



Paris was a city that was both beautiful and ugly, magnificent architecture stained with fumes and dirt, and pretty cobbled streets where pungent drains gurgled furiously. Patisseries displayed mouth-watering treats, people stared shamelessly, and stylish women smoked endless cigarettes whilst art galleries sat on every corner. It truly was a jungle of culture and sophistication. Each fashion capital was different. Models needed to be able to work them all in order to succeed in a competitive industry where stunning girls came from all over the world. In a proudly ruthless city like Paris, only the fittest survived. The models had to be at the top of their game: thin to the point of invisibility, impossibly beautiful (although the definition of what constituted beauty changed all the time), permanently elevated in heels, and with skin as thick as a rhino's to take the constant rejection.

While the image of an international model's life looked so perfect and glamorous, behind the scenes it was not quite the same, endlessly traipsing across cities on castings and go-sees in the hope of booking a job. Stopping to cross a road, Katrina recalled the woman at French *Vogue* flicking through her book barely even looking at the pictures and not bothering to feign an interest. Then there had been the man for the Japanese

catalogue casting who had measured every inch of her and made her try on six equally peculiar outfits before saying that they were actually looking for a blonde. And the go-see for the photographer who was so important that he hadn't even bothered to turn up! Maybe for one in every thousand girls modelling was fun and glamorous. But as Katrina had surveyed the room of waiting models that day, all tall, skinny and striking, she doubted any of them enjoyed tramping round Paris, endlessly being turned down.

The only thing certain was that Katrina had really got to know the city after walking around all day using a useless mini-map and poor GCSE French, which meant eating the same *baguette avec fromage, s'il vous plait* every day. She crossed the road to avoid the advances of a drunken man who was leering at her and let her hair fall over her face. She tried to calm herself down, taking deep breaths in an attempt to suppress tears of self-pity. It was so rare that she let herself get upset; after all, she had loved the idea of being a model and travelling round the world. Living in Paris should have been the most amazing experience ever. Yet the reality was day after day of rejection, still with no job, while her agency account began to run up debt and the money she had earned in London was slowly being depleted by the expensive French capital. It was such a disappointment.

Katrina walked towards her hotel utterly exhausted, with aching feet from her high heels and a sharp pain in her shoulder from lugging her portfolio round all day. She passed by a very glamorous and polished model being dropped off by a chauffeur outside a much smarter hotel. She had on full make-up and styled hair, suggesting she had been on a shoot, and wore extremely fashionable and expensive clothes. Katrina cast an admiring eye over the girl; she doubted *she* had to do the cattle-market castings

and the low-paid editorials. A man pulled up in a Ferrari, leapt out and greeted the girl with a kiss before they walked hand in hand through the hotel doors. Katrina carried on her way, feeling the heel of her shoe bending, threatening to snap in retaliation for the punishment it had taken that day.

She reached the familiar entrance to her own hotel. The manager was chasing the phone bill money, so she had to hover outside for ages until he disappeared into his office before sprinting past reception and into the shaky old lift. Her room was quiet and stuffy with the summer heat and had no air conditioning. Katrina was not successful enough to warrant a decent hotel; the Parisian modelling agency put all their girls who weren't top models in cheap hotels whilst charging them exorbitant prices and profiting from their lack of experience. Models had very little control over the money they earned, as expenses were deducted from their agency accounts just as soon as cheques were paid in. With rent, bikes, flights and photo prints taken off, it was always an achievement to be in credit. Katrina dropped her bag amidst the mess covering the bed and went in search of the other girls staying there.

Lydia and Andrea were sitting in their room two doors down moaning about a casting they had gone to for swimwear. Katrina perched on Andrea's bed, painting her toenails with hot-pink MAC polish in a vain attempt to make her angry-looking feet a bit more attractive.

'Honestly, they were so rude! The designer just gave me filthy looks and said my hips were a "leetle too beeg"! Plus the photographer had me strip to my underwear and do poses like I was on a beach! It was so embarrassing!' Lydia exclaimed, trying to pinch fat on her non-existent stomach. 'Will you come to the gym in the morning, Andy?'

‘I have a job tomorrow for Deutsche *Elle*,’ Andrea announced in her thick German accent. ‘I will be very early flying to Berlin and then I go to my family in Frankfurt and eat good food.’ She stood up and fanned herself with a magazine, then pulled her top off to reveal an already perfectly toned stomach.

‘Damn, that means another new room-mate.’ Lydia flicked through a copy of British *Vogue*. ‘When are we ever going to feature on these pages and have enough money to stay in a decent place? We don’t have long; soon we’ll be too old, according to the modelling industry.’ She stopped and peered closely at the magazine. ‘Oooh! God, he is gorgeous!’

‘Who?’ Katrina lifted her head from toenail painting. Lydia showed her a picture of a very good-looking man staring intensely into the camera. ‘Who is he?’

‘Dominic Cayley, the actor. It says here that he’s in Paris shooting scenes for a film. Imagine bumping into him!’

Katrina grinned wryly. ‘Probably quite unlikely, as I doubt he’ll be staying in this hole and frequenting the local patisserie. I have absolutely no doubt that he’d fall instantly in love with you if he was, though, and you’d live happily ever after!’

Lydia threw the magazine at Katrina, yelping as it knocked over a mug of ancient tea. Leaping off the bed to pick it up, she then sent an ashtray of cigarette butts flying and started laughing hysterically. Katrina couldn’t help but laugh too and began to feel less miserable.

The prehistorically old telephone rang loudly and Andrea leant over, pulling it off the table with an almighty crash.

‘Ello?’ She stifled her giggles. ‘Yah, she is here. Hold it one moment, right.’ Andrea passed the phone to Katrina. ‘It is for you. I do not have an idea how this very strange man knew you were in here.’

Andrea made a disgusted expression at Katrina whilst lighting a cigarette. The manager was well known by all the girls for being a bit of a pervert with his habit of bursting into rooms uninvited at random times to do 'safety' checks. He had taken a particular shine to Andrea for the simple reason that she wasn't British.

Katrina grimaced back at her and took the receiver. 'Hello?' she said tentatively.

'Hi, darling it's Rosanna here!' a high-pitched voice trilled. 'How are you, sweetie?' Without waiting for an answer she continued, 'I've flown over for the night and I'm calling to invite you out. I've got Rebecca and Sarah and you must make Lydia come too. An agency night out!'

Rosanna was the owner of Source Model Management, who represented Katrina in London. In her mid-forties, although she had been 'thirty-nine' for the last three years, she was all polish and glamour with fortnightly trimmed shoulder-length caramel hair and lashings of mascara. She continued to pour her remarkably toned body into leather trousers and a variety of brightly coloured silk shirts come winter or summer. Rosanna had a habit of totally ignoring people she knew during the day before becoming their best friend at night after a few drinks and a couple of lines of coke. She was critical, demanding and incredibly bitchy. Katrina's immediate reaction was to decline the invitation, yet that would annoy Rosanna, who liked to make an appearance every so often to take her 'girls' out for a treat. Ultimately if she didn't go she could jeopardise any cash advances from the agency account, or even worse, lose her contract.

'Okay, why not? Great,' she replied resignedly, cursing the manager under her breath for putting Rosanna through to the wrong room. 'I'll tell Lydia about it and we'll be there.'

‘Super, darling!’ Rosanna’s voice gushed down the telephone. ‘I have a driver, so I’ll pick you both up in an hour. Bye for now!’ She ended the call before Katrina had a chance to ask her what an agency get-together would entail.

Katrina informed Lydia of the arrangements then slunk back to her own room to get changed. She pulled on a pair of clean jeans and a strappy black top stolen from a shoot before emptying her purse out on the bed. She had only fifty-four euros left for the entire week, so she hoped the evening wasn’t going to cost much. Her whole childhood had been about tight budgets, seeing as it was just her mother’s small salary from her charity job and her father’s child support to live off. She was good at being careful with money, but the agency allowance of seventy euros a week was difficult to live on when she had to buy skincare, food, travel and any other necessities with it. If she spent that money on a couple of drinks this evening, she would have to call her mother to ask for a loan, and she hated doing that. The whole point of modelling had been for Katrina to make loads of money so she could buy her mother nice things, not beg for emergency handouts.

‘Come on, Katkins, it’s time to go.’ Lydia appeared at her door. ‘Surely you’re champing at the bit to enjoy a night out with the boss!’

Katrina grinned wryly before pulling her knotty hair back into a ponytail, rubbing the black mascara smudges from under her eyes, and slipping her feet into a pair of pink Miu Miu heels that belonged to her room-mate.

Rosanna was very drunk already, and air-kissed Lydia and Katrina whilst fiercely declaring that she had missed them, which Katrina very much doubted. She sat in the back of the car quietly listening to the others rattling on, and

feared that there seemed to be a long night planned, with a variety of different places and people needing to be seen.

The first stop was at the apartment of an owner of a New York model agency who was having a party for no particular reason other than he had a lot of money to throw around. Despite his name being Paulo, Rosanna kept calling him Fabrizio, much to his obvious fury. Paulo was a typical Silverado, with slicked grey hair, fake tan verging on orange, bleached blinding white teeth and the ability to lift one eyebrow in what he considered to be a suave manner. Katrina suspected he drove a convertible Bentley with cream leather seats while wearing tortoiseshell Armani sunglasses. The most surprising thing about him was his silver Gucci jeans, which were so tight Katrina had no idea how he managed to sit down or how he had ever got them on in the first place. There were delicious things to eat, though, and she scoffed four pieces of chocolate cheesecake. Nobody else was eating; they were too busy smoking, taking drugs and staying thin. She supposed that was what she was meant to be doing, but it just seemed so pointless.

After leaving Paulo's apartment, Rosanna led them on to a trendy bar for a designer's birthday celebration. In true fashion-party style, a rich, ancient man with a thin, lizard-like face cornered Katrina. He was wearing a bright green Versace shirt and an eighteen-carat Bulgari watch with so many diamonds it almost blinded her every time he moved his arm.

'I do hate these kinds of parties. I have to come along every so often just to socialise.' The lizard leant close to Katrina in a conspiratorial fashion and pushed a strand of hair away from her face, failing to notice her sickened expression. 'I must say, you're quite a pretty girl. Do you want to come for lunch with me tomorrow? I know a lovely little bistro.'

Katrina leapt about two feet in the air and quickly thought of a plausible excuse. 'I can't: I'm going back to London for work.'

'That's a great pity.' He fixed his predatory eyes on another potential prey and began to slide off. 'Maybe another time . . .'

Katrina breathed a sigh of relief and turned to her left, coming face to face with a very beautiful male model leaning against a wall looking lost in thought. He had an intense frown and a clenched jaw, portraying the perfect picture of man contemplating the meaning of life. Not sure whether to interrupt his concentration, Katrina smiled at him. He was at least better than a million-year-old lizard. Without changing his expression he said, 'Great party. Are you one of Portia's friends?'

'No. I'm more of a friend of Mercedes,' she joked. He looked even more confused.

'Oh, who's that? I haven't met her. Are you a model?' He spoke without moving and continued to clench his lovely jaw determinedly.

'Yes. Are you okay? You seem a little stressed,' Katrina said curiously, catching Lydia's eye across the room and making an exasperated face.

'Well, everyone always tells me I look best when I'm serious; it makes my jaw more defined, and if I clench it then my cheekbones look better too. This is a working party for me. You never know when someone important is going to see you, and I heard that Testino might show up, and maybe Giorgio Armani too.' The male model returned to his pose, leaning against the wall, his eyes narrowed as if he was looking for danger on the South African plains.

Katrina wondered if there were any normal men around. Perhaps she should just give up and forget about finding a boyfriend. Where were the good-looking,

vaguely intelligent, not-too-old men that everyone promised existed? They weren't in Paris or London if her attempts to find them were anything to go by. She excused herself from the stupid male model, noticing that Rosanna and her entourage were heading for the exit.

'What a fantastic party!' Rosanna clutched Katrina's arm as she fell off her Jimmy Choos on the way out. She screeched wildly just as a herd of Italian men whizzed by squashed into a Lamborghini.

The next stop was a club called Le Cave, which was dark and packed with sweaty dancing bodies. Female models were allowed in free as it encouraged wealthy men to spend lots of money. Tall, stunning girls of an average age of eighteen sat in clusters like wide-eyed deer with long twig legs, whilst overweight, greying men in suits plied them with alcohol and drugs. Weapons disguised as generosity. There were few conversations, as barely anyone spoke the same language; instead communication was through gestures and the waving of champagne bottles, Cristal and Dom Perignon shouting loudest. Katrina surveyed the seedy scene, watching how the girls behaved like geishas towards the men, seeking admiration, free drinks and hopefully a future date. Money and fame meant everything in a world obsessed with image. Sometimes she wished she could just join in, enjoy it and accept that she was a disposable commodity that needed to get everything she could before being pushed aside for the next one. However, she knew the reality of it was superficial and cruel, and as much as she wanted to be a model, she didn't want the 'extras' that came with it. She declined the glasses of champagne and the suggestions of private parties and sat waiting for the others to be ready to go.

Unfortunately by the time Rosanna was ready to leave the club it was nearly four a.m. Lydia had to be dragged

off a dark-eyed Italian whose *'ciao, bella'* and skin-tight T-shirt had certainly paid off that night, judging by his proud smirk. Rosanna dropped them off outside the hotel with lots of shrieks and promises of lunch. The manager unlocked the front door with a murderous expression. When Katrina got to her room, her electronic key wouldn't work, which he refused to believe. A whispered argument commenced that resulted in him swearing in a combination of French and English, waving his arms about wildly and finishing off by throwing an ashtray at her. Oh, the glamour of being an international model, thought Katrina as she finally got into the tiny stuffy room. This was not the luxury suite, gorgeous men and designer dresses that her friends back home joked with her about. If they could see the reality! She crawled into bed, noting that Lauren was not back for the third night in a row. Falling asleep almost instantly, she had a very vivid dream that she was being chased by a giant lizard.