



Playboy's Lesson (The Chatsfield)

By Melanie Milburne

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When the Chatsfield heir comes to play...

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Playboy's Lesson (The Chatsfield) By Melanie Milburne Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2339084 in Books
- Published on: 2014-05-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.62" h x .50" w x 4.21" l, .21 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Melanie Milburne read her first Harlequin at age seventeen in between studying for her final exams. After completing a Masters Degree in Education she decided to write a novel and thus her career as a romance author was born. Melanie is an ambassador for the Australian Childhood Foundation and is a keen dog lover and trainer and enjoys long walks in the Tasmanian bush. In 2015 Melanie won the HOLT Medallion, a prestigious award honouring outstanding literary talent.

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Even by Chatsfield standards Lucca had to admit this latest one of his to hit the London tabloids was a doozy. He lounged in the chair opposite his father's new broom, Christos Giatrakos, and gave one his trademark lazy smiles. 'What was it that got up your nose? The handcuffs or the studded leather codpiece?'

What the newly appointed CEO of the Chatsfield Hotel chain lacked in terms of a sense of humour was more than made up for in ice-cold ruthlessness. The Greek's face was set like marble, his blue eyes glacial and his mouth set in a line so thin it hinted at a streak of cruelty underpinning his intractable personality. 'We're used to reading your sordid exploits in the tabloids, but this news is all over the internet. You've brought nothing but shame to the brand of this hotel with the way you carry on your affairs.'

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Lucca didn't bother disguising a yawn. *Boring.* Heard it all before. A hundred...probably trillions of times. He rocked back on the legs of the chair, expertly balancing his weight as he kept his gaze trained on the hardened CEO. He was used to showdown meetings like this. He enjoyed them. It was his way of making up for the way he had disgraced himself by wetting his pants when he was called into the headmaster's office at boarding school when he was seven. He never allowed himself to be intimidated. *Never.*

'The only thing that's predictable about you is your unpredictability,' the CEO continued. 'Since you've consistently refused to clean up your act, it will now be cleaned up for you.'

'It was just a party that got a little out of hand,' Lucca said. 'The press made it out to be an orgy. I didn't even sleep with any of those girls. Well, maybe just the one, but that was because I was handcuffed to the bed at the time, so what else was I supposed to do?'

A muscle in the CEO's jaw pulsed. On. Off. 'Your father is refusing to give you a single penny of your allowance from the Chatsfield Family Trust unless you agree to fulfil the assignment I have appointed you. It will make quite a change for you working for a living instead of being a professional party boy with nothing better to do than get laid by a host of wannabe starlets and trashy gold-diggers.'

Lucca set his chair legs back down on the carpeted floor with a little thump. He had an exclusive art auction he wanted to attend in Monte Carlo next week. He was building a private collection of miniature paintings and there was one in particular he wanted to get his hands on. His gut instinct told him it would be worth millions in a few years. He didn't want to be exiled to some godforsaken place and miss out on the deal of a lifetime, but neither did he want to forfeit his allowance.

The way he saw it, his family—his train wreck of a family—owed it to him.

'What sort of mission?'

'A month working at the Chatsfield Hotel on the island of Preitalle in the Mediterranean.'

Lucca mentally breathed out a sigh of relief. The royal principality of Preitalle was a short ferry trip or helicopter ride to Monte Carlo. But he figured it might be in his interests to appear unhappy about being exiled. His father's CEO wanted to dish out punishment and he clearly was enjoying doing it. Just like that headmaster.

Bastard.

'Doing what?' He feigned a suitable amount of apprehension. That was all part of his game. Give the opponent what they want but only on the outside. Inside he was totally in control. Totally.

The CEO's cold eyes gleamed with malice. 'Working alongside Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte as she plans her sister Madeleine's wedding at the end of the month.'

Lucca threw his head back and laughed so loudly the sound bounced off the walls and came back at him like an echo in a canyon. 'You're joking, right? *Me?* Plan a wedding? I know nothing about wedding planning. Parties? Yes. Weddings? Zilch. Can't even remember the last time I went to one.'

'Then this will be a perfect opportunity to learn.' Christos clicked his pen on and off again as he eyeballed him. On. Off. The annoying sound was in perfect time with that muscle in his jaw. On. Off. 'You're reputedly an expert at knowing what women want. Here's your chance to finally put that expertise to good use.'

Lucca decided to play along. How hard could it be? With the wedding this close, the bulk of the planning would have already been done. He would leave the last-minute work to the people who knew how to do this sort of stuff while he had a bit of time out on one of the beaches on Preitalle.

He was getting a bit tired of the London scene in any case. It used to be so much fun, courting scandal, poking fun at the establishment, doing the most outrageous things he could think of just for the heck of it. Exploiting every situation to his advantage. But there was only so much partying and nightclubbing and sleeping around any man could do. It was exhausting.

Even—dared he say it—boring?

Besides, he wanted more time to concentrate on his art. Not just the ones he was collecting but his own etchings. His passion for drawing had been present from the moment he had been old enough to hold a pencil in his hand. Drawing was his way of retreating into a private world where he could be quiet and centred. It had been his way of anchoring himself during his chaotic childhood. The eye of the family storm could bluster and blow all around him but he could always escape to his inner world of creative peace. He had spent hours sitting cross-legged beneath Graham Laurent's painting of his mother, desperately trying to capture the features that were fast fading from his memory, yet somehow resolutely captured for all time in the portrait before him.

He enjoyed the process of creating those first scratches of a pencil on a tiny canvas to the end result of having a framed miniature painting with his signature in the right-hand corner.

Spending the month of June in the Mediterranean would be just the ticket to indulge that passion instead of

his more base ones. It would be easy. He would jump through the hoops and have a whoop of a time doing it.

'So—' he rocked back in his chair again '—what does the little princess think about having an offsider?'

An offsider?' Lottie looked at her sister, Madeleine, in wounded affront. 'Why do you think I need someone to help me? Don't you think I'm up to the task of planning your wedding? Did Mama suggest it? Papa? One of the palace officials?'

Madeleine held up her hands as if warding off a barrage of enemy fire. 'Whoa, there! No need to shoot the messenger. It's part of the deal with conducting the reception at the Chatsfield Hotel. It's come from the top level of management but I've given it my full approval. The CEO is sending a representative of the Chatsfield family to work alongside you in the interest of public relations.'

'But I've already done all the planning.' Lottie rapped her knuckles on the encyclopedia-thick folder she had brought with her. 'Every minute detail is set out in there. The last thing I need right now is someone coming in to change everything at the last minute.'

Madeleine lounged back in her seat and elegantly crossed one leg over the other as she inspected her newly painted toenails. 'I think it will be good for you to have someone to share the workload with.' She looked up with an I-know-better-than-you look that always grated on Lottie's nerves like a rasp on a raw wound. 'Someone young and hip and a little more in touch with the party scene.'

Lottie narrowed her gaze as the back of her neck began to prickle. 'Who are they sending?'

'One of the twin brothers.'

She knew her sister thought her a little out of touch with the modern world but did she have to make it so obvious by recruiting someone who did nothing *but* party? The Chatsfield twins, Lucca and Orsino, were notorious bad boys who were in and out of the press almost weekly with their wild exploits.

Hells bells...please let it not be... 'Which one?'

'Lucca.'

Lottie blinked. Twice. Three times. 'Did you say...?' Madeleine nodded. 'Yup.'

Lottie gulped. 'The one whose photograph has been splashed all over the internet? The one in that hotel room wearing nothing but a studded leather—whatever it's called?'

'Codpiece.'

She clapped a hand over her forehead. 'Oh, dear God.'

'I'm sure he'll behave himself impeccably while he's here,' Madeleine assured her. At least even the scandalous Lucca Chatsfield had drawn a line at posting a selfie of *that* picture on Twitter, Lottie thought.

'Word has it his allowance from the Chatsfield Family Trust will be cut off if he doesn't.'

Lottie dropped her hand and scowled at her sister. 'So I'm to be some sort of behaviour modification coach or

something? Who on earth thought of this ridiculous scheme? Are you sure it's not a joke? Tell me it's a joke.'

'It's not a joke,' Madeleine said. 'In fact, I think it's going to be good for us in the long run. You know how everyone is always saying how backward and irrelevant we royals in Preitalle are. We don't have quite the same standing as other European royals. But if we show how embracing we are of modernity it could make our future in this region so much more secure. Lucca Chats-field has been at every high-profile party in England, Europe and America. He moves in circles most people can only dream about. Rock stars, celebrities, actors and film directors—you name it. Having him involved in the organising of my reception will heighten my popularity—I'm absolutely sure of it.'

Lottie rolled her eyes. 'How, for pity's sake, is a notorious hard-partying playboy going to help me organise a royal wedding?'

'Why don't you ask him?' Madeleine gave another one of her smug older and wiser sister smiles. 'Hear that helicopter landing outside? He's just arrived.'

Lucca had it all planned. He would pop into the palace, meet the party-plan princess and then hotfoot it out of there and leave her to fuss over the flower arrangements and the wedding fripperies while he laid back on a sun lounger on the nearest beach with a cocktail and a bikini-clad waitress by his side. Or three.

He'd done a little research on the trip over. The older sister and heir to the throne, Princess Madeleine, was known as the pampered princess. Not an out-and-out diva as such, but a young woman who knew her destiny from an early age and wholly embraced it. For years she had been squired by men from all over Europe but had recently become engaged to a studious-looking Englishman called Edward Trowbridge. Apparently Madeleine wanted a wedding reception extravaganza at the Chatsfield Hotel and had appointed her baby sister, Charlotte, as chief wedding planner.

He'd seen plenty of photographs of Madeleine De Chavelier in the press. She was a gorgeous, rather buxom twenty-six-year-old blonde with blue eyes and an extroverted personality that would stand her in good stead once it came time for her to take over the throne from her parents, Guillaume and Evaline. Clearly a favourite with the paparazzi, there wasn't a single photograph of Madeleine that could even loosely be described as unflattering. Fashion designers courted her, knowing she had only to appear in public once in one of their outfits and the item would sell out and a new trend would be set.

However, the same could not be said of Princess Charlotte. There were scores of unflattering comments about her lack of fashion sense, and some rather nasty and unfair, he thought, comparisons made between her and her sister. As if to back up their criticisms the press had sourced several candid shots that made Charlotte look severe and much older than her years. There was nothing about her private life other than one small snippet about a fling with a diplomat's son while she was at finishing school in Switzerland when she was eighteen. But if she had an active social life since it certainly wasn't wild enough to attract the paparazzi's attention, which, quite frankly, was a little intriguing.

There was nothing he liked better than to ride a dark horse.

'This way, Mr Chatsfield.' A palace official bowed as he opened a door leading into a morning room. 'Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte will receive you now.'

The first thing Lucca noticed when he stepped into the room was a pair of startlingly green eyes glaring at him from behind a pair of tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles. The princess was standing with her back ramrod

straight, reminding him of a small tin soldier facing an imaginary battle. Nary a muscle on her slim framed body moved. It was as if she had been snap frozen...all except for a betraying little movement of her left index finger against her thumbnail, an agitated flicking movement that he suspected might have been an unconscious habit, like picking at a hangnail.

However, he could see why the press made such sport of her clothes. If what she was currently wearing was any indication, she either didn't have a clue what suited her or deliberately dressed in the most unflattering way possible. The below-the-knee plaid skirt teamed with a brown cotton blouse and covered by a cardigan that swamped her small frame made her look like a bag lady rather than a princess second in line to the throne. Her hair was neither blonde nor brown, but a tawny shade, and tied back severely from her face, giving her a prim, schoolmarmish look.

'Welcome to the royal palace of Preitalle, Mr Chats-field.' She spoke in a coolly polite tone that had a hint of a French accent to it. She held out her right hand to him but he sensed it was out of a grim commitment to duty rather than any desire to make physical contact.

He took her hand and watched as her rainforest-green eyes widened fractionally as his fingers wrapped firmly around hers, almost swallowing her tiny hand whole. Her skin was rose-petal soft and cool like silk. She tilted her head right back to keep eye contact with him, making him feel every millimetre of his six-foot-two height.

Her hand fluttered like a little bird inside the cage of his, sending a shock wave of heat through his pelvis like the backdraft of a fire. He released her hand and had to physically stop himself from wriggling his fingers to rid himself of the electric tingling her touch had evoked.

'Thank you, Your Royal Highness,' he said with exaggerated politeness. He might be an irascible rake but he knew how to behave when the occasion called for it, even if he privately thought it was all complete and utter nonsense. In his opinion people were people. Rich or poor. Royal or common.

She pressed her lips together so tightly as if she were trying to hold an invisible piece of paper between them steady. He wasn't sure if it was out of annoyance or a gesture of nervousness or shyness, but it drew his gaze like starving eyes to a feast. She had a bee-stung mouth, full lipped and rosy pink without the adornment of lipstick or even a layer of clear lip gloss. It was a mouth that looked capable of intense passion but it seemed somewhat at odds with the rest of her downplayed and rather starchily set features.

A feather of intrigue tickled Lucca's interest. Did she have a wild side behind those frumpy clothes and that frosty facade?

Maybe his exile here wouldn't be a complete waste of time, after all....

She stepped back from him like someone does in front of a suddenly too-hot fire. She squared her slim shoulders and crossed her hands over the front of her body, cupping her elbows with the opposite hands. 'I believe you have been appointed as my assistant.'

Lucca was seriously getting off on her priggish hauteur. It was so different from the way women usually responded to him. There was no simpering and batting of eyelashes. No breathy coos and whispers. No coy come-hither looks or pouting lips and delectable cleavages on show.

No, sirree.

She was buttoned up to the neck and spoke to him in clipped formal sentences and looked at him down the length of her retroussé nose as if he was something unpleasant stuck to her sole of her sensible shoe.

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