

Praise for

THIEVES' GAMBIT

Winner of
THE WATERSTONES CHILDREN'S BOOK
PRIZE FOR OLDER READERS 2024

‘A propulsive, high-octane thriller that kept me guessing until the very end. *Thieves' Gambit* gripped me from the first page, and never let go. You won't want to stop reading.’

Alex Aster, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lightlark*

‘Strap in for the ride with this twisty, fast-paced heist’ *Daily Mail*

‘This fast-paced heist thriller is incredibly assured with a blockbuster feel.’ *Observer*

‘*Thieves' Gambit* is a masterpiece! I love everything about this book from the twists and turns to the international settings and the characters.’ Natasha Bowen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Skin of the Sea*

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‘A fast-paced roller coaster of a read.’ *Kirkus*

‘A captivating push and pull narrative . . . dangerous game [and] wanderlust vibes in this edge-of-the-seat thriller.’ *Publishers Weekly*

ALSO BY KAYVION LEWIS

Thieves' Gambit



THIEVES' GAMBIT
HEIST
ROYALE



KAYVION
LEWIS

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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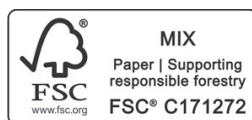
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ONE

If I pretended hard enough, I could almost believe the fireworks bursting over the stadium were for me. According to my phone, it was still 11:47 p.m. But that was Rio time. Back on Andros, it was January 13 already. Close enough. It was my freaking birthday and all I wanted was to see one debonair, vest-wearing traitor destroyed.

‘He’s really doing it up with the choreography, don’t you think?’ Devroe’s voice, frustratingly nonchalant, buzzed from the com in my ear. From my spot in the wings, I couldn’t help but glance toward the stage, where Saint Santi, one of Brazil’s biggest pop stars, somersaulted over one of his backup dancers during the instrumental of ‘Eruption.’ The crowd lost their minds. The floor shook as over forty thousand fans seemed to screech at once.

I didn’t respond, but Devroe kept talking anyway. “‘Eruption’ is such a powerful song. It’d resonate more if he let it breathe, don’t you think?”

‘Thirty seconds before I’m headed your way. Don’t get distracted.’

‘I’m only ever distracted by you—’

I muted the com until I was sure he was done talking. Six months later and he was still *flirting*. Acting like he didn’t have a world-shattering wish stashed away to play against me at any time. I thought he’d get tired of this game after a month or two of working together, but the icier I got, the more steadfast he became. It was enough to drive a girl crazy.

It was enough to pummel my heart into pieces.

I had to get rid of this boy before he ruined me in one way or another.

‘Eruption’ ended with an explosion of confetti and streamers over the pit. The stage flashed to black, and within seconds Saint Santi was replaced with his body double while the real deal was offstage, engulfed by an entourage of costumers, makeup artists, and assistants.

With my standard-issue stagehand jacket and Santi’s favorite energy drink in hand, I slipped into the posse. Before I knew it, we were deep backstage. In the dressing room, Santi shoved the energy drink back into my hands before two other posse members started stripping him out of the sequined jumpsuit he performed in. A man with perfectly arched eyebrows wearing a belt of makeup brushes like an ammunition strap gripped Santi by the chin as he caked on fresh foundation. A mushroom cloud of hairspray fogged out the dressing room, and I saw my chance.

Joining the myriad of hands plucking and primping Santi, I finagled my fingers into the waistband of his pants and fished

out the palm-sized leather notebook within. I pressed the book up my jacket sleeve and deposited the replica in its place. Santi fanned the cloud away while two assistants draped a sweeping coat over his shoulders. He patted his waistband, just like my recon saw him do between every costume change. Satisfied that his notebook was still in place, he allowed the stagehands to shove fingerless mesh gloves on his hands before the whole gang rushed out into the hallway toward the next set.

‘I hate that we’re going to miss “Salacious Seduction.” That song is so very *us*.’

Slowly, I slid my gaze across the now-empty backstage corridor until it landed on the threshold across from Santi’s dressing room.

I’d decided a few months back that Devroe’s unrelenting aesthetic appeal was another reason to be pissed with him. He was giving James Bond’s more laid-back little brother tonight, in all black from his form-hugging jeans to the fitted black blazer and the V-neck Santi T-shirt underneath. He knew what he was doing; the magazine spread pose in the doorway with one foot up and his hands in his pockets was enough to tell me so. It was impossible to look as sexy as he did and not know what he was doing.

“‘Irredeemable’ is much more *us*.’ I shoved past him into the space, a storage room for Saint Santi merch and stage equipment, cluttered with plastic boxes overflowing with shirts and posters, tangled black wires on the floor, and what looked like a miniature volcano for the second act in the corner.

‘The pocket’s near his left hip.’ I tossed the notebook to Devroe. He pressed the door shut and immediately started

skimming through the pages and snapping pictures. Saint Santi's precious songbook. In true artist fashion, he scribbled lyrics as they came to him and always kept the notebook on him. It would've been pretentious if the last six or so of those scribbled songs hadn't gone platinum in the last year. Someone in the organization wanted the newest songs.

I did my best to ignore Devroe, cologne model appeal and all, while I changed into the new hoodie he had brought in a backpack for me and twisted my braids into a bun. On the off chance Santi or anyone did notice his precious notebook was missing, it wouldn't hurt to be a little less recognizable on my way out. I eyed a box of red-and-black Santi socks beside the hoodies – they'd look amazing with my checkerboard kicks, but the box was XXS socks only. I sighed.

'As stunning as a scarlet sunrise and as intriguing as a moonless midnight,' Devroe whispered.

I tugged my new orange Santi hood down. My face flushed. 'What?'

Devroe nodded toward the notebook, flipping a page. 'Just the lyrics. They're quite beautiful. No wonder he's raking in so many awards.' Devroe looked up. There was a crushingly tempting sparkle under his silky lashes. 'They resonate—'

I forced myself to roll my eyes. 'Nothing to set the mood like stolen words. Move.'

He was strategically blocking the door. As expected, he didn't budge at first. 'It's midnight.' He maintained piercing eye contact, like that was going to be the thing to finally break me.

'Move.'

‘January thirteenth.’ He straightened a braid behind my ear, tickling my skin and making my breath catch.

‘*Move.*’

‘Happy—’

I grabbed him by the arm, twisted it, and sent him spinning behind me as I opened the door and got the hell out of there before my heart could do something treasonous.

Happy birthday was something only people I loved had ever said to me. I couldn’t let myself get that giddy flutter hearing it come from him. Not when he could cash in on his wish at any second. Not when I still had another six months of teasing and flirting and seductive posing to deal with.

The only person who could wish me a happy birthday was me, and that was because I was making it happy myself.

No one paid me any mind as I slipped into the wings of the stage. The getaway car would be waiting around the back of the stadium – a brisk walk through trailers and tour buses, through a checkpoint, and out into the street. My half was done; it was up to Devroe to return the original songbook after Santi’s finale. It was preferable if Santi didn’t notice the target had ever been missing at all.

But that didn’t mean he couldn’t notice something else was missing.

‘Hey!’ I butted in to the stage manager’s drill sergeant routine, yelling over the roar of the crowd. Our research told me she was one of the bilingual Spanish-speaking crew members. Necessary since my Portuguese was less than fluent. ‘Do you know where Santi’s firework mic is?’

‘Of—’ She squinted at the stage. The manager screamed.

‘It’s gone! Where’s the mic? Goddamn it, where’s my firework mic?!’

The wings shattered into acute chaos. It might as well have been the apocalypse. Two songs left until Saint Santi’s finale and the TikTok-famous microphone he was supposed to belt his final note into while literal fireworks exploded from his palms was missing from its spot tucked in his heeled boots.

It’d been missing since I swiped it in the dressing room earlier and left it in the hidden pocket of Devroe’s backpack. But if they hadn’t noticed that yet, a hint wouldn’t hurt.

‘There was a guy in a black blazer eyeing it earlier,’ I added into the chaos. The manager nodded. She flagged over two backstage bouncers who looked like they were begging for action, and the swarm straight-up sprinted backstage.

I left smiling. What a pity for Devroe to have to waste his wish bailing himself out of a Brazilian prison. The best gifts really are the ones you get yourself.

Despite my insistence that we could take off, the driver of our black Tesla getaway car didn’t budge – to be expected. The plan said Devroe was supposed to be back before 12:45, so unless Count herself was telling him to hit the gas, he wasn’t going anywhere until then. Or so I thought. It was surprising when the touch screen flashed a message in Portuguese and he pulled out at 12:38.

‘Where are we—’ I cut myself off. We weren’t on the route back to the hotel, but I should know by now that asking wasn’t going to get me anywhere either.

I ran my fingers over the links of my meteor bracelet, already wary of where I might end up. But before I could really start

to fret, we pulled around to the opposite side of the stadium. It was another restricted area, but to my surprise, with a few words in Portuguese, we were waved through and rolling up to another staff exit. The back doors pushed open. The stage manager, now laughing up a storm, stood with some of her lackeys holding the doors open.

Then Devroe and Santi himself were leaving, grinning like they'd been friends for years.

What the actual hell?

Seething, I watched Santi pat Devroe on the shoulder. Devroe, now missing his stylish blazer and wearing an orange hoodie like mine, shrugged before gesturing to the car, prompting Santi to wave in my direction. I ducked even though the windows were tinted to the point of being painted black.

Despite myself, I couldn't take my eyes off Devroe as he slid into the back seat with me.

He was supposed to be in cuffs right now. How the hell did he get a private escort out? I wouldn't ask, so instead I settled for gritting my teeth and glowering.

And Devroe only smirked. 'He was so grateful when I returned the mic to him. Was waiting right on the edge of the stage. Truly I caught him in the nick of time. Thank god I found that thief in the black blazer. He got away, but I managed to wrestle the mic from him.'

How did—

I plucked the com out of my ear. Unmuted.

He won this round.

'I'm sure you'll get me next time.' He presented something from his pocket. 'Consolation prize.'

‘I don’t want—’

It was a pair of the firework socks, just like the ones in the storage room, only actually my size, and with Santi’s fresh signature across the ankles.

The only gift I might get for my birthday . . .

I snatched the pair and chucked them out the window, already mourning the loss of such uniquely gorgeous footwear.

Devroe blew out a breath. ‘I figured you would do something like that.’ When I looked back, he was holding an identical pair. ‘I’ll hold on to these until you come around.’