

HOUSE PARTY – Chapter 8 – Freddie's POV

The one where she stole my wine...

My brother swore it wouldn't be a party this year, not after last year's bust up and yet, I hear glasses being filled and karaoke in full swing downstairs. The new French doors, which were smashed to smithereens last year by a mysterious flying rock, cost him almost two grand to replace.

Money he didn't have.

He ended up working long hours at the local cinema to pay Mum back. He's a lucky bastard to have a friend who, despite it not being *Hattie's* idea to throw the party, was willing to go halves. I made my thoughts on his selfish behaviour very clear at the time. This year, I've been told to keep myself to myself, with instructions from Mum to intervene if randomers begin to show up or they start lighting fireworks.

We do *not* need a repeat.

Besides, Alice is here and we're busy revising for the January exams.

I glance at the clock. It's almost midnight so the fun will begin soon.

"Want a snack?" I ask.

Alice leans back on the bed, holding her laptop above her head in a precarious way. We're not involved or anything like that. Everyone thinks we are. But we're not. She's undeniably beautiful with big dark hair and warm eyes, but, as she pointed out soon after meeting me, I am *not* her type.

She frowns, puckering her lips. "No. Bring me wine!"

I laugh, throwing my legs over the bed and heading to the door. "They'll get rowdy about midnight by the way. It's Hattie's birthday."

Alice gives me a knowing look.

"*What?*" I choke.

"It's the way you say her name." She laughs, her voice shrill. "*Hattie...*"

"Shut the fuck up." I throw a discarded T-shirt at her face, which she rapidly balls up and launches back. "You're so aggressive, did you know that?"

Alice just shrugs. "Wine, boy. Bring me wine! I refuse to see the New Year in sober. Especially if you're telling me there's a bunch of nineteen-year-olds getting lairy downstairs."

I roll my eyes and head down. I promised Sam I'd stay out of sight.

He hates me and I get it. Issue is, I have no intention of doing anything about it right now. Especially since he refuses to speak to our father and has laid that responsibility firmly on my

shoulders. A burden I'm bitter about taking. Especially while I'm trying to study for final year exams and focus on my career prospects.

I pause at the bottom of the stairs, glancing along the hallway to the living room where most of the noise is coming from. I don't think there's anyone in the kitchen, so I hot foot it across the cold tiles towards the fridge, only to find it open.

I almost retreat. But before I can make a move, the fridge door closes and *she* crashes into me.

"Shit," Hattie stammers, stumbling back a step. Her eyes are wide, her cheeks flushing red immediately. I love that about her. How easy she is to read. I make her nervous, being the older brother in her best friend's house. I don't want to make her nervous, but I do enjoy what my presence does to her.

This girl thinks I'm cool.

She has no idea.

Even better, she's chosen to pillage *my* wine from the fridge. The bottle I pointed out to Sam earlier as Off Limits to him and his friends.

I clear my throat. "Where you going with my wine, Hattie?"

"Erm..."

"Can I have it back, please?" I practically purr, holding my hand out. She swallows thickly, glancing at my hand like it's an affront. Her face runs through a myriad of emotions before settling on something akin to stubbornness.

Fascinating.

"What you going to do if I don't?" She holds my eyes bravely as she takes a long sip direct from the bottle.

My pulse skyrockets. I hope she can't hear the heavy thud of my heart. The way her lips fasten around the stem, her eyes locking on mine, I swear it takes me a solid second to correct myself. I watch another rush of heat wash through her cheeks.

She's embarrassed but excited.

It's so fucking unbearably cute.

Not for me.

She's Sam's best friend and he'd never speak to me again. Even if he does hate me right now, I can't lose him for good. Not when our parents are as flighty and unstable as they are. We need each other.

And yet, a little flirting won't hurt, right?

I step closer, folding my arms. Hattie gulps.

“What will you give me in exchange for it?” I glance at her lips. They part in surprise.

She takes a moment to steady herself, a quiet smile teasing the corners of her mouth. “What do you want?”

Oh, she’s playing. This isn’t a game I can win. But, with this girl, I’m perfectly prepared to lose.

I smirk, shaking my head.

God, this is fun.

Unfortunately, the game is ruined. Sam’s voice echoes down the hall. “Hatter! Hurry up! It’s your turn for fuck’s sake.”

My shoulders drop on instinct.

Hattie gives me one last challenging stare, stepping past me with the bottle. I think she’s testing to see if I’ll snatch it or say anything else. I can’t look away, those dark blue eyes, her fizzy blond-red hair, the freckles across her nose and cheeks.

She’s fucking mesmerising.

I cough to clear my throat, blinking.

“Fine. Have it,” I say, my voice wavering. There’s no way she can’t tell I’m affected by her. Say something smart, Freddie. Say something to ease the tension. “Be a good girl, Hattie.”

WHAT?

Her face pulses red again. With one final startled glance my way, she shoots down the hallway, my wine still in hand, towards her friends in the living room.

Be a good girl!?

I run a hand down my face. What a fucking moron. She’s going to think I’m deranged.

“What’s taking you so long?” Alice complains, appearing at the kitchen door. I spin too quickly and point at her like some cheesy gameshow host.

“They stole my wine.”

She scoffs, glaring down the hall in their direction. “Want me to fight them?”

I click my fingers. I’m being weird. Alice frowns as if to confirm this fact. “Unnecessary to bring violence to the situation.” I tilt my head. “Also, I let her take it like an absolute...”

“Simp.”

“I was going to say pushover.”

Alice shrugs like it’s the same thing. I click my fingers *again*, eyeing up the top shelf full of Dad’s old spirits. I haven’t looked at them in years. They were the bringer of doom in this house, but since he’s moved out, nobody has touched them. A thought that lodges itself in my chest. Why the fuck haven’t we thrown these out?

“Shots?” I ask Alice.

“No, Freddie.”

“Ok... Then we can steal Sam’s beers? Since Hattie stole my wine?”

“Sure.” Alice sighs before our attention is drawn to the absolute racket coming from the party. I actually feel myself wince from the shrill voice attempting to sing – or murder – *Thunderstruck* by ACDC.

“What the actual...”

We head towards the living room in pure intrigue. I said I’d stay out of sight, but if this voice belongs to who I think it does, then it’s worth the risk. It’s worth having a bust up with Sam just so I can see her face.

I lean on the doorframe, Alice coming up beside me and holding onto my arm for balance. We stare – awestruck or in pain, it’s hard to say. But I can’t fight a smile as Hattie fails to hit note after note and yet puts her whole back into embarrassing herself.

I’d take a photo if I had a camera. Since I don’t, I take a mental picture. Especially when she laughs in the pauses, her eyes sparkling, her smile earth-shatteringly beautiful.

I can’t have her.

But nobody can stop me from making her my secret muse.