moan, moan, moan – and another bloody moan for good measure. It's too hot, they don't

want to stay out too late, the food's not up to scratch, they *don't like beaches*. I mean, how can you not like beaches? They didn't like it at all when Poppy and I brought a Croatian couple back to drink absinthe by the pool at dawn, I think, giggling to myself at the memory. But really – if neither beaches nor a laissez-faire attitude to partying is your bag, the question remains: why come to Ibiza in the first place?

'The problem is that Andy wants to invite some old school friend who I haven't even met, and who'll probably turn up drunk anyway. It's not meant to be a hooley, it's *my day* . . .' Skinny is telling Plump Alison, who is hanging on her words, seemingly enraptured. I shut my eyes and turn my face up to the afternoon sun, allowing myself to drift off for a second.

'So I've told him, *we just don't have the numbers.*' It's no use: sleep is not an option within earshot. Andy and Charlie have driven into the village to buy provisions. I'd bet my life's earnings (not a lot, I grant you) that they've stopped for a couple of sharpeners, if only to escape Alison's inane witterings for half an hour.

'Drinks, anyone?' asks Poppy, and two prone male bodies show faint signs of stirring.

'A beer might just save my life,' croaks the lithe, brown one with messy black hair. Damian is Poppy's long-term boyfriend, and they couldn't be more compatible. As a journalist on a men's magazine he is the epitome of the work-hard, play-hard lifestyle that suits my friend so well. And if ever the reams of misogynistic drivel he is required to churn out for work start creeping into his extracurricular chat, Poppy pulls him up short pretty sharpish.

They make a fine-looking couple, I reflect, not for the first time, as Poppy opens a bottle of San Miguel and takes it over to him, crouching down to ruffle his hair and give

him a kiss. Damian has his half-Indian heritage to thank for his permanent stubble and soulful dark eyes, hidden, at the moment, by a pair of classic Ray-Bans. The other half is Welsh, and the unlikely sounding genetic combination has proved a winner. Poppy has chosen her Missoni string bikini with typical nous. Its zigzag stripes of emerald, lime, khaki and aqua add curves to her slender frame and enhance her green eyes. Despite the heavy night, she is the picture of health and vitality. 'Beer, Ben?' she asks. 'Or does the Pope shit in the woods?'

'Cheers babe.' Ben drags himself into a sitting position. I try not to gawp.

Ben Jones is probably the most gorgeous specimen of manhood I have ever laid eyes on. A classically trained actor, he supplements his fluctuating income with the odd modelling stint (as you do), his full pouty lips, high cheekbones and long-lashed blue eyes lending themselves perfectly to preppy Gap-style advertising campaigns. He and Damian were at school together, so I've known him for as long as Poppy's been with Damian, which must be getting on for . . . Jesus, nearly five years now. And even after nearly five years, it's sometimes hard to believe that I count this Adonis amongst my closest friends; in fact it's sometimes hard to believe that I count any of these people amongst my closest friends. But I'll come back to that later.

'So what happened after I left last night?' he asks us all. Unusually for him, Ben left early last night as his nightmare current squeeze, an Australian model called Kimberly, wanted to get her beauty sleep (and presumably her fill of Ben, lucky bitch).

Both Alisons sit up straighter, I notice. Fuck it, who am I trying to kid? *I* sit up straighter, and pull my tummy in too.

Poppy starts to laugh. 'Good question. Who do you want to hear about first, Mark or Bella?'

'Start with Mark please,' I say, getting to my feet. Joining Poppy at the bar, I pour myself a large gin and tonic and light the first fag of the day.

'Christ, Mark's a dick,' says Poppy, and we all laugh.

Mark is the art director on Damian's magazine, all shaved head, biceps bulging out of racer-back vests and crotch attempting to thrust through the flies of his Diesel jeans. On anybody less pulsating with testosterone, this would look gayer than Elton and 'my partner David Furnish' on a campsite in Mykonos. Mark presides over shoots of naked women and says things like, 'Man, Kelly's minge is sweet' without shame. It pains me to admit that I find him extremely sexy.

'Yes, he really excelled himself last night, didn't he?' I say. 'What would be your reaction, Ben, to eighteen-year-old Brazilian twins?'

'Fuck me!' Ben chokes on his beer. 'Lucky bastard. Where did he find them?'

'Pacha, of course. The last we saw of him, the three of them were heading off, arm-in-arm, to the marina, making for the girls' parents' yacht.'

'They were bloody fit,' says Damian. Poppy sighs patiently.

'They were eighteen, darling. And Mark is thirty-two. Don't you think it's a tad pathetic?' Poppy is lucky enough never to have suffered from jealousy. I suppose she's so secure in her own achievements and beauty that it's never been an issue. Which is more than you can say for me.

'I really hope their father – who I am assuming, with my penchant for racial stereotyping, has a macho and fiery Latin temperament – catches Mark in the act with his darling daughters,' she muses.

'You messa with my bambinas, I cut offa your cojones,' I add, and everybody laughs, even the Alisons. I glance over at Ben. Christ, he's gorgeous.

'So what did you get up to then, Bella?' he asks. I sigh theatrically, trying to mask the shyness that used to be so incapacitating and which still occasionally rears its ugly head at entirely inopportune moments. Like at job interviews, or when talking to handsome men. I deal with it by drinking more than is seemly (not at job interviews), hanging out with people way cooler than me and hoping some of their attitude will rub off. But, deep down, I've a strong suspicion I'll always be a bit of a loser.

'It was my favourite dress.'

'That short white lacy number you had on last night? Yes, it looked great on you. Really showed off your tan.' He noticed what I was wearing? Result! 'So what happened to it?'

'Well . . .' I'm starting to feel a bit sheepish now, as I don't want Ben to think I'm a complete slag, even though he is by no means Mr Whiter-Than-White himself.

'It's classic,' says Damian, grinning. His teeth are dazzlingly white against his brown skin. 'Come on Belles, spill.'

'OK then. I met this American guy – can't even remember his name now . . .'

'It was Randy,' says Poppy. 'Can't believe you've forgotten that bit.'

'Oh God, yes, of course! I can't believe I've forgotten that bit either. Anyway, *Randy* and I decided to go to the loo for a line, and while we were in there we had a quick snog. In the course of the snogging, my dress came off – *I did not shag him*, by the way . . .'

'Of course not,' mutters Skinny Alison and Poppy glares at her.

'I didn't. Anyway, by the time we were ready to go back and have another drink, I looked on the floor and my dress was gone. Someone must have put their hand under the partition from the next cubicle and pinched it. I mean, really – what on earth would possess you?'

'Was it the Ladies or Gents?' asks Ben. Such a pertinent question makes me go all gooey.

'The Gents. Not sure if that makes it better or worse. It must have been some sort of prank, rather than a random opportunistic cheapskate stalking me and thinking *I really really must have that dress* – fab though it was. Ha-ha very fucking funny.'

'Actually it is,' says Damian. 'And you never know, transvestism isn't unknown in Ibiza.'

I ignore him.

'Anyway, I was stranded in my bra and knickers, so had to get Randy to go and alert the bar staff to my plight. They all thought it was bloody hilarious, but the barmaid did lend me a towel, which I fashioned into a mini toga and wore for the rest of the night. No one batted an eyelid, of course.'

'Excellent stuff,' says Ben. 'What happened to Randy?'

'Dunno – I lost him in the crowds.'

'Poor bloke, he's probably brokenhearted.' I glance up suspiciously. Is he taking the piss? Ben simply doesn't do gratuitous compliments. Not towards me, at any rate.

'Hi guys,' coos a breathy voice from the direction of the French windows. 'How's it going?'

Nearly six feet tall, with curly, almost ringleted auburn hair and even whiter teeth than Damian, Kimberly likes to make an entrance. Now she poses languidly for a second, allowing us to take in the length of her legs, before slinking across the terrace towards Ben. He leaps to his feet.

'Drink, darling?'

'Ew, no!' She wrinkles her retroussé nose in disgust. 'I can't believe you're all drinking in the sun? Don't you know how dehydrating it is? Your skin's not going to thank you, babe.' She gives a little tinkly laugh and I want to punch her. Her skin is an unlikely bronze spattered with tiny freckles. Surely redheads don't tan? 'Organic OJ will do me just fine?'

I haven't seen Kimbo swim the entire time we've been here, despite her vast collection of tiny bikinis, and suddenly realize why. If her hair went anywhere near water without the aid of a hell of a lot of Frizz-Ease and an hour's attention it would surely be a ginger afro. I'm tempted to chuck my drink over her just to check, but reconsider. It would be a waste of perfectly good gin.

'I just had a call from my agent?' she says. 'And US *Playboy* is interested in me doing a centrefold? And although I'm perfectly happy with the human body as a sexual and sensual instrument –' Excuse me while I puke. '– I'm more in touch with my inner spirituality? Y'know?'

The Aussie upward inflection is doing my head in. We may be hungover, and she may be talking utter crap, but it's not as if we don't understand the English language. Y'know?

'Babe, that's amazing,' says Ben. 'I can't believe I'm knobbing a potential *Playboy* centrefold. You've got to accept.'

'Oh, I don't know,' says Poppy. 'As you're such a spiritual person, maybe you should concentrate on less *obvious* things.'

'Oh you naughty boy,' says Kim simultaneously, tapping Ben's nose playfully, as I suppose a *Playboy* centrefold might. 'But the shoot clashes with my yoga retreat in Kerala next month – Goa's just *soooooooo* touristy these days – and I need to, like, reconnect with my soul?' She starts doing

some ostentatiously arse-revealing yoga moves and Poppy catches my eye.

'Anyone up for Sa Trinxa?'

I was hoping someone would moot this. The gin has already topped up the toxic fluid that is my blood and I want to party on. Sa Trinxa is the coolest bar on the coolest beach in Ibiza and I defy anyone not to have a good time there. Apart from the Alisons, of course, who'd rather talk weddings around the pool.

'I'm game,' says Damian.

'Me too,' says Ben.

'I think I'll take a rain check? I need to, like, catch up with my meditation? You guys have fun, OK? But not too much fun without me, gorgeous? Remember the Tantra?' Kim licks Ben's face in a frankly horrible display of intimacy and slinks off.

Sa Trinxa it is then.

I'm basking in the clear water off Las Salinas, favoured beach of Ibiza's beautiful people. It's a fifteen-minute walk from the car park to Sa Trinxa, at the far end of the beach, but boy is it worth it. Looking back at the beach from my watery vantage point, I'm faced with a scene right out of a soft-focus Seventies fashion shoot. Nestled into the rocks at the back of the sandy white beach, the bar is built up on a wooden platform, with bamboo and banana leaves providing shelter from the fierce Balearic sun. Exquisite semi-naked bodies of every nationality laze on the shore, tattoos and anklets much in evidence. Impossibly slender and tanned girls in tiny bikini bottoms are starting to dance on the water's edge, swaying in time to the ambient music the bar's sound system is pumping out. They know that everybody in the bar is looking at them; that's the point.

I do a somersault underwater. I could swim before I

could walk, as my parents had a pool when I was a baby (when they were still together), and I'm still better at swimming than walking. The former has fewer falling-over opportunities. I come back up for breath and let my mind drift back to last night. I was a little economical with the truth when I said I hadn't shagged Randy. It seems a tad sordid to admit you've done it in a nightclub loo, after all. Even if the club in question is Pacha. But hey, he was fit as fuck, and seemed to think that I was too, which is always a turn-on. He was from California, and looked like a surfer, with a broad jaw, shoulder-length, sun-streaked hair, darker eyes, lashes and stubble, perfect American teeth and mid-calf, Hawaiian-printed board shorts. One of the best things about Ibiza is that you can meet so many globally gorgeous men here.

He approached me on Pacha's absurdly jet-set terrace, complimenting me on my eyes, dress and legs. I lapped it up, then told him I had some coke if he fancied a line. I'm always so euphoric on Charlie (not least for its confidence-boosting properties) that I want to share it, for whomever I'm with to be on the same wavelength, to *share the joy man*. I'm a bloody idiotic hippy at times. Anyway, we made our way to the Gents, waiting until nobody was having a piss in the urinals, before sneaking into one of the two whitewashed stone cubicles, laughing as we locked the door behind us.

I felt another rush of euphoria after we'd done the lines and Randy seemed to too, as he grasped my shoulders and started kissing me, tracing the inside of my mouth with his tongue. It felt great and I responded in kind, offering little resistance when he slid my dress off my shoulders and onto the floor, leaving me standing there in my bra and knickers. He undid his board shorts, which also fell to the floor. He wasn't wearing anything underneath and his

cock was impressive. He pushed me against the wall, and tried to get my knickers down, but we were both hampered by the garments around our feet. We laughed, and kicked them aside.

Realizing that in such a confined space there was no other option, Randy sat down on the loo seat and pulled me down on top of him. He'd already managed to get a condom on (something told me he'd done this before). I felt his great American cock going deeper inside me, as I manoeuvred myself up and down on him, turned on as much by the naughtiness of it all as by his calloused thumb rubbing my clitoris. God, it was good.

But when I told Ben that I'd lost Randy in the crowds, I was lying about that too. When we eventually emerged from the loo, with me in the towel the barmaid had lent me, he kissed me, apologized and said he couldn't be seen with me in case his friends told his girlfriend back in Santa Barbara. Bastard. It was the first time he'd mentioned a girlfriend.

You know what though? I've been treated worse. God, the hours I've spent agonizing over why some chap or other hasn't called, what I might have done to put him off me. What it is that other women have that I don't; something that keeps the opposite sex interested in them for more than just a few cheap shags. Endless, painful self-analysis. At least Randy had the decency to tell me to my face immediately after the event. OK, so decency is probably not quite the right word, but you know what I mean. It's that being kept hanging on for weeks, sometimes months on end – because they don't have the bloody courage to tell you to your face – that really hurts.

Here, in the beautiful sea that surrounds this beautiful island, Randy's nothing more than a delicious (if somewhat seedy) memory. Ships that pass, and all that. I do a

backward somersault, then swim out towards the horizon for a bit, going deep underwater like a fish before heading back to the shore. It's time for another drink.

The jetty that sticks out into the sea in front of the bar acts as a kind of catwalk. The rocks that account for the very clean water make it difficult to get in and out of the sea without using the jetty, so every time you have a swim you know that at least someone will be observing, and quite possibly commenting on you. In the old days I'd have been horribly self-conscious hauling myself out of the water in front of such a pulchritudinous crowd. Today, emboldened by the five bottles of wine we seem to have got through with our lunch, I am the picture of insouciance. I may be nowhere near Poppy's league of beauty, but I scrub up OK and am feeling happily confident in my fuchsia and orange halterneck bikini, my long dark hair dripping down my back. It's great how sexy sunshine and booze can make you feel when there are no mirrors around.

Lunch was to die for. Griddle-blackened tiger prawns pulsating with garlic and parsley, fantastically crunchy chips to soak up the juices and a lovely fresh salad to make us feel virtuous. The food, wine and swim (not necessarily in that order) have certainly sorted out my hangover, I think, as I weave my way through the bodies on the sand back to our table.

'How was the water?' asks Poppy.

'Absolutely gorgeous! So refreshing, I feel like a new man. What's the wine situation?' I pick up my empty glass.

'Don't panic, we've ordered a couple more bottles,' says Ben, laughing.

Looking around the table I feel a moment of pure joy. I'm with three of my favourite people in probably my favourite place on earth, mellowed with sun and wine, with nothing but more pleasure to look forward to until

we leave this magical island. It's so hot I'm drying off already, salt crystals forming on my sunbaked shoulders, my wet hair keeping me cool. Whichever direction I look, I am confronted by sunshine, beauty and laughing faces. It seems as if nothing can pierce my bubble of happiness.

And then I see him. Walking up the beach towards us, skinny brown legs in way-too-short denim cut-offs, barrel brown chest revealed by a batik silk shirt left open to the waist. His shoulder-length hair is thick and grey, his chest hair white and wispy. A shark's tooth dangles from a leather string around his neck, above which his strong mahogany face is etched with deep vertical grooves. He is carrying – oh God – a guitar in one hand and what looks like a spliff in the other.

'Bella,' says Damian, following my gaze. 'Isn't that . . .?'

Yes, the ageing hippy openly checking out all the topless babes on the beach is my much-loved but thoroughly disreputable father.