



PARTYGIRL
A NOVEL ANNADAVID

PARTY GIRL

A NOVEL

ANNA DAVID

 HarperCollins e-books

FOR ALL THE PARTY GIRLS OUT THERE—
AND ALL THOSE WHO PUT UP WITH THIS ONE

“Silly things do cease to be silly if
they are done by sensible people
in an impudent way.”

—JANE AUSTEN

“My girl wants to party all the time,
Party all the time,
Party all the time...”

—EDDIE MURPHY

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that crazy things happen at weddings. Or at least that's what I tell myself as my activities segue from outrageous to risqué to downright depraved.

There's the bathroom blow job incident, which I categorize as "outrageous" rather than "downright depraved," solely due to the fact that my eighty-two-year-old stepdad walks in while I'm going down on the cousin of the bride in the poolhouse bathroom. Because of his eighty-two-ness (the stepdad, not the cousin, thankfully), he was prone to more "senior moments" than nonsenior moments—and thus is easily convinced that what had just happened never in fact happened. By the time I'm done talking to him, I've actually managed to convince him that not only was there no blow job, but also there had been no cousin of the bride. I'm pretty sure if I'd kept going I could have gotten him to believe there was no wedding. But the point is, in convincing my stepdad, I'm pretty sure I convince myself. And thus: outrageous, not downright depraved.

Don't bother asking me how I go from sitting next to the cousin and finding him mildly attractive—not gorgeous, just mildly attractive, someone I might have gone out with had he asked me—to kneeling down in front of him while he sat on Mom's bidet. It wouldn't have been my style to have asked, "Care for a blow job in the bathroom?" At least I don't think so. It's possible that after a bottle or so of good wedding champagne, Amelia Stone is replaced by Paris Hilton minus the millions, plus good twenty pounds, but since my exploits haven't been caught on tape—note to exes, not that I know of—I can only venture this as a guess. I'd like to imagine that I happened to visit the restroom just as he was leaving and that our sudden passion erupted spontaneously. But by the end of the night—well, morning—the whole cousin incident was so comparatively pristine, I may as well have been a virgin in white in that bathroom.

Later, I find myself in the sauna with the groomsmen. It had been my mom's idea, that all the "young people" from the wedding should sauna and swim, but somehow it got down to just two guys and me. By this point, I know that I'm way more than mildly intoxicated, but since technically I'm on vacation, aren't I supposed to be? If I were this drunk in L.A., someone would probably bring out the coke and I'd thus be able to alleviate my alcohol buzz a bit, but parties at Mom's house tend to be pretty short on drugs—at least non-SSRI ones. And since in some ways there's no better high than having two men vying for your attention, I figure it's just as well that I'm not holding.

"I'm going to be graduating in May," Mitch says, as he offers me a sip of his warm Amstel Light. "Medical school has been a bitch."

"Oh, but now you're going to have to do your residency," Mitch's alleged best friend Chris interjects, while interjecting his body into the minuscule space that exists between Mitch and me. "You'll be working, like, ninety-hour weeks for no money."

"Which is so much worse than 'doing your residency' at Paramount for a salary just above the poverty line?" Mitch lobs back, looking at me.

I swear I never get tired of the attention of boys. But I prefer direct attention, rather than transparent male dick-swinging contests. ~~Do they honestly think that the one who gets the last dig in will win my affection? Don't they know that being an assistant and a student, even a medical student aren't exactly lady-killer positions to be in, and that they should perhaps be digging into their personal arsenals for more compelling things to compete over?~~

I stand up and they're silenced. "Last one in has to do a shot," I say and before I've even finished the sentence, they're pushing each other aside in their zeal to jump into the pool. I stand at the sauna door, cold air rushing in, their wet towels at my feet. If I didn't know better, I'd swear that the two of them just wanted to have sex with each other.

Okay, we're going to sleep now," I instruct them, as I try to get as comfortable as I can while lodged between these two guys in a double bed. "Sleep."

I honestly think we're going to bed. Was anyone ever that naive? I can't even sleep on two Ambien by myself, but the birds are dangerously close to chirping—a horrifyingly depressing time to still be partying, as I've recently learned—this is the only bed left in the house, and neither of these guys are in any condition to drive. I turn toward Chris, who's facing the wall. Mitch is on the other side, facing the other wall.

A few minutes pass and I hear Mitch breathing heavily in that way that means he could be asleep. I sigh and feel more relaxed. My insomnia always seems embarrassing, and I'm all too relieved to be able to suffer through it without witnesses. Miraculously, I drift off for a moment or two.

And am awakened by lips on mine—specifically, lips belonging to Chris. My eyes swing open just in time for me to realize that Chris's kissing skills aren't half bad. Some people pride themselves on their gaydars. I pride myself on my kissdar because I can usually tell on sight if a guy is going to be one of those drench-your-face-with-saliva kissers, too-tentative pecking kissers, or a possessor of one of those lizardlike tongues that darts into places it's not wanted. Most guys, unfortunately, fit into one of these categories. It's the ones that don't that drive us mad, in all the good ways. Unfortunately their kissing skills always seem to accompany a tendency for unemployment, a lack of an IQ, or just general asshole-ishness. If they could kiss well and also possess qualities that actually made them good boyfriend material, women would probably maim and kill one another to have them. I had assumed that Chris would be some combination of too-tentative and lizardlike—that he'd start out with inappropriate propriety and then swerve into too much without the required sensuality—and am startled to discover that he seems to know what he's doing. He even knows the take-my-face-in-his-hands move.

I kiss him back, enjoying the secretiveness of the act. Despite all their lame competitiveness, despite the fact that Chris is an assistant at Paramount and that he attacks his alleged best friend who is actually doing something useful with his life in a pathetic attempt to win a girl's affection, I'm more attracted to him than I am to Mitch.

Chris is kissing well enough that it's impossible to say how many times we kiss—one time just seems to mesh into another. And then I'm utterly shocked when I feel a hand creeping from behind into my nether region. Had Chris and Mitch, in some sort of a silent pact, targeted my two most

manipulatable zones and decided to each work one of them? The thrill of kissing someone while another hand works me from behind is unbelievable. I'm completely getting off on the anonymity of the hand (even though I obviously know whose hand it is) and on this wise solution to all that petty male competitiveness that was going on earlier, until I come back to earth and remember where we are. Which is in the guest bedroom directly below my mom and stepdad's bedroom in their house, which I'm visiting for the weekend to see an old friend get married—not to blow his now-wife's cousin and have a ménage à trois with two of his groomsmen.

“Wait—you have to stop!” I suddenly screech. I jump out of bed and the two of them look alarmed, if not altogether shocked. I grab a pillow off the bed. “I need to go somewhere where I can actually sleep,” I say, as if they'd been talking and I was tired of shushing them. Without another word, I stomp off to the den, where I promptly pass out on the couch.

Back in L.A., Stephanie asks me about the wedding and I regale her with my exploits. She laughs hysterically, the same way I did when she told me about twisting her ankle while dancing at the wedding she went to back East—at least she thinks she was dancing, as she was actually in a blackout and didn't want anyone around to know so she never was able to determine how it happened. "They should keep us away from weddings—the way we behave is completely foul," she says.

I work at *Absolutely Fabulous*, a celebrity weekly magazine that's basically a glorified tabloid, and Stephanie works one level down, at *American Style*, a weekly magazine that devotes itself to dissecting the outfits and homes of celebrities in minute detail. And thank God for Stephanie. Most of my *Absolutely Fabulous* coworkers are about as cool as Sunday school teachers.

Because of its high circulation rate (five million and rising all the time), those who work at *Absolutely Fabulous* speak of it in the revered tone most might use to describe *The New Yorker*. "We quite simply, have the best writing and reporting of any magazine out there," our bureau chief Robert likes to say, and we all drink the Kool-Aid. Glimmers of reality peak into that otherwise glorious way of thinking—like the fact that I'm sometimes embarrassed to tell people I work here, that the constant note I'm always given about my articles is that I need to "make my sentences shorter," and that the big joke about the publication is that everyone reads it on the toilet, but it's amazing how convincing staff of roughly thirty people can be. People seem to stretch reality just enough to motivate them—but it's a little weird, you know? Can't they just say, "When I was little, I didn't imagine that figuring out what Madonna eats would be my living, but hey, this is a successful magazine and someday I may work somewhere else"? I know that it takes a bit of denial for all of us to get out of bed in the morning, but sometimes the people at *Absolutely Fabulous* seem to be swimming in a whole river of it.

Stephanie absolutely hates her job—only works there for the party invites and free clothes, and willingly announces as much to anyone who will listen. Which makes it all the more difficult for me when she keeps rising on their masthead while I stay stuck as a low-level writer at *Absolutely Fabulous*. It's not that I want Stephanie to fail—it's just that sometimes I wouldn't mind if my number one partner in crime were sort of in the same place as I am.

Unfortunately, I seem to inspire a sort of figurative foaming at the mouth from my boss Robert. This could have to do with the fact that I was hired by his second-in-command, Brian, when Robert was on leave, or maybe I just remind him of someone he absolutely hates. I try most everything to turn him around, but when people make up their mind about you, you could save their mother's life and they'd still think you were an asshole. Case in point: Brad McCormick, my high school boyfriend who hovered somewhere around the five foot four mark during our adolescent relationship. Though he's now about six feet tall—a late growth spurt and, unfortunately, not one I was able to benefit from—to me, he'll always be "little Brad McCormick."

“You ready?” Stephanie asks me on a Thursday at about six. She’s standing at my cubicle, workbag slung over her shoulder, flashing the flask that I gave her for her birthday from under her coat.—

I used to get really excited before going to premieres. I think I imagined that someone would see me there and discover me for God knows what—I’m not an actress, or I should say I only am in my personal life—but I guess I thought getting discovered for being so utterly fabulous that I would need to be immediately removed from my day-to-day life and deposited into an existence that revolved around being fabulous full time. I think I thought that rubbing up against movie stars would make me happy. But it occurred to me this one night that I found myself in a cigarette-fueled drunken discussion with Jeremy Piven at a premiere. Jeremy Piven didn’t seem too happy, so why should I be happy for having had the experience of talking to him all night?

We stop for drinks at some Westwood college bar beforehand. Or, if I’m going to have to be perfectly honest and specific about everything, I should say that Stephanie stops for drinks and I stop for drinks and a few lines.

When I first started doing coke, at parties, it was usually easy enough to count on being in the right place at the right time for a steady supply. But more than a few experiences chatting up thoroughly disgusting men only to learn that they were simply fellow coke-seekers themselves had brought me to a point a few months ago where I finally understood the necessity of having my own dealer. And the sheer joy I’ve felt over the fact that I can do coke whenever I want because I’m not relying on someone else to get it has made the additional expense seem almost irrelevant.

I wander into the bathroom after a woman with gray hair in a bun leaves, and shut myself in the stall farthest away from the door. Pulling a vial from my purse, I shake some coke onto the window ledge and chop it with a credit card, then take a rolled-up bill from my wallet and snort it up. I hear someone come in and hold my breath while she washes her hands and thankfully leaves, then pour some more coke on the ledge and snort it.

“I still have plenty left,” I tell Stephanie as I return from the bathroom and sit down in my swivel chair. The metal taste of cocaine drips down the back of my throat deliciously. Some people say they hate the drip but I love it—that practical evidence that the drug is working its way through my body.

“Nothing could sound more foul,” she answers, as she tries to pour some of her vodka tonic into the flask. Stephanie doesn’t do coke—she used to have panic attacks and is convinced, probably correctly, that a few lines of cocaine would send her right back there—so I ask her more as a course of habit than as some sick kind of peer pressure.

“Ready?” she asks. I smile, nod, and sniffle so I can swallow and taste more cocaine again.

We walk briskly down the red carpet as skeletal blond actresses—shivering in their summer dresses on this uncharacteristically cool night—smile obediently for the paparazzi.

“Leslie, over here!” the photographers all scream at once at this beautiful blonde who’s grinning seductively. The way the photographers are jostling one another and screaming her name with such glee, you’d swear they were trying to get snaps of Julia Roberts, or at least the president or the queen

or something. The fact that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of Leslies with bit parts in movies like ~~the mediocre one we're about to see~~ and one, if that, will actually continue to work in Hollywood after this current role, certainly doesn't seem to be at the forefront of the photographers' collective minds. But Leslie handles her moment well.

Stephanie and I decide to make a run for it to avoid being caught in the back of one of these shots. It happened to Stephanie once—a picture of Lindsay Lohan was almost ruined by the image of Stephanie, an extremely unflattering image of her at that, doing a shot with someone the picture didn't capture (that is, me) and the photo ran in about a hundred magazines. Stephanie has yet to live it down.

She takes off at a good pace but I'm waylaid by Leslie, the actress, as she steps backward, lodging her seemingly ten-inch red heel into my big left toe in what feels like an instant toe decapitation—if toes had heads. She starts to trip backward but her publicist catches her, glaring at me for daring to slide my foot under her client's \$700 shoe-slash-instrument-of-torture. For an anorexic who couldn't weigh more than ninety-eight pounds, Leslie sure knows how to put some weight into her shoe. Then again, the shoe probably weighs more than her. I limp up to Stephanie, who hands me a bag of free popcorn with butter sympathetically.

“Is it bleeding?” she asks simply.

I shake my head. “Feels more like an internal thing,” I answer. “Like maybe she crushed the toe bone. Do toes have bones?”

“Sure,” she shrugs. “Hospital?”

“Oh, God, no,” I answer as Matt Dillon walks in and waves at me. I wave back until I realize he's actually waving at the manly looking woman wearing a headset behind me. The humiliation and possible broken foot are far from inspiring but nothing a few lines can't fix, at least temporarily.

Unfortunately, the bathroom is stuffed with wannabe actresses who somehow wrangled invites to this and are drowning themselves in makeup and perfume to go sit in the dark for ninety minutes, after which they'll surely have to go through the whole routine again for the after-party. Once the movie starts, I venture back to the bathroom but some security-type woman is lodged there and seems not to be budging. Is she some actress's female security guard? An employee of the movie theater? An insane stalker who somehow got hold of some security-type uniform? I'm certainly not going to ask her. One thing's for sure—she's a buzz killer, in every way.

I'm just finishing a "Where Are They Now?" story on Doc from *The Love Boat* when Chris calls.

"What are you doing?" he asks, and I'm not sure if he means right now or in general.

"Trying to live down my post-wedding shame." My answer is partially true and partially a complete lie. I haven't wanted to admit it to anyone, but my mind has been a little fixated on the whole wedding ménage incident, wondering what would have happened had I not freaked out and left. Inappropriate as it was, it *did* turn me on. It also disgusted me, so though I'm a bit excited that Chris is calling, I had also been pseudo hoping that he would crawl under a rock never to emerge, knowing full well that he lived in L.A. and had my number. It probably would have been smarter to make sure that none of my ménage participants lived in my state, not to mention city, but who considers these things at the time?

"Don't be silly," he says. "Nothing to be ashamed of. Just some good, old-fashioned fun."

"Ha." I sort of say it and sort of snort it.

"I've been wanting to call you for a while," he says. "But I didn't want it to be awkward. See, I think you're really cool, and would love to see you one-on-one but..."

Just then, the phone is snatched from his hand and I hear Mitch's voice. "I'm in town," he says. "I think the three of us should get together."

Aha. So here we go. The opportunity to see this ménage through has presented itself. As I make small talk with Mitch, I can't decide if this wedding reunion for our triumvirate is a good idea or an incredibly terrible one. *It would make the ménage story even better*, I think.

"Why don't we meet at Jones at 8 P.M.?" I ask rather suddenly, surprising even myself. "If that works for you guys."

"It works for us," Mitch says, not even checking with Chris. "See you then!"

The first lemon drop goes down smoothly, so I follow it with two more. Licking the sugar off my lips, I glance at my cell phone, wondering if I should call Stephanie. She'd actually been so excited by the prospect of my meeting up with my ménage partners that she begged to come along. Not to have drinks with us, mind you—that would be a bit too normal for Stephanie—but to be somewhere in the restaurant so she could spy. I rejected the pitch on the spot but am beginning to wonder if her presence might have been comforting.

But suddenly, before I even have a chance to call her for backup, Chris arrives. Or I should say a guy claiming to be Chris walks up to me. Was he really this short? Did he actually have this much of

receding hairline last month?

“Hi there,” he chirps, enveloping me in an awkward hug. Too late, he goes for the cheek kiss but I’m caught off-guard, and he ends up inhaling a section of my hair. Had he developed horrific halitosis since the wedding, or had I just lost my sense of smell that night? I hope my hair doesn’t capture and begin to emit his mouth stench. “Mitch is dealing with the valet.”

I motion for the waiter before he even sits down. Sipping from my lemon drop, I marvel over how much drunker I must have been than I realized the night of the wedding.

“How have you been?” I ask him as he slides into the booth.

He’s looking me straight in the eye and grinning, and the look is altogether too intense. “God, it’s great to see you.”

I smile, trying to erase the image of him shoving his tongue down my throat from my mind, and take an enormous gulp. “You, too.”

My mind is racing all over, trying to figure out what the hell I could have possibly been thinking the wedding night. Had I been roofied? But wouldn’t I then be experiencing the pleasure of having my entire knowledge of Chris blocked out? I take another sip and tell myself that Mitch is going to show up and make Chris seem better. They had appeal as a duo, not as individuals.

“Hey there,” I hear from a deeper voice as Mitch slides next to me in the booth and wraps his hand around my waist so that it rests on my right love handle.

“Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes,” he continues, looking at me like I’m an enormous sandwich and he’s just decided to break his year-long carb-free diet. On my other side, Chris slides in so close to me that his breath seems to replace any oxygen in the vicinity. I notice that Mitch has the crater-faced complexion of someone whose adolescence was defined by acne that he attempted to pick off. I’m suddenly intensely grateful for Jones’s dim lighting.

“Drink?” I ask them, motioning for the waiter and they both nod enthusiastically. They’re sitting so close to me that I almost feel like we’re a single unit. Had they decided ahead of time to act as aggressive as possible or were they both only children who had absolutely no sense of what the term “personal space” meant? There was only one way to deal with this: get wasted and see if they seemed any better.

I stumble out of Jones an hour later, marveling at the fact that my *ménage à trois* partners had turned out to be so creepy and lame. You’re supposed to have a *ménage à trois* with, like, a member of the Red Hot Chili Peppers or Jane’s Addiction and your most outrageous girlfriend, not two dorky groomsmen from a wedding that took place at your mom’s house. Why am I always getting everything so horribly wrong?

Just as the valet guy hands me my keys, I hear a guy say, “Whoa—you’re not driving.” I look up and see Gus, this slightly pudgy party guy Stephanie sometimes hooks up with. He walks over to me with his friend and snaps the keys from my hand.

I grab my keys back, outraged. “Don’t be ridiculous,” I say. “I’m fine.” My words sound slurred even to me, which is annoying. Then I drop the keys, which doesn’t help my case, but seeing as Gus is the biggest drunk I know, I don’t appreciate being judged by him right now.

“I live eight blocks away,” I say.

“Most accidents happen when people are within two blocks of where they live.” This comes not from Gus but from his friend, a dark-haired guy with a receding hairline and glasses. He holds out a hand. “Hey, I’m Adam. We met at that party in the hills last month.”

I shake his hand and nod but have no recollection of meeting him or, in fact, having been at a party in the hills last month. I’m fairly annoyed by his recitation of this fact we’ve all heard eight hundred times like he’s some driver’s ed teacher. His overall sobriety bugs me, too.

“Look, you guys, I appreciate your concern but I’ve got to get out of here.” I glance at the valet parker, who’s been standing here patiently the whole time. Though he doesn’t seem to speak English, the language of you’re-too-drunk-to-drive seems to be international. I lower my voice so that he can’t hear, despite his non-English speaking. “These two guys I had a ménage with last month when I was at a wedding at my mom’s house are inside, and I told them I had to go see a sick friend to get away from them. I really need to get out of here before they come out.”

Adam’s jaw drops slightly but Gus looks thoroughly nonplussed. Gus turns to the valet. “Her car’s staying,” he says. “She’ll come pick it up tomorrow.” Then he turns to Adam. “Can you take her home? I think my E just kicked in.”

“You can put it on any station you want,” Adam says as he quickly switches the radio from NPR to, essentially, static. “Although I must confess that I like this one, if only because it sounds so much like what’s already playing in my head.”

I laugh. Even though he’s the very definition of holier-than-thou, the guy seems kind of funny. I notice an asthma inhaler sitting in the cup holder, which makes me laugh again for some reason, and then I feel incredibly self-conscious about seeming like a cackling lush.

“Look, I’m really not that drunk.” As I say this, I’m looking up at the streetlights, which seem to be blindingly bright and a bit like the strobe lights we used to use for our dance shows in high school and they make me dizzy.

Adam doesn’t say anything. *He looks like such a nice boy, I think, the kind my mom would meet and wonder why I didn’t like. He must think I’m an outrageous slut.* “I mean, the whole thing I was saying about the wedding and the ménage and all that—I wasn’t really serious.” I’m not sure why I care so much about what he thinks.

“Hey, I’m not judging.” He says it the way that my alleged female friends from high school use to say, “No offense but...” In other words, he probably was.

“So, what do you do?” I ask him conversationally, but I kind of know what the answer will be. All of Gus’s friends are aspirants of some kind or another—actors, writers, directors, producers,

whatever. They tend to, in fact, claim those careers in conversation, even though their rent is paid either by overly indulgent parents or some miserable job waiting tables. After only about a year and a half in L.A., I was already over everyone and their extravagant Hollywood dreams. Don't they realize how few people are actually successful in these careers and that you can't claim a career until you've actually made money at it?

"I'm an actor."

"Really?" I ask. "Been in anything?"

"I had a scene in a Chris Kattan movie," he says, "but it was cut out."

"Oh." I sort of feel bad for him now.

"Right now I'm waiting tables at Norm's."

I feel worse.

"In West L.A."

Oh, dear God. I snap the radio to a random station and the song "Cecilia" starts blaring out of the speakers. I've always loved that song. Truthfully, the name Cecilia has always sounded enough like Amelia for me to sometimes convince myself that the song is about me. I start singing along with it, remembering the drinking game my quad mates and I used to play senior year in college, where we had to drink whenever a singer sang a woman's name. "My Sharona," "Come on, Eileen," "Oh, Cecilia"—we were big into '80s music for some reason.

"Oh, Amelia, I'm down on my knees, I'm begging you please to come home," I sing. God, it feels good to let loose. Adam smiles uncomfortably but I don't care about that or about the legions of people in karaoke bars who have accused me of being tone deaf. Singing this song is the first thing that's felt okay this whole night, besides those lemon drops. I continue to sing for the rest of the car ride, imagining Mystery Perfect Man who seems to resemble Jude Law but who isn't a famous movie star and never slept with the nanny or was married but is just begging me please to come home to him while he's down on his—

"Amelia." Adam is sort of shaking me awake. "Amelia." I open my eyes.

"Whoa," I say. "I was singing."

"You were, but you were also kind of sleeping. It was, to be honest, strangely adorable." Even though he's grinning in a I'm-laughing-with-not-at-you kind of way, I'm so humiliated that I'd rather be under the car than in it. Adam clears his throat.

"This is where you live, right?" As my eyes focus on him, I notice that he looks quite anxious. "Are you okay?" he asks.

I smile brightly, defensively. "Never better." I open the driver's side door. "Thanks for the ride."

"You're welcome."

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