

Petty in Pink

A NOVELLA



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

L.J. SHEN

Petty
in
Pink

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 Montlake

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*To those who celebrate love, and to those who are still
looking for it.
And to my readers, whom I love so very much for making my
dreams come true.*

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“I just wanna let them know that they didn’ t break me.”
—Andie Walsh, *Pretty in Pink*

CONTENT WARNING

Despite being (mostly) romantic and light, this book does tackle some heavier issues. Some include:

- verbal abuse
- mental abuse
- gaslighting
- unprotected sex
- miscarriage (off-page)

Please proceed with caution.

Chapter One

LAYLA

Valentine's Day, 2023

“This is giving strong undecided vibes,” I told Maddie on the phone, squinting at an appetizer that peered back at me.

“Layla, you’re at their *wedding*,” my best friend said, snorting. “I’m pretty sure they’re serious about each other.”

“Don’t be. Choosing Valentine’s Day as your wedding date, thereby ruining everyone else’s plans?” I scoffed as I put down the weird shrimp appetizer with the buggy eyes. “And making all the guests wear *pink*? Regardless of splotchy skin tone? They’re trying to compensate for something. I better investigate.”

I moved down the mile-long table of appetizers. The tablecloths were red, and black-and-white heart-shaped confetti covered every surface of the floor. I was a big fan of the *show, don’t tell* rule. Not only when it came to the books I consumed, but also to the people I spent my time with. And this was screaming *telling*. What did they have to prove?

Usually, the cocktail hour was my favorite part of the wedding—the *only* tolerable part, actually—but this time the food selection was too fancy. A mix of caviar, seafood, and soup shooters in tiny pink glasses. It felt like I was in some kind of extravagant detox rehab, minus the celebrities and comfy yoga pants.

Maddie snickered. “How’d you get roped into attending some strangers’ wedding, anyway?”

“Hey, she is not a stranger. She’s honestly the closest thing I’ve ever had to a sister.”

“Wow. Fighting words right there. Thanks a bunch, L.”

I’d only known the bride, Kellianne, for two months. She was my new teacher’s assistant at Bright Horizons Academy. But she was sweet and

motivated, and she didn't run away screaming when we got the Twos class, notoriously the most difficult age group. I showed her the ropes and invited her to our weekly drinks and monthly spicy book club meetups. She was a recent arrival to the city, and I'd learned she was trying to build new friendships. So when she asked if I could come, mentioning that only her close family was able to afford coming and that the groom had over three hundred guests, I caved.

"Listen, I usually go through three teaching assistants a year whenever I get the Twos class. One time a PTO mom had to step in for a full semester before we found someone to brave those little angels." I plucked a champagne glass from the long table, then took a sip. "Kellianne stuck around. We are sisters-in-arms. I'd give her an internal organ if she ever needs one." I smoothed down my pink satin dress with my free hand, peering around the grand marble lobby of the Central Park hotel where the wedding was taking place.

The couple might not be in love, but one of them was definitely rich. I'm talking golden-toilets-and-Dolce-&-Gabbana-toasters rich. A Danish prince had gotten married here two weeks ago.

"Is the food decent, at least?" Maddie sighed.

"I just had a stare-off with a shrimp. I hope that answers your question."

"It does. But now I have to vomit again."

"Sorry. Why is it that the more bougie the event is, the less edible the food is?"

"That question is way above my pay grade." I heard Maddie cracking open a can of what I assumed was her seventh ginger ale today. "Isn't it in that new hotel? Are there any dashing eligible bachelors to speak of?"

I scanned the room again. Everyone was paired off or huddled together into groups. I guessed the groom was in investment, or something equally soulless. The tall-white-men-with-Ivy-League-haircut percentage was out of control.

Virtually every person in the room had their back to me. Not that I could blame them. I stuck out like a brain cell in a flat-earther convention, with my electric green hair and red-hot lipstick.

There *were* a few fine-looking men, but I would bet my left boob that all of them wouldn't have swiped right for me on an app, or vice versa. It was an energy thing. Theirs was will-not-be-seen-alive-in-anything-

cheaper-than-Prada, and my energy gave off will-drink-water-from-the-pickle-jar-for-twenty-bucks vibes.

“No one that passes the vibe check,” I drawled to the phone, taking another sip of my bubbly drink. “I’ll just show my face, say my congratulations, and move along with my life.”

Said life currently included watching the last season of *The Great British Bake Off* and ordering pad Thai while wearing compression socks, but whatever. I wasn’t hurting anybody.

“Hey, am I hearing Ms. Rachel in the background?” I tapered my eyes.

“The answer depends on whether you’re going to chide me for giving my child screen time or not.”

“Not.”

“Then yes, *Caitie’s Classroom* is on.”

“What’s my godson still doing up?” I pulled the phone away from my ear to check the time. It was nine. *Who the hell gets married at nine?*

“I put him to bed an hour ago. I’m just too lazy to stand up and grab the remote. This pregnancy is killing me.”

Mads was ten weeks along with Satan’s Spawn number two. In truth, I loved Ronan, their son, more than I did most of my extended family members.

In his defense, her husband, Chase, worshipped Mads like she was the next coming of Jesus. He just was horrible to everyone else.

“Next time don’t marry a handsome, six-two billionaire. They’re impossible to resist.”

“Okay, next time I won’t.” I could practically hear my best friend’s eyes rolling. “Try to have a good time, all right? I know you’re allergic to weddings, but this one isn’t your own, so technically, you can still have some fun.”

“Yeah, yeah.” I knocked back the rest of my champagne as I sailed my way to the reception room. Most of the pink-wearing guests were already seated inside, an indication the ceremony was about to start. I casually passed the sign by the massive doors.

**TO THE WEDDING OF CORNELIUS FERGUS SMITH III AND KELLIANNE
TRACEY McLEAN.**

“Keep the EpiPen nearby,” my friend warned me.

Chapter Two

LAYLA

I slipped into a chair in the last row, smiling my hellos to a string of women who appeared to be my age, all wearing a different shade of pink. I was a firm believer of not yucking anyone's yum, but I just didn't see how making everyone look like a vagina added to the ambiance of a wedding.

"Hi, I'm Layla." I waved to the woman closest to me. She turned around and gave me a small, unsure smile.

"I'm Tara."

Tara's eyes were pink-rimmed. Her face was pale with exhaustion. I wanted to ask her what was wrong, before reminding myself it was none of my business. I trained my eyes on my phone instead, thumbing through fuckboys on a dating app.

God, I hated being single. Too bad I hated the possibility of being taken even more. I was working on it with a therapist, though. *The possibility of being a part of two*, Dr. Lopez called it. She said I'd been making progress. And still . . .

"Ohmigod, there's Connor." Tara, beside me, pointed at the altar. "He wore a pink bow tie."

"It suits him so well." The woman from Tara's other side sighed dreamingly.

I stole a quick glance up from my screen. The minute I saw him, my eyes froze.

So did my heart.

So did every single muscle in my body.

Panic. Terror. Pain.

Standing at the altar, wearing a crisp suit and a smug smile, was my own personal demise.

Cornelius was Connor.

And Connor was *my* Connor.

My ex-boyfriend.

My only serious relationship ever.

The man who'd ruined my life. The person who'd caused me to be in therapy to begin with.

The monster who smashed my heart into a trillion different pieces, most of them too tiny to ever glue back together.

The man who made me swear off love, and children, and everything in between.



I ran into the restroom, locked the door, and gripped the edges of the vanity as I stared at the mirror. My mouth was paper-dry, and a film of cold sweat covered my entire body.

Cornelius Fergus Smith III.

Of course he had the name of a fucking Confederate States general.

How did I not know his full name before? But the answer was clear to me. He never got any bills to our shared apartment back then. His parents paid his way for everything. I never actually saw his ID, either. Connor was a big deal back in college. He never got carded when we were at bars and clubs.

“You’re not going to make a scene, Layla Schmidt. No, look at me. YOU’RE NOT.” I wagged a finger at myself in the mirror. “You’re going to go out there, sit on your ass—that looks great in this dress, by the way—wait until the ceremony is over, and go back to your daily program. He doesn’t have any power over you anymore. He’s somebody else’s problem now.”

But Kellianne didn’t deserve this. She was only twenty-three. Not much older than I was back when Connor—who was a year older than me, now thirty-four—destroyed my life.

Maybe he’s changed.

But I knew he hadn’t. To change, you must first bear the consequences of your actions, and he never did. His family was always there to clean up his mess.

What were my options here?

Well, I could go back there, pretend he was a complete stranger who didn’t alter every decision and dream I’d ever had, play along, go home, and forget about it.

My second choice was to go out there, make a scene, embarrass everyone—mostly myself—and run off to tend to my own nervous breakdown.

The third was to walk out of here and tell Kellianne I was sick if she ever asked where I was next week, when she returned to work.

I knew I wasn't going to run away this time, which left me with the first two options.

Ignoring a pending calamity was never my style. I was the woman who sent all her friends mammogram and Pap smear reminders, who always volunteered to be the designated driver. My apartment was fully babyproofed for my friends' toddlers. I grew seventeen different plants in my living room to offset my carbon footprint on this planet.

I was the kind of person who gave a crap. Whether it was her business or not.

I knew I was going to say something and hate myself for it.

I knew, before I even got out of the restroom.

Because I was Layla Schmidt, and I always stood against injustice.

Especially when it smiled in front of my face in a five-thousand-dollar suit.