

THE
CHATSFIELD®



*The
Sports Star
at The
Chatsfield*

MELANIE MILBURNE

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«HarperCollins»,

Step behind the hotel room doors of The Chatsfield, London... This is so not how Alice Hammond planned on spending her birthday. Not only has her own father stood her up, but now some guy has sat down next to her at the Chatsfield bar and started teasing her! Ok, he's the seriously gorgeous captain of a top football team, but he's also the most arrogant man Alice has ever met, and storming off is the only option! But when she accidentally switches phones with Angus it's time to track him down, and when the hunt leads to his hotel room, Alice might be in for a birthday treat after all!



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The Sports Star at The Chatsfield

Melanie Milburne

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[Chapter One](#)

I was on to my second mimosa by nine-fifteen... that's p.m. in case you're wondering. I have my fair share of problems but thankfully drinking isn't one of them. I was sitting in the swanky bar at The Chatsfield Hotel in London waiting for my father. We meet here every year on my birthday, May 15th.

That's another thing I should clarify. We meet here on the years my father actually remembers, which makes it about one in two. Last year he forgot so this time I wasn't taking any chances. It wasn't that I was all that fussed about my birthday. Dad never buys me a present. He hands me a

cheque. He's been doing it every year since I was twelve. He handed my mum one on that occasion too, but that was part of the divorce settlement. I suppose I should be grateful the amount has kept in line with inflation, but there is still a little girl inside me who longs to hold a gift that her father has personally chosen for her.

You might ask, why does my father hand me a cheque in the days of electronic banking? Good question. The answer is for show. He does the same thing every year... well, every second year. He sits down, orders a Manhattan, and once it's down in front of him with a bowl of crisps – which he shouldn't be eating because of his cholesterol – he opens his wallet and selects a crisply signed cheque and hands it to me with a big cheesy grin as if he's handing me the key to eternal happiness.

I play the game. I glance down at the amount written there and gasp in shock/delight/surprise and thank him for being so generous, yadda, yadda, yadda. I smile inanely and ask him about his latest girlfriend, holiday, golf handicap, etc.

Yes, I know. It's nauseating.

I wouldn't have bothered texting him to remind him this year but I had to see him about another matter. My father was getting married. Remarried. Now, before you start thinking I'm one of those kids who got seriously traumatised by their parents splitting up, and for years and years secretly fantasised about them getting back together, think again. I was cool about it. I'm still cool about it. They should never have married in the first place. They only did it to please their parents when they accidentally got pregnant with me. I'm the product of a one-night stand. It doesn't have quite the same ring to it as honeymoon baby, does it?

But I digress.

My dad at the age of fifty-seven was getting married.

So? You might ask. Lots of divorced men remarry in middle age. Fine. Good on them.

But they're not marrying my BEST FRIEND!

Argh, I want to vomit when I think of my dad with Sophie. She's the same age as me. Twenty-five. I mean, what *is* he thinking? He's thirty-two years older than her. I still can't believe it. Sophie called me a couple of days ago to give me the heads up. I had no idea. I think that's what I found the most upsetting. How could I be the last to know my best friend is shagging my father?

Former best friend.

How could I share anything with Sophie after this? She knows too much already and now she'll probably blab it all to my father. All those confidences, all those whispered secrets and shared insecurities.

But not if I stop this before it goes any further, hence the father–daughter drinkies at The Chatsfield.

I glanced at my watch and frowned. If my father didn't show up soon I'd have to buy another drink. I never have more than two standard drinks. Never. Long story, but to summarise: a friend of a friend's eighteenth birthday party, delicious punch loaded with alcohol, sex in the cloakroom with a guy I didn't know. I'm glad the memory of it is only patchy. Call me overly sensitive, but I hate thinking about that night. I'm so pathetic that every time I hear the number eighteen I get a horrible feeling deep in the pit of my stomach. The thing that annoys me the most about recalling that night is it was the first time I'd stood up to my father. I mean *really* stood up. Disobeyed him outright. He'd grounded me for being rude to one of his girlfriends. I forget her name now but you have no idea how *awful* she was. Nice as pie when my dad was around but as soon as he turned his back she would have a go at me. Dad wouldn't listen to me when I tried to explain. That's what made me rebel. I hate that he took her word over mine. Who the hell was she to call *me* fat? I had PMS, damn it. I always get a little bloated.

But anyway... where was I?

Oh yes, The Chatsfield bar was filling up with late night patrons. The Beautiful People: models, actors – both stage and screen – sports stars and movers and shakers from the corporate world. I

scanned the crowd for any sign of my father but he was nowhere to be seen. I suddenly wished I'd chosen a less crowded venue, but the thing about The Chatsfield is it's so darned gorgeous and sumptuous I can pretend I'm someone uber sophisticated, instead of a mousy little museum curator who spends most of her time with medieval artefacts.

I positioned my drink just so next to my phone and evening purse on the little table in my two-person nook, and draped my wrap over the back of the vacant seat in a proprietorial manner just in case anyone got any ideas about pinching my father's chair before he got the chance to sit on it.

I looked up to see a tall dark-haired man in his late twenties enter the bar with a group of noisy young men behind him. Bachelor party? I wondered. I watched as they approached the bar. I suspected they were already half tanked by all the joking and smiling and jostling that was going on. The friendly camaraderie amongst them made a tiny pinch of resentment pull at the lining of my stomach. I wasn't without friends...well, I was one down now that Sophie was about to become my stepmother, but I didn't have a football team of them.

The dark-haired man was the last to collect his drink from the bar. It looked like mineral or soda water in the glass, which made me wonder if he was the designated driver. Or maybe he was pacing himself. After all, it was only nine-thirty at night. That was ridiculously early for the nightclub crowd.

I found it hard to drag my eyes away from him. My eyeballs felt like they were magnetised to track his every movement. There was something vaguely familiar about him. I wondered if he was a male model or something. Perhaps I'd seen him in a gossip magazine when I was at the hairdresser's. He was six foot one or two with an athletic build that spoke of hours of endurance training. His hair was wavy rather than curly and it was long enough for the ends to brush against the collar of his shirt. It looked like he had combed it recently with his fingers because I could see the deep grooves in between the strands. He was clean-shaven with an olive complexion, but when his eyes met mine I was surprised to find they weren't the brown I was expecting but a deep and unusual shade of slate blue.

He gave me a long appraising look that made every inch of my flesh lift up in goose bumps. His gaze had an intensity about it that made me feel as if he were picturing me naked. It wasn't a sleazy look, not by any means. It was like an alpha wolf sighting a potential mate. I even saw his nostrils flare ever so slightly as if he were checking the air for my scent. I was glad I'd splurged last week on that bottle of Ellie Saab.

I sat up straighter in my chair, every cell in my body on high alert when he left his friends and came towards me with a smile on his face. Now, I'm not one to be charmed by a smile, but I can tell you my pulse rate shot up like I'd just bolted up ten flights of stairs. I'm not the sort of girl guys walk over to in a bar. I could sit in a bar all night and no one but the waiter would speak to me. I'm like wallpaper. I fade into the background because that's where I feel most comfortable. I glanced around behind me to see if he was coming to speak to someone else. Nope. I was sitting against the back wall.

'Are you using this chair?' he asked.

I was about to say I was expecting my father to join me when I realised how pathetic that sounded. Nine-thirty on a Saturday night and the best I could do was a drink with my father? What if he went back to his friends and sniggered about the dowdy girl in the corner who couldn't land herself a man? Believe me, it's happened before. 'I'm meeting someone,' I said instead, with a little lift of my chin for emphasis. 'He'll be here any minute.'

'No problem.' He smiled again which made my heart rise and fall like it was strapped into a rollercoaster. 'Have a good one.'

I watched as he turned back to his friends who had by this time taken over most of the quieter area of the bar. They were lounging about like they owned the place. One even had his feet up on one of the tables. I rolled my eyes and picked up my drink, resettling in my chair like a broody hen settles on a clutch of eggs. I know. I can be petty at times but really. Some people.

I made my second drink last another half an hour while I watched the blue-eyed man and his friends get more and more rowdy. They were telling bawdy jokes – which to tell you the truth were

side-splittingly funny – but I wasn't in the mood to laugh. My father still hadn't shown up and he hadn't responded to any of my texts. Also – and this was the part that was the most annoying – I kept seeing the blue-eyed man glancing from time to time at the vacant chair and lifting one of his dark eyebrows questioningly. I ignored him, of course.

The waiter came over and took my glass off the table before I could snatch it back up and pretend I was still drinking it. 'Would you like another, Ma'am?' he asked.

I know it's been done to death but I really love that movie *When Harry Met Sally* so I said the immortal line (but I changed the gender) as I nodded in the blue-eyed man's direction. 'I'll have what he's having.'

'Angus Knight?' the waiter said.

My stomach dropped like it had been kicked off the roof of The Chatsfield. 'Kick' being a pertinent word considering I had just realised who the blue-eyed man was. Angus Knight, the newly appointed captain of the Yeatswood United Football team. International playboy extraordinaire. He had so many followers on Twitter he made the Pied Piper look like a recluse. I hadn't recognised him with his clothes on. Erm, I mean his street clothes. I was used to seeing him darting around a football field in shorts and a team shirt with the number seven on it. Did I happen to mention seven is my lucky number?

'Ma'am?'

I blinked at the waiter who was still waiting for my answer. 'I'll have a soda water. Thank you.'

'Would you like me to ask him to autograph one of The Chatsfield's coasters for you?' the waiter said. 'I'm sure he wouldn't mind.'

'No!' I felt my face flush as my voice came out like a squeaky toy. 'I mean, thank you, but I'm not an autograph hunter.'

I have no time for groupies. What are they thinking trailing after sports stars as if they're some sort of royalty? So what if Angus Knight can kick a football? So what if he earns millions of pounds every year and has done since the age of seventeen when he was plucked out of obscurity from a council estate and thrown onto the world's stage?

Fame has a bad effect on most people; even the most level headed ones. They nearly always end up with a sense of entitlement. They expect special treatment wherever they go. They don't have time for ordinary people. They surround themselves with sycophants and status seekers and yes-men and women who worship them like a craven image.

I'm way too sensible for that sort of nonsense. Whenever I feel the slightest bit intimidated by someone who's famous I think of them in their underwear.

But right then when Angus Knight turned and looked at me that tactic didn't have quite the same effect. A vision came into my head of him in nothing but a pair of close-fitting briefs with every contour of his hard, toned body spectacularly outlined...

I was so shocked at my X-rated thoughts I jerked back in my chair so forcefully it almost toppled over backwards. I gripped the arms to rebalance myself, my heart rate soaring, my cheeks furnace-hot at the thought of everyone in the bar seeing what I was wearing under my off the peg little black dress. I said I was sensible but that doesn't mean I don't like sexy underwear. Mind you, I guess there's not a lot that's sensible about a hot pink thong, but I hate VPL (visible panty line) so I always wear a thong under this particular dress.

Angus left his mates to saunter over again. I didn't care for the lazy smile that curled his lips upwards. It was as if he knew where my mind was straying. I could see it in the sparkle of his deep blue eyes as they meshed with mine. 'Your date stood you up?'

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