

# HOW TO BE THE LIFE OF THE PARTY

**ARRIVE LOOKING FINE AS** hell. But not *too* fine. You should be a disheveled, *I just put this together* fine. An effortless fine.

Everything should always appear effortless.

Keep up with the heaviest drinker in the room. It's important to impress her. You don't want people to think you're boring. Plus, you're funnier when you're drunk. And what good is being the life of the party if people can't laugh at you?

Make out with your girlfriend because she smells like sweet honey, because her lips taste like sea salt and sugar, because she's redwood tree tall. You want to climb her, crawl inside her, live like this forever. Tell her she looks beautiful under an arc of neon light. Silence the little girl in your throat who wants to plead, *Tell me you love me*, because, confession? Even after four years together, you still aren't sure sometimes.

Drink something strong and smoke something sweet and light up the room like a firecracker. Compliment people's outfits and mean it. Scream *I love this song* and prove it by singing every word.

Don't worry. Have a drink, and another. Be chill. Tuck your anxieties in your bra so no one besides you will notice them poking you like warped underwire. Ignore the voice in your head that believes everyone secretly hates you.

Dance. Dance. *Dance!*

(Your insecurities can't catch you if you keep moving.)

Glimpse traces of That Feeling whenever you notice yourself in mirrors and coffee table reflections. That *Feeling* of swollen lips, invincibility, sexiness, power. *Belonging*. That Feeling is a song, and you are the maestro. You never want this crescendo to end.

You are not a loser. Not anymore. You have made it. You are one of Them.

Or . . . you will be.

*Soon.*

Drink.

That's right, keep going.

You have an audience to please.

# CHAPTER 1

I LOVED THE SOUND of my own name.

*“Dance with me, Blake.”*

It wasn't vanity. Not entirely . . .

*“Blaaaaaake.”*

Hearing my name reminded me I was here. I existed. I had a witness.

And it felt good to be seen.

*“I love you, Bee.”*

My girlfriend's breath was hot in my ear. We were dancing. I loved dancing with Ella Spencer. This gorgeous statue of a girl who only had eyes for *me*. She was electric, and so was I. We were Blake and Ella, Ella & Blake, the couple Landstown High voted Most Likely to Still Be Together in Ten Years for yearbook senior superlatives. Only ten years? A decade sounded insulting when the honor was first bestowed.

We were going to last forever, I just knew it.

We were on Josiah Winters's yacht, *Byte Me*. I didn't know what time it was. The string lights looked pretty and so did my girlfriend, my beautiful, beautiful girlfriend. Someone handed me a drink and I downed it without asking what was in it. It was pink and it was pretty, what more did I need to know? I was here and everything was good.



Someone shouted over the music, “*You aren’t going to fucking believe this!*” Josiah. Loud-ass Josiah. Ella and I swayed toward the knot of our coworkers clustered around the bar, and there was Roxanne Garcia, glowing under a crystal chandelier. She grinned at me over a martini glass like the Cheshire Cat. She was so pretty she made my teeth hurt.

“Mr. Peterson hosted a costume party on his boat last weekend and he showed up in blackface,” Josiah said, and declarations of “Shut up!” and “*I know you fucking lying!*” exploded from the group like confetti. Ella snaked an arm around my waist, and I sank into her.

(My beautiful girlfriend—who chose *me!*)

Josiah had evidence. He airdropped it to the entire party so we could see. When Ella opened it, she laughed and called him an asshole, but when I saw the photo, my anger was scarlet and slingshot fast. I hated the Petersons. I served Mr. Peterson and his miserable, entitled family all the time at the Snack Attack Shack. More than once he’d snapped his fingers to get my attention because he didn’t know my name.

“I hate him,” I spewed, tossing my phone onto the bar with a clatter. “He’s such a racist piece of shit! Someone . . . someone”—the room swayed—“someone should teach him a *lesson.*”

“Uh-oh,” Ella said. “Big Bad Bee’s coming out.”

(You know what’s even better than the sound of your own name? A *nickname* someone created just. For. You.)

“I love it when Big Bad Bee comes out!” Josiah cheered, his pale cheeks ruddied from wine.

“Who’s Big Bad Bee?” someone asked.

How could they not know?

I sashayed around the bar and plucked the cotton candy vape out of my best friend Annetta's hand. She muttered, "Not like *I* was using that," when I took a giant hit. I looked so cool.

"*I* am Big Bad Bee," I declared through a cloud of sweet smoke. The crowd cheered, "Bee! Bee! Bee!" but all I heard was, *Me*—

*Me.*

*ME!*