



SECRETS OF A TEENAGE HEIRESS



Prince Gustav stole my selfie stick.

And now I was stuck hiding in his wardrobe, while his PA attempted to teach him how to strike the perfect pose.

'Instagram is all about confidence,' the PA explained, as Prince Gustav nervously checked his teeth in the nearest mirror. 'Loosen your shoulders and show them some attitude. They want to see the real you.'

I peered through the wardrobe keyhole out into the suite as the PA adjusted MY selfie stick and waited patiently for Prince Gustav to finish rolling his shoulders back and forth.

'Are you ready?'

'I don't know, Freddie.' Prince Gustav sighed dramatically. 'I was sure I wanted an Instagram account but now I feel very stressed about the whole idea.'

'I understand,' Freddie agreed, 'but that's why I'm here to talk you through it. And it's really about time that we had one up and running. Soon you'll be taking selfies wherever you go without any assistance.'

‘What do I do with my head?’

‘It’s all very simple. I’ve done plenty of research and downloaded all the best apps so we can get the filter just right.’ Freddie ushered Prince Gustav nearer to the window. ‘First, we need the perfect lighting. There you go, that’s great. Now, tilt your head.’

‘I feel like a Labrador.’

‘It’s a great angle,’ Freddie insisted and all the security men and women in the room nodded in agreement. ‘Perfect! Now, take the selfie stick and when you feel ready, just click that button at the bottom.’

Prince Gustav warily took the end of the pink and silver bejewelled selfie stick and attempted to position it correctly, almost knocking Freddie out as he swung it through the air.

How could he not know how to use a selfie stick? He wasn’t even old! Do castles not get Wi-Fi or something?

Ducking swiftly out of the way, Freddie gave the prince an enthusiastic thumbs up. Silence descended upon the room as everyone waited in anticipation. Keeping his head in position, Prince Gustav tweaked his shirt collar with his free hand before clearing his throat and forming his lips into a mild pout. After a few seconds, there was a small click.

‘Did it work?’ Prince Gustav asked, swinging the stick clumsily back towards Freddie.

Freddie unclipped the phone and everyone held their breath as he inspected the photo.

‘Well,’ he said, breaking into a wide grin and holding out the screen so Prince Gustav could see. ‘I’d call that a royal whopper!’

‘Not bad for my first selfie!’ Prince Gustav exclaimed. ‘Let’s do another!’

Oh. My. God. This literally could not get worse.

I guess this whole tragic scenario made me look bad because *technically* I had broken into the hotel suite of Prince Gustav, but he started it – he ‘borrowed’ my selfie stick without permission, which, if we’re going to get technical, was actually Mum’s fault because she took it upon herself to lend it to him without saying a word to me. And it is MY selfie stick, not hers to just give away to whomever she likes, so that counts as THEFT.



‘Matthew!’ I had shouted earlier, slightly out of breath from running full pelt across the lobby. I almost dropped Fritz, my dachshund, as I slid across the marble floor, stabilising myself on the reception desk.

I rang the gold bell vigorously. ‘Matthew!’

‘What’s wrong with *you*?’

Urgh. Cal Weston, Matthew’s annoying son was sitting on top of the far end of the desk, watching me curiously. He was in the year above me at school, not that we ever spoke there. I couldn’t seem to avoid him in the hotel, though, he was always lurking around like some kind of weirdo. What kind of loser spends their free time at the place where their parent works?

OK, so technically I do, but I *live* here so it’s different.

‘None of your business,’ I said, ringing the bell again. ‘Matthew!’

I caught Cal rolling his eyes.

‘You know,’ I said, glaring, ‘you’re not meant to be sitting up there. Guests are arriving all the time and you shouldn’t be the first thing they see.’

‘But you screeching like that is the first thing they should hear?’

I scowled.

‘If I stay sitting up here, are you going to snitch on me?’ He sighed, looking back to his laptop screen. ‘Like you did last time.’

‘I did not snitch!’ I protested. ‘That was your fault! That peacock was COMPLETELY out of control and . . . oh, never mind. MATTHEW!’

‘Can I hold Fritz?’

‘No,’ I snapped. ‘He only likes nice people. MATTHEEEEEEEW!’

‘Yes?’ a calm voice answered behind me, making me jump out of my skin.

‘There you are! I’ve been ringing the bell for a billion years.’

Cal snorted. ‘You’ve been here two minutes.’

I ignored him. ‘Matthew, I need to report a crime.’

Matthew raised his eyebrows. ‘Oh?’ He moved behind the reception desk, straightening his dark green, gold-buttoned uniform. ‘Here at Hotel Royale?’

‘Yes, here at Hotel Royale,’ I said, tapping my nails impatiently on the desk. ‘That’s why I’m telling you and not the police. Someone’s been into my room and stolen my selfie stick. The one Vivienne Westwood designed for me especially.’

I ignored Cal’s snigger.

‘What is all this racket?’ Audrey, the general manager, came clacking across the reception hall in her polished stilettos. ‘Flick, I thought you were meant to be doing your homework upstairs.’

I rolled my eyes. Even though she’s not my mum, Audrey sure acts like it. She is so good at bossing everyone about in the hotel that the queen once tried to hire her to boss everyone about at Buckingham Palace instead, but

she turned down the job to stay here. Which I guess was good for my mum and everything, because she didn't lose her manager, but it also meant that I'm stuck with Audrey watching me like a hawk.

'I was just telling Matthew that I have been the victim of a heinous crime.'

Cal let out a loud 'HA!' and shook his head.

I narrowed my eyes at him. 'Don't you have anywhere better to be?'

'And miss this entertainment? Are you kidding? I've got a front-row seat here.'

Fritz began to scrabble about impatiently in my arms, so I plonked him on top of the reception desk. It was so polished that when he tried to walk along it, his legs kept slipping and sliding, like Bambi on ice. If I hadn't been so distressed about my selfie stick, it would have been hilarious.

'No, Flick!' Audrey scolded, snatching Fritz and holding him at arm's length, so his back legs were just flailing about in the air. Audrey has never really had a way with dogs. 'What have I told you about putting Fritz on the reception desk? Take him off.'

'I'll take him!' Cal offered. She handed him over quickly and promptly checked her suit thoroughly for dog hairs even though he hadn't even touched her.

Technically, pets weren't allowed at the Royale but two years ago, after months of my dedicated pestering, Mum had caved. Now Fritz comes with me everywhere, except to school, and even Audrey has admitted that he is particularly handsome 'for a dog'. His social media profile is really growing and the guests love him too. One guest, Mr Dancy, stays at Hotel Royale three or four times a year and he always brings Fritz a new jumper to keep him cosy during the winter months. Today, Fritz was wearing a blue one with 'HOT DOG' printed on the back. He has an extensive collection of knitwear these days.

'Why were you causing a fuss?' Audrey asked, leading me away from some guests who were swanning in through the revolving doors laden with designer shopping bags. Matthew, as head concierge, went over to greet them and ask about their day. Delighted to see him, they immediately launched into a full description of all the sightseeing they'd done and a dull story about one of them getting stuck in a telephone box. Poor Matthew always has to pretend to enjoy these boring, repetitive conversations and he's been working here FOREVER, like, fifteen years. He laughed and gasped in all the right places. He was very convincing. Mum should really give him a raise for this daily torture.

'Flick?' Audrey prompted, as I watched him distractedly. 'What's going on?'

‘Oh yeah, right. So, my selfie stick has been stolen. It’s very important. Fritz always uploads a new photo to his Instagram account at 5.30 p.m. on the dot and the selfie stick is key to the whole operation.’

‘Fritz uses the selfie stick?’ Audrey looked confused.

‘Of course not! It’s for the angles, it’s to do with the allegory.’ I sighed. ‘You wouldn’t understand. The important thing is to find it before 5.30 so I can post his next picture, otherwise we’ll be letting down *thousands* of people. Forty-five thousand, to be exact.’

‘I see.’ Audrey smiled. ‘I think I know what’s happened here. You need to speak to your mother.’ She checked her watch. ‘She will have just finished a meeting and has five minutes until the next one. Let me give her a call, wait here.’

She marched back to the reception desk and into the office behind it. A few moments later, she reappeared. ‘She’ll be with you in a moment. Why don’t you take a seat?’

She gestured to the purple velvet armchairs in the corners of the reception hall. I gladly took Fritz back from the evil clutches of Cal, and sat him on one of the armchairs while I nestled into the other one. As we waited, Fritz sat up regally on the plush velvet, enjoying the adoring waves he received from guests coming into the hotel.

When we were little, Cal and I used to sit in these armchairs for ages, spying on all the guests, whispering made-up stories about who each person was and what they did, and then laughing our heads off, until Audrey would come along and shoo us away. That was obviously a *long* time ago, when Cal wasn’t such a weirdo and we were friends.

FINALLY Mum came down the grand staircase, already looking impatient. She always looks impatient when it comes to me, even though I’m her only child and therefore should be the sole reason for her being.

I reminded her of that the other day, when she was annoyed with me for setting off all the smoke alarms in the hotel because I’d put a pizza in the oven but got distracted by YouTube videos of dogs eating peanut butter and forgot about it. Firstly, it was her fault for NEVER letting me order room service even though we live in a hotel with a Michelin-star chef, and secondly, most parents would have been thrilled that their beloved child was showing an interest in cooking at the delicate age of fourteen. But *noooooo*, I got in big trouble just because all the guests and staff had to be evacuated and it made the news headlines because everyone thought there had been this big fire in the grandest hotel in London. The PR team had to work through the night persuading

guests and members of the press that everything was fine and it was in fact all down to a pizza, which now resembled a lump of coal, on the fifteenth floor.

As Mum walked towards me, I could kind of see what people mean when they say that she has this authoritative aura about her. Just the way she walks in and sits down seems to command the attention of a room. I don't think I've ever seen her slump or look scruffy. Even at weekends, she dresses as though she might be going to a meeting at any minute. I also think a lot of her power comes from the fact that she never raises her voice. Ever. Even that time when Cal and I let that goat loose in the ballroom, or last week with the pizza thing. When she's disappointed or angry, she just gives you this look and it makes your insides go icy cold.

Believe me, I've been on the receiving end of that look WAY too many times.

'Would it be possible to remove Fritz so that I might sit down? Perhaps he could sit on your lap,' she suggested, sharing a knowing look with Audrey who was watching us, bemused, from behind the reception desk.

'He likes having the chair to himself.'

'Flick,' Mum said in a warning tone.

'Fine.' I sighed. 'But if he gets angry, I'm blaming you.'

'I am happy to take full responsibility.'

I got up and slid my hands under Fritz's belly to lift him from the chair. He growled immediately. 'I tried telling her,' I said to him under my breath.

'I hear you've been asking about your selfie stick?' Mum said calmly, sitting down in the armchair as Fritz settled on my lap.

'Yes, it has been stolen. Potentially by an overzealous fan of Fritz's. I suggest we close down the hotel and search all the rooms. We should start with the opera singer on the third floor. I don't trust anyone who wears a wig that big.'

'That won't be necessary, Flick,' Mum said, before standing up again to greet a waiter passing by, on his way to the kitchen.

'Good afternoon, Ms Royale and Miss Royale. And . . . uh . . . Mr Fritz.'

'Good afternoon, Timothy.' Mum smiled warmly. 'How is that Italian coming along?'

'You remembered! It's going very well, thank you.'

'Wonderful. I always wanted to learn Italian but never quite mastered it,' Mum confessed. 'The furthest I really got was . . . wait for it . . . *spaghetti Bolognese!*'

They both burst into laughter as though Mum had said something genuinely funny.

I really hope Mum hasn't passed her humour gene down to me. It's very niche.

I coughed impatiently.

'Well, I'll leave you to it,' the waiter said, getting the hint, before he scurried off towards the staff lift that went down to the kitchens.

'Amazing, isn't it?' Mum sat back down again. 'A full-time job and he finds time to study because his fiancé is Italian and he wants to learn it by the time of the wedding. Very impressive.'

I rolled my eyes. 'OK, Mum, that's very nice and everything, but can we please focus on something actually important? This is serious! Someone's broken into our flat. Potentially a selfie-obsessed opera singer!' I leaned in towards her. 'Now, I'm happy to tell you that I will keep the police out of this and not press charges if the selfie stick is returned safely to me.'

The corner of Mum's mouth twitched. 'How grown up of you, but there's no mystery here and certainly no thief. I lent your selfie stick to a guest. Prince Gustav Xavier III, in fact.'

I blinked at her. 'What?'

'I lent your selfie stick to Prince Gustav. You know he's staying here, don't you? In the Sapphire Suite.'

'You lent my selfie stick to some prince? Why would you do that?'

'Matthew overheard him talking to his PA in the lobby.

Apparently he bought one in Duty Free but misplaced it. He seemed distressed so Matthew informed me of the situation and I offered him yours so they wouldn't have to go to the trouble of purchasing another. Plus,' she added, winking at Audrey, 'Prince Gustav is rather handsome.'

'Mum! Gross! And that selfie stick is mine and Fritz's!'

'The prince only needs it for today. His PA promised they would return it tomorrow. I had one of the staff leave it in his room about an hour ago, ready for his return from afternoon tea with his aunt.'

'But what about me?'

'What about you?'

'I need it!'

'I'm sure you can cope without it for one evening.'

'No way! Not only does Fritz have to prep for his Instagram post, but I was planning on doing a practice run of a vlog today and I need the selfie stick to test all the angles.'

'Vlog?' Mum raised her eyebrows.

Here we go.

'I thought we discussed this, Flick,' Mum said sternly. 'I was very clear about my opinion.'

'Yes, you were. And I've taken your thoughts into consideration.'

The corner of Mum's mouth twitched again. 'And?'

‘And I’ve decided they’re void.’

‘Flick,’ Mum began in her best warning tone.

‘Mum, look, all my friends agree that I would gain millions of followers like *that* –’ I clicked my fingers for effect – ‘if I started vlogging. All the other heiresses are doing it. At my age most of them have handbag and perfume ranges, thanks to their online profiles. I’m fourteen years old now; you have to let me do my own thing. You know, like in *The Little Mermaid*.’

‘The Disney film?’ Mum looked baffled. ‘What’s that got to do with vlogging?’

‘Duh. Her dad is all clingy and so she leaves him to go and live with the hot prince. You know, Mum, you could learn a lot from King Triton’s mistakes.’

‘Hi, Christine.’

I sighed dramatically as Cal came over, his laptop nestled under his arm. Why was he always butting in?

‘Hello, Callum,’ Mum said brightly. ‘How are you?’

‘Good, I was just on my way to see Chef. I hear he’s got a new strawberry mousse on the menu.’

‘He does, it’s outstanding.’ Mum turned to me. ‘Have you tried the new mousse?’

‘I don’t care about mousse!’ I cried. ‘What about my selfie stick?’

‘Trust me, this mousse is to die for.’ Mum turned back

to Cal, completely ignoring my distress. ‘I hear you came top of the class again in your English paper?’

Cal blushed. ‘Dad told you, huh? It was only one essay, it’s not a big deal.’

‘He’s very proud of you, and so he should be. You always were very hard-working.’

I couldn’t help but notice Mum direct a wistful glance towards me as she said that.

Which was very unfair considering I would be just as hard-working if SOMEONE didn’t go around lending random princes my selfie stick and thus keeping me from uploading said hard work.

‘Still hoping to be a journalist some day?’

‘That’s the big plan.’

‘I can introduce you to Nicholas Huntley, if you’d like,’ Mum continued. Cal’s eyes widened.

‘Why would you want to meet *him*?’ I crossed my arms, annoyed that the conversation was moving away from the problem in hand. ‘Isn’t he just the guy who married that actress, Helena Montaine?’

Hotel Royale was one of Helena Montaine’s favourite places to dine, so she was often here for big meetings with famous directors or with her new husband, Nicholas Huntley, and her daughter and step-daughter, the It Girls Marianne Montaine and Anna Huntley. It was always a

big deal when they were in the building, as there would be hordes of paparazzi outside waiting to get a photo. Famous people stay at the hotel all the time, but Mum was particularly friendly with Helena and her husband. I often saw her enjoying a drink with them in the cocktail bar, talking about really boring topics that no one cares about, like the news and stuff.

‘Nicholas Huntley happens to be the greatest journalist of all time,’ Cal said pompously. ‘And he’s written some of the most important books about war weaponry there have ever been. His book on tanks won the Baillie Gifford Prize.’

I yawned as he finished his sentence. There is seriously no one in the world as boring as Cal Weston. Except maybe this Nicholas Huntley person and his tank books.

‘Tell me, Callum,’ Mum said, abruptly standing up and straightening her white tailored jacket. ‘Do you spend your evenings vlogging?’

‘Uh.’ Cal looked confused. ‘No. It’s not really my thing.’

‘You see, Flick?’ Mum looked back down at me. ‘Cal doesn’t vlog.’

‘That’s because he has nothing interesting to say,’ I protested, as Cal rolled his eyes. ‘It’s me the people want to know about.’

‘We’ll talk about this later. You’ll have to do without

the selfie stick for one night. And so will Fritz.’

‘But Mu—’

‘End of discussion, Flick,’ Mum said firmly. ‘Now, I’ve got another meeting to get to. Good to see you, Callum. Keep up the hard work.’

She patted Cal on the shoulder and walked back across the reception hall and through the revolving doors to her car waiting outside.

‘You’re starting a vlog?’ Cal sniggered. ‘About what?’

‘About my life,’ I huffed. ‘Not that it’s any of your business.’

‘Why would anyone want to know about your life?’

‘Excuse me, I featured on the *Daily Post*’s “50 Heirs to Watch” list. So there.’

‘Yeah, you came in at number forty-nine,’ he said as he walked away. ‘Real impressive.’

I glared at his back, then stomped loudly towards the lift with Fritz, ignoring the raised eyebrows of Audrey and Matthew, and prodded the button for Floor 15. Leaning against the back mirror of the lift, I cuddled Fritz as the blinking light passed the other floor numbers.

The whole thing was completely ridiculous and totally unfair. Just because Prince Gustav Xavier III is a prince, it doesn’t mean he can go around stealing stuff. And, what’s more, HE’S NOT EVEN A REAL PRINCE! The monarchy

in his country hasn't properly existed since FOREVER, but he still swans about the place using the 'prince' title, going to the best parties and stealing other people's selfie sticks.

That was when the idea hit me. He wasn't actually using the selfie stick right now because he was at afternoon tea with his aunt! Mum had said it had been left out for him for when he got back. So I could sneak into his suite, grab the selfie stick, take it back to my room for Fritz's photo shoot and then if Prince Gustav needed it later, he could come and ask and I might be inclined to lend it to him. I congratulated myself out loud to Fritz on such an excellent plan. He barked in agreement.

All I had to do was break into Mum's office in the flat and get hold of her master key, which opens every room in the hotel. And that was a doddle. I'd had a key cut for her office without her knowing when I was nine. I would be in and out of Prince Gustav's room in a matter of seconds without anyone noticing. Easy.



Obviously now that I was hiding inside Prince Gustav's wardrobe while he pouted in what he referred to as a 'mysterious yet alluring way', I regretted that decision.

I had been so close to victory. I'd had the selfie stick in my hands when I heard a booming voice echoing down the corridor. I had run to the door to check through the peephole and, sure enough, there was Prince Gustav, striding towards me, arguing with one of his many security guards about the pros and cons of social media.

I quickly threw the selfie stick back down and, after running about the room in a panic, I clambered into the wardrobe and crouched back as far as possible.

Attempting to get comfortable without making any noise, I realised that the chances of my mum finding out about this were really quite high. If Prince Gustav decided to don different outfits for his new Instagram account, which, judging by his levels of enthusiasm, was highly likely, I was busted.

My only hope was that Prince Gustav might have to rush off to a party or something, leaving the coast clear.

'Keep this up, Your Royal Highness, and you'll have more Instagram followers by the end of the day than all the Kardashians put together!'

I sighed as Prince Gustav pulled the bouquet of flowers out of the vase on the dressing table and struck a rose-sniffing pose.

'Very creative, Your Highness!' Freddie cheered. 'Something for the ladies!'

That was when disaster struck.

The dulcet tones of Fritz's high-pitched bark went off in my pocket: my text alert. I had forgotten to put my phone on silent and I was suddenly getting a flurry of messages. Who was texting me this much? I reached for my phone but it was too late.

I heard quick footsteps and someone yell, 'GET BACK, YOUR HIGHNESS,' before the wardrobe doors were dramatically swung open and I found myself squinting up at the prince's burly security men.

'Hi,' I squeaked, ducking my head to look through their legs at Prince Gustav, who was standing against the back wall with a security guard shielding him, the selfie stick still swinging from his hand and the flowers scattered all over the floor. 'Welcome to Hotel Royale, Prince Gustav. I'm Flick.'

He blinked back at me in shocked silence.

'Great pictures, by the way. Instagram won't know what's hit it.'

Yep. Mum was definitely going to kill me.



Flick! OMG I had to text you straight away. You'll never believe what just happened to me! Are you there?

Flick? Are you there? Helloooooo!

OK, I'll just tell you anyway. I was just in the garden talking to Mum and A BIRD LANDED ON MY HEAD

Seriously, it just landed right on there!!! I didn't even have any food on my head or anything, it just perched there! According to Dad it was a sparrow. I'll send you all the pics now! Mum took a hundred of them! Enjoy!

Hey Grace, sorry for the late reply.