

LINDSEY KELK

I heart

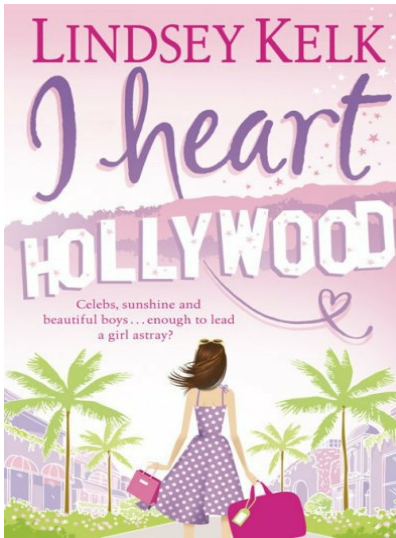
HOLLYWOOD

Celebs, sunshine and
beautiful boys... enough to lead
a girl astray?



Synopsis:

Angela Clark fell head over heels for New York, but will the sun-drenched glamour of Hollywood win her heart? Angela Clark can't believe her luck! she's an English girl living in New York with a dream job at hip magazine *The Look* and a sexy boyfriend. Her latest assignment takes her to Hollywood to interview hot actor and fellow Brit James Jacobs. Thrown in at the deep end she heads west with best friend Jenny dreaming of Rodeo Drive and Malibu beach. Soon Angela discovers that celebrity life in Hollywood is not all glamour, gloss and sunshine. Despite his lady-killer reputation, the only person who seems genuine is James. Then a paparazzi snaps them in an uncompromising position and suddenly Angela is thrust into the spotlight for all the wrong reasons! Can she convince all those close to her — especially her boss and her boyfriend — not to believe everything they read? And will Hollywood ever win Angela's heart?



I Heart Hollywood

By

Lindsey Kelk

The second book in the I Heart series

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For Big Bear and Little Mouse (not as nauseating as it sounds, honest)

Chapter One

The wedding was perfect.

Just ten people at City Hall, no hymns, no readings, no fuss; and then over to Alta in the West Village for the reception. Tiny candles flickered in the faces of my favourite people: Jenny, Vanessa, Erin. And Alex. God, he looked pretty in a suit. I made a mental note to get that boy a three-piece more often. Like maybe at our wedding... no, bad Angela, too soon to even think it. Dum-dum-dee-dum...

'So you don't think I'm making a ridiculous mistake?' Erin whispered over my shoulder, bringing me back with a bump. 'I mean, it can't be six months since I was telling you I would never get married again.'

I shook my head. 'Not at all.' I glanced over at the new Mr Erin, or Thomas as he was known to his friends. Or 'that mad hot piece of ass' as he was known to Jenny. 'You wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't absolutely the right thing to do.'

'Uh, which it totally is. Hello?' Jenny Lopez swung in and planted a great big kiss on the bride, smudging Mac Ruby Woo lipstick all over her face. 'He's a super-hot, super-rich lawyer and super in love with you. I'm pretty sure they are the main three factors to take into consideration before you hitch your wagon. Plus, wow, classiest wagon ever. Even better than your last wedding. And way better than the one before that.'

'My God, you are so rude,' Erin playfully slapped Jenny's mass of chocolate brown curls. 'But you're right. I couldn't *not* marry him. He's so sweet.'

'Yeah, sweet. I'm totally only getting married when the guy can rent out my favourite restaurant for an entire Saturday evening.' Jenny sighed and sank a full flute of champagne. 'Doesn't Thomas have any single friends? And I do mean, single, rich lawyer friends?'

I couldn't stop smiling. The last wedding I'd been to hadn't been such a roaring success. I had started the day as a blushing bridesmaid with a devoted fiancé and ended up a high-heel-wielding hand-breaker, whose devoted fiancé was at it with some tart in the back of their Range Rover.

After leaving everyone in the wedding party in tears and/or hospital, I had hotfooted it over to New York only to be taken in by Jenny: an entire family, best friend and therapist all in one. It hadn't been a walk in Central Park but I'd found my way eventually. A job blogging for *The Look* magazine, great friends, an actual life, all the things that had been missing for so long. As a hand slid around my waist and pulled me close, I was reminded of the other thing I'd found in New York: Alex Reid.

'So this is the nicest wedding I think I've ever been to,' he gently pressed his lips against my skin. 'And I have the hottest date here.'

'Firstly, there are only eight girls in the entire wedding and secondly, it's still not even true,' I said, turning to brush Alex's long black fringe out of his eyes. 'Erin looks stunning, Jenny is ridiculously pretty in that dress and Vanessa—'

'Will you please just take the compliment?' Alex shook his head. 'And I don't care what you say, there's not a girl in the whole city that could compare with you right now.'

I wrinkled my nose and accepted a kiss, silently thanking my lucky stars. We'd met just after I had arrived in New York and got far too serious, far too quickly. He had put the brakes on and I had spent six months cooling my heels, pretending I wasn't ready to start dating but really wondering when it would be OK to call him. Eventually, I'd picked up the phone, cashed in all my karma chips and, thank God, Buddha and Marc Jacobs, he'd answered. Now I was just trying to have fun and ignore the constant burning feeling in my stomach, that this was it, that Alex was the one. There was no way I wanted a repeat performance of last time. I'd spent ten years with my ex and not once, not for a moment, had I felt so scared to lose him as I did when I lay wide awake at night, watching Alex sleep.

For the last two months, he had been the most attentive, thoughtful, heartbreakingly wonderful boyfriend I could ever have imagined. He bought me little gifts, like the beautiful sunflower, my favourite flower, he'd brought to pin to my olive green Cynthia Rowley shift for the wedding. He surprised me with indoor picnics when I was on deadline, ran out to pick up breakfast before I woke up and even trekked all the way over from Brooklyn to Manhattan with the handbag and keys I'd left at his apartment as well as a huge hangover-friendly pizza when Jenny and I had both managed to lock ourselves out of our place at three a.m. We never did find out where Jenny had left the keys... But, most impressively, when I'd drunk far too much at a wine tasting I was supposed to review for *The Look*, he'd held my hair back while I threw up. Outside a very fancy restaurant. While everyone was watching. On his shoes.

And it wasn't just that Alex was competing for the title of World's Best Boyfriend, there was also the little fact that he was also a total rock god to take into consideration. His band had released their third album while we were on our 'break' and, despite a little commercial and a lot of critical success, he was still being a complete angel. While Jenny was loudly insisting that he should be out snorting coke out of groupies' belly buttons, Alex was lying watching *America's Next Top Model*, eating Chinese takeout on our sofa.

I peered up and down the table as we sat down for dinner and couldn't remember a time I'd felt so happy or so at peace with myself. So what if these weren't the people I'd grown up with, or the people that had taught me to ride a bike? They were the people that had taught me to ride the subway and to stand on my own two feet. Or at least how to get back on them after I fell on my arse, drunk.

'Hey, how much does she make you want to puke?' Jenny nudged me. 'How come she's been married, like, seven times and I can't even get laid.'

'I was just having a lovely quiet moment, thinking how lucky I am to have found such amazing friends,' I tapped Jenny's hand. 'And then you go and ruin it.'

'Aww, you love me,' Jenny leaned her head on my shoulder and chucked me under the chin. 'And you know I love you too. But seriously, I'm going to cry. If you and Brooklyn over there think you're getting married before me you're so wrong.'

'Jenny!' I looked over at Alex but he was giving one of Thomas's investment banker friends his very best listening face. 'Shut it. We've been together for about two minutes. You'll jinx it.'

'Not possible honey.' Jenny swept her hand over the candle in front of her. 'How many nights have you spent apart since you got back together? Three? Four tops. He is totally into you. And I know you've got the wedding march on replay in your head. I will bet you anything that you have a ring on your finger inside the year. You want me to direct him to some of the more tasteful options? I know he's all, like, 'creative' but you have to get something you can wear for the rest of your life.'

I combed down my long light brown fringe nervously. 'Seriously, stop it. We're taking things slowly and you know it.'

Jenny smiled. 'I know but it's totally obvious. And you know that I'm really pleased for you, it's awesome. But Angie, we have to get *me* laid. It's been like six months, for crying out loud. Oh, thank God, food.'

'Yes, because I really feel like eating right now,' I muttered.

Dinner passed by altogether too quickly, the food amazing but not soaking up the champagne as quickly as I would have liked. A sausage roll and chicken drumstick would really have helped, but this was a classy New York function, not a Clark family knees-up. As dinner turned into speeches and speeches turned into drinks, I excused myself from a fascinating research analyst who almost passed out when I told him I didn't have a pension, and went to look for people I actually wanted to talk to. Erin and Vanessa were busy fulfilling bride and bridesmaid duties at the door, Jenny was giving several of Thomas's friends her best nodding and smiling while Alex was presumably hiding from the same people in the bathroom. He could dress up in a suit and comb down his messy black hair but he couldn't hide the look in his eyes when Thomas and his friends started discussing stocks and shares. Without anyone to protect me from the same death by conversation, I vanished up to the balcony to hide.

'You planning on spying on people too?' Alex asked as I rounded the top of the stairs. He was leaning over the banister, nursing a champagne flute, his tie and collar loosened.

'So this is where you've been hiding,' I took a sip from his glass. Well, one more couldn't hurt. 'I thought maybe you'd left with your new boyfriend from dinner.'

'Yeah, I think we've hit it off. You know I've always been fascinated by high-yield bonds.'

'I knew the band was a front. So who are we spying on?'

He pointed down towards the makeshift bar at the back of the restaurant. 'Well, it was you but then you vanished, so mostly Jenny. Just trying to work out who her target is this evening.'

I spotted her immediately, leaning against the bar, all glossy curls and red pout. She sipped on a clear cocktail and checked her nails, ignoring the guy standing next to her, who was awkwardly trying to attract her attention with a weak cough and terrified smile.

'Looks like she's over Jeff at last,' Alex nodded.

'Looks like,' I frowned. 'But I don't really know. One minute she's all "I want to get laid, I want to get laid", but then she's sat at home every night watching *Nanny 911*. See? It's like he isn't even there.'

'Maybe she's just choosy?' Alex suggested as the hapless banker gave up and moved on to Vanessa. 'Or maybe she just really likes *Nanny 911*?'

'Well, yes she does and she ought to be choosy, she's gorgeous, but it's more than that,' I said. 'I don't know. She goes out, she meets men, they give her their numbers and she never calls. And then at the same time she's rattling on all the time about how she's not getting any. I just don't know what to do for the best. I know she's hung up on Jeff still but it's the one thing she absolutely will not talk about. Sober.'

'Does she still think they'll get back together?' Alex leaned his head against mine.

I shrugged and pouted. The official line was that she was totally over her ex, but the unofficial, drunk-at-two-a.m. line was, 'I'll never get over him as long as I live, he's my soul mate.' But I had a feeling that wasn't something she wanted to share with Alex.

'So I don't tell her that some blonde moved in with him yesterday?' he asked. 'Sorry I didn't say anything earlier. I totally forgot.'

'Seriously?'

Alex nodded.

The fact that he had refused to sell his apartment just because it was in the same building as Jenny's ex was usually reason enough for her to decide she wasn't talking to him for days at a time, so it seemed to make sense to keep this little bit of information to myself. 'No, she cannot find out about that. She'd probably take to her bed for a month.'

'Sounds fun,' he smiled, one hand sliding up my back, the other holding fast to the balcony. 'Can we do that now please?'

I looked up into Alex's ridiculously green eyes, his fringe catching in my eyelashes as he dropped his face to mine for a long kiss. His body was warm against the thin silk of my dress and the balcony pressed into the small of my back. I felt my clutch slip out of my fingers and drop, not sure if it had fallen over the balcony, not sure if I cared.

'I should probably leave soon,' I said, my voice catching as Alex ran his hand down the back of my neck, curling the hair at the nape around his long fingers. 'I have a meeting with Mary at nine.'

'So my place is closer by subway, yours by cab.' Alex's eyes were dark and dilated, his breath quick. 'And I don't think people on the subway would be OK with what I have planned.'

'Cab then,' I smoothed down my dress and scooped up the bag. Thank God it hadn't actually gone over the edge and bashed anyone. I'd assaulted enough people at weddings in my time. 'Have to say, didn't think you'd be the sort of bloke to get turned on by weddings.'

'What sort of "bloke" did you think I was?' Alex smiled. 'And it's not so much weddings as you. Now get your ass in a cab.'

Chapter Two

The next morning was grey and cold, just like every morning had been since the end of November. The hardwood floor in my bedroom felt like ice as I gingerly poked my toes out of the bed and felt around for my slippers. I knew it was stupid not to wear my giant bed socks when Alex stayed over, but we hadn't been together that long, I just didn't think he was ready for it and so I suffered. Like an idiot.

March was the opposite of July. I'd sweltered from the moment I stepped off the plane but now I sometimes wondered if I'd ever be warm again. Hot and sticky summer had given way to a cool and crisp autumn, which was all too quickly overtaken by subzero temperatures and snow storms. As pretty as three feet of snow was, I had learned already that it was a) not a rarity in the city and b) not a good thing. When it snowed at home, everything stopped. My mum waited until the gritter had been around the streets, then trekked up to the shops in her wellies, walking in the road, to buy unnecessary quantities of canned food and eight pints of milk that would go off before she could force my dad to drink them all to avoid them going off. When it really snowed in New York, the roads jammed and the subway stopped but life didn't. And walking in the bitter winds with a face full of sleet did not make it easy to lead the glamorous life that my family in England might have imagined me living. Although that could also be because my emails and phone calls rarely mentioned the fact that I'd been walking around with a Rudolph-red nose, bundled up like the Michelin man for months.

I flicked at the curtain to check the state of the streets. At least it hadn't snowed in the night, but the sky looked grey and threatening and, below, people dashed backwards and forwards, bundled up for an arctic expedition.

'What time is it?' croaked Alex, rolling towards me and pulling the curtain back across the window.

'Seven-thirty,' I sighed, allowing him to pull me back into bed, my feet disappearing under the quilt. Alex was like my very own human hot-water bottle. No matter how cold the apartment was, he was always like a furnace. Aside from the obvious, it was one of my favourite reasons to have him in bed with me. 'And as much as I don't want to, I really do have to get up.'

'See, I go around telling people how awesome it is having a writer for a girlfriend,' Alex grumbled as I pulled away again, 'because she doesn't have to be in an office at nine a.m. every day. And here you are, at seven-thirty...'

'I can't help it,' I said, wriggling away from him and braving the icy floorboards again. I pulled on my giant fleecy dressing gown and looked back at him, his eyes squeezed tightly shut, the covers up around his nose. 'Do you really tell people your girlfriend is a writer?'

'Mmm,' Alex rolled himself over under the covers, hiding his head as I flicked on a lamp. 'What else am I supposed to tell them? You're a British refugee who can't go home because you broke some guy's hand?'

'Arse,' I grabbed a towel off the radiator, heading into the bathroom. 'You can tell people whatever you want.' As long as you tell them I'm your girlfriend, I added silently with a great big smile.

The Spencer Media building was on Times Square, one of my least favourite places in all of Manhattan. Even today, on a frigid Monday in March at eight-fifty in the morning, the streets were pulsing with tourists, clutching their Starbucks and digital cameras with inadequate knitted mittens. I had never thought I'd consider a North Face padded coat a necessity, but then I'd never tried to live through January in New York with nothing but a pretty Marc by Marc Jacobs swing coat and a feeble H&M leather jacket. Never, ever in my entire life had I been so bloody cold. Now I understood the need to forgo my newfound interest in fashion and put on As Many Layers As Humanly Possible before I left the apartment. It was insane.

I pushed past a group of school kids taking it in turns to snap shots of the group, one switching in, one switching out to take over photographer duties, and wondered exactly how many tourists' pictures I had managed to land in since I started working for *The Look*. There were probably millions of shots of a disgruntled-looking girl tutting and sighing in the background all over Facebook.

The views from Mary's forty-second floor office almost made the trekking across Times Square worth it. The higher up I got, the more amazing New York looked to me. At ground level I could sometimes forget where I was—H&M here, HSBC there—but up in the office, surrounded by skyscrapers, watching the rivers sweeping around the island, I couldn't be anywhere else but Manhattan.

'Mary's been waiting for you,' an uninterested voice came from behind a huge computer monitor as I tried to locate the group of kids below.

'Aren't I early?' I asked the monitor. Mary's assistant, Cici, had never been my biggest fan but she usually gave me the courtesy of a dirty look. Unfortunately I was wearing so many layers, I couldn't find my watch, and Spencer Media was a little like Vegas, they didn't bother with clocks, presumably so their staff wouldn't realize how late they were working. Not many days went by when I didn't get emails from Mary and the other editors at nine, ten in the evening.

'Mary gets in at seven, your meeting was due to start at nine.' She stood up and swept around the desk. I couldn't help but hope she must have some really, really warm clothes to change into. Her teeny tiny bottom was squeezed into a skater skirt that just about covered her stocking tops and it didn't look as if she had any thermals on under the gauzy, pussy-bow blouse that topped it off. In fact, it didn't look as if she had anything under it. Oh my. 'It's now three after nine. You're late.'

Was it right for a PA to make me feel like a naughty sixth-former?

'Angela Clark is finally here,' Cici purred ahead of me as we passed through Mary's big glass doors. 'Can I get you anything, boss?'

'More coffee, and do you want anything?' Mary was wearing her standard uniform of skinny jeans, cashmere sweater and steely grey bob, but something about her was different. I realized she was smiling. This had to be a good start.

'I would love a coffee.' I tried a small smile at the assistant who huffed a little and flounced off. 'How are you, Mary?'

'Good, you?' She leaned across her desk and didn't wait for a reply. 'I have a treat for you. You're going to love me.'

'Sounds good.' I began to disrobe. Gloves, scarf, coat. 'I like treats.'

'Well, you know everyone here loves your blog.' Mary templed her fingers under her chin and smiled back. I had been writing an online diary for *TheLook.com* since I'd arrived in New York, thanks to Jenny's amazingly well-connected friend Erin and my complete lack of shame at spilling the details of my private life all over the internet. And to humour my journalistic ambitions, my editor occasionally threw me the odd book and music review for the magazine when they needed an extra hand. But the most exciting part of it all for me was my column in the UK edition, much to my mother's disgust. She didn't like that Susan in the post office knew what I was up to before she did. 'We have a new project for you. How do you feel about branching out?'

'Branching out?' I paused in my outerwear removal. This sounded an awful lot like a firing. 'Branching out from *The Look*?'

'No, not at all,' Mary nodded thanks as Cici arrived with her coffee. I looked up hopefully. No coffee for Angela. I was definitely being fired. 'This is it, Angela, your big break. An interview has come up and we want you to do it.'

'I've never interviewed anyone before,' I said slowly, not wanting to jinx anything.

'Sure you have, you interview people all the time.' The very fact that Mary couldn't look at me proved she didn't even believe herself. What was going on?

'I have asked questions of the fourth runner-up of *America's Next Top Model* cycle eight and waited in the queue for the toilets with an Olsen twin. They aren't interviews, Mary,' I said. 'Don't you have loads of writers that—you know—specialize in interviewing?'

'We do,' Mary said, looking up and staring me out. 'But this one is yours. Are you telling me you don't want to do it?'

Miraculously, a steaming coffee appeared in front of me, but Cici had turned on her heel before I could say thanks. Baby steps, I thought to myself.

I took a deep breath. Of course I wanted to do an interview. How hard could it be to ask some random a few questions? 'Of course I want to. It'll be great. I'll be great. I'll manage. I'll try.'

'No try here, Angela.' Mary pushed her frameless glasses up her nose. 'This is a biggie. One week in LA with James Jacobs.'

'James Jacobs? The actor?' I asked, sipping tiny scorching gulps. 'Me?'

'Yes you,' Mary leaned back a little in her chair. 'And yes, the actor. The very hot British actor.'

'You want me to interview him for the website?'

'Not quite,' she replied. 'It's for the magazine.'

'You want me to interview James Jacobs for the magazine?' I wondered if I'd slipped and cracked my head on the shower this morning. That would explain why I thought Mary was suggesting I should interview this very hot British actor.

'That's right,' she carried on. 'You go to LA, you bond over being British, talk about, I don't know tea and crumpets, and you get the inside scoop. He hasn't done an awful lot of press but apparently he really wants to do this. Let his female fans in on the "real him" or some other shit.'

'From what I've heard, he's already let rather a lot of female fans in.' I pulled off my last jumper, hot and flustered all of a sudden. 'Isn't he a bit of a slag?'

'If you mean, has he been "linked with several Hollywood starlets", then yes.' Mary made bunny ears around the quote. She typed something into her Mac at super speed, then swivelled the monitor to face me. 'But this is what we want to get past. His team are worried that all this "attention" could create a negative vibe with his female audience.'

The screen showed a Google image search. James Jacobs was tall, broad and athletic and there was no denying he looked good in a pair of swimming trunks. His dark blue eyes and damp, dark brown curls just added to the overall 'Abercrombie at play' look.

'Doesn't look very British to me,' I commented, taking the mouse and clicking through a few more pictures. 'Where's he from again?'

'Uh, his Wikipedia entry says London.' Mary took the mouse back and flicked through to what was obviously her favourite shot, halfway down the page, James staring directly at me, dark brown hair tickling his cheekbones, bow tie loose, top two buttons of his shirt undone. 'So you fly on Saturday.'

'Sorry, what?' I snapped back from the pretty pictures and looked at Mary. She had her, 'I'm really not kidding' face on. Not a favourite of mine. 'But, it's Monday?'

'Which gives you almost a whole week to prep.' Mary started to click at other things on her screen. A sure-fire sign that the meeting was all but over. 'So, Cici will book your flights, your car, hotel and organize all the other stuff. Cash, credit card, BlackBerry, whatever.'

'But, seriously, is this a good idea? Maybe I don't have the experience for this. I'm not a professional interviewer, I'm a talker at best—and, when I'm lucky, people talk back. That's really not a qualification.' I leaned over the desk. Was Mary not feeling well? 'And I've never been to LA before. What, I mean is, really, this doesn't make that much sense, surely?'

'Look, Angela,' Mary's eyes flickered across her screen. 'Here's the thing. I'm not supposed to tell you but they asked for you.'

'What?'

'Hey, I'm as surprised as anyone else.' Mary pulled a face. 'Not that I don't think you're great but, like you said, you're not a professional interviewer: we both know that. But James's people wouldn't have anyone else. It was the only condition of the interview.'

I didn't know what to say. What could I possibly have done that could attract the attention of James Jacobs's 'people'? I didn't think they would have been that impressed with my critically acclaimed series on which Manhattan department store was the best to hit for a free makeover before you went out (Bloomingdale's, Soho).

'If you're not going to do it, just say,' Mary went on. 'The entertainment team on the magazine are already incredibly pissed off. They can get someone else like that—'

'No!' I said quickly. 'It's not that. I absolutely want to do it. It's amazing. I just—I just don't get it.'

'Me either.' Mary really didn't believe in sugarcoating anything. Even when I would have preferred it. 'I can only tell you what they told me. James's team doesn't want a polished, super celebrity reporter who is going to stiff them with some horrible sordid Hollywood exposé. They want someone who is going to help show James as—you know—a fantasy guy. The whole point of the article is it needs to be fluffy, not scandalous, sort of a "My Dream Week with James Jacobs". Almost like it was written by a reader.'

'So basically an amateur not experienced enough to weasel out the details of his secret love child?' I surmised, slightly relieved and slightly offended at the same time.

'Yeah, pretty much.' Mary had either missed or chosen to ignore the part where I was slightly offended. 'The entertainment editor thought it was maybe because, you know, you're British so he'll trust you.'

'Britain isn't just this little quaint village where everyone makes jam and says good morning to their neighbours, you know,' I grumbled half-heartedly. 'Margaret Thatcher was British and no one trusted her.'

'So, like I said, Cici will get you everything.' Mary pointed towards the door, where Cici stood, clipboard in her hand, hateful look on her face. 'And you'll blog from LA, OK? You can say you're doing an interview but it's probably best not to give too much away. Save it for the magazine. It'll be good for you.'

'And people weren't that mad on Tony Blair towards the end,' I added thoughtfully. 'And Sweeney Todd. Was he real?'

'No, Angela, he wasn't,' Mary looked back across the desk. 'Angela, they have asked for you. We are sending you. Against the wishes of the editorial team. Against the wishes of the publishing team. Do not fuck this up. You don't want to lose your visa, do you?'

I bit my bottom lip. It was like getting told off by my mum. 'Lose my visa?'

'This is a major interview for the magazine and, if you do it right, could even go international,' Mary explained. 'If this goes wrong, the publishers are hardly likely to want to continue with your blog, are they?'

'No,' I said, suddenly feeling very sick.

'Look, no one's expecting a Pulitzer prize-winning article, just go out there and talk to this man. There are a lot worse ways to spend a week in March. You're getting an all-expenses-paid trip to LA, plus you're getting paid. Suck it up, go buy a bikini and interview the handsome man.' She waved me out of my seat. 'I'll see you in two weeks. And don't screw it up.'

I felt a bony grip on my shoulder and rose tentatively out of my chair. Please let it be Death, I prayed silently, gathering up my sweaters, gloves and coat.

'Can we please hurry this up?' came the snide voice attached to the Vulcan death-grip. 'I have other things to do today.'

'Oh, Cici,' I said, trying not to be disappointed. She might be as bony as Death but Cici was a lot more dangerous.

'And then, as if I wasn't freaked out enough, she basically said they only want me because I'm an amateur.' I dropped my head onto the table in Scottie's Diner, across the street from our apartment, toppling the tomato sauce into Jenny's fries. 'Shouldn't I be insulted?'

'OK, firstly, you kinda are an amateur, aren't you?' Jenny gulped her Diet Pepsi and shrugged. 'I just mean you've never interviewed anyone before, right? And uh, hello, you're going to LA on Saturday?'

'Yes,' I started, 'but—'

'Shut. Up.' Jenny held out her hand. 'You're being paid to fly to sunny, hot LA from cold, fugly New York. In March. To interview one of the hottest men in the entire world. Who has specifically asked for you. And they're paying you for it. I see no bad here. It's a massive step for your career, you're interviewing one of the hottest men in the world. And you're going to LA. With one of the hottest men ever. In LA.'

'I can see that you've found a couple of positives.' I frowned, sipping my hot chocolate. 'But—and I know I sound like a whiny cow, but the more I think about it, it just doesn't feel like a good idea. I don't want to take on such an amazing opportunity and then cock it up because I don't know how to interview someone, let alone some Hollywood super-stud. Plus, I don't really want to disappear off to LA for a week on my own. Not at the moment...' I tailed off and looked into my hot chocolate, painfully aware that I had said absolutely the wrong thing.

Jenny shook her head. 'Uh-uh. You are not doing this: it could be my only chance to meet James Jacobs. And, you know, it would be nice to head out to LA again,' she pointed with a floppy fry. 'If you even suggest turning this down because you've just got back into Alex's shorts, I will be so angry with you.'

'Firstly, that's not what I meant,' I lied, pulling the fries across the table. Most days, I loved that Jenny knew exactly what I was really thinking, no matter what actual words made it out of my mouth, but sometimes it was just irritating. 'And secondly, when were you last in LA? And thirdly, you're coming with me?'

'Firstly, yes I am, secondly a few years ago, I've so told you before and you never listen and, thirdly, that is exactly what you meant and it's bullshit.'

'It's not that I don't want to go, or at least not because of Alex. I-I don't know. I'll miss him. Is that the saddest thing ever?'

'Yes, it is.' Jenny gave me her best 'you're being ridiculous' look. 'You don't think he's going to cheat on you?'

'No, of course not,' I shrugged. The thought might have crossed my mind. 'Things are just going really well right now. But things were going really well before and look what happened.'

'Oh Angie,' Jenny said, 'it's different this time. Any idiot can see it's real between you two.'

'Wasn't it real before?' I asked. It had been everything I could do not to even think these things all day and now here I was, saying it all out loud. 'And he walked away. And did God-knows-what with God-knows-who. Who's to say I go away and he's out with his friends and, well, you know. Have you seen him? He's bloody gorgeous.'

'Yeah, so over that and hello? He won't cheat on you because he loves you.' Jenny stabbed at me with a fry loaded with ketchup.

'He hasn't said so.'

'Have you said it?'

'Nope.'

'Do you love him?'

'Yes.'

'Huh. So you've been thinking it but not saying it?'

'Er, yes.'

'So what makes you think he isn't thinking it but hasn't said it either?' Jenny reasoned.

'But what if I say it and he thinks I'm moving too fast and dumps me again?' I countered.

'So you don't say it,' Jenny held up her hands. 'Or you do. Whatever.'

'Hmm.' I nibbled a fry thoughtfully while Jenny wolfed down a whole handful. 'You were there on holiday?'

'Where, LA?' Jenny asked through a mouthful.

I nodded, trying not to look at the big potato-ey mess. For a very beautiful girl, Jenny could be foul sometimes.

'Way to change the subject. OK, don't laugh, but before I decided to become the new Oprah and before Tyra frickin' Banks beat me to it, I thought I might give acting a shot. So I spent a while in LA, stayed out for the pilot season, but it wasn't for me so I came back to New York. It might be nice to go back out, see some friends. Maybe we could stay at The Hollywood. I could take a week's vacation and you know, you can introduce me to James Jacobs.'

'OK, OK, this is too much.' I couldn't help but grin at Jenny. 'And don't you dare try and change the subject—that's my thing. You went to Hollywood to be an actress?'

'And I'd have been a silver-screen goddess but the West Coast wasn't for me.' Jenny shook her head. 'Can we leave it?'

'Fine, I just—well, I can't imagine you playing anyone other than Jenny Lopez,' I said.

'It's the role of a lifetime.' Jenny gave me a quick flash of jazz hands. 'You do mean me and not the other one, right? Because I'd have to kick your ass.'

'You're more of a diva,' I agreed. 'So what's The Hollywood?'

Jenny waved at the old silver-haired man behind the counter. 'Sister hotel. It's The Union in New York and there's The Hollywood in LA, The Strip in Vegas and, uh, The Something Else in Paris. I can never remember. Scottie, could we get some more fries, please?'

'How many times do I tell you, my name it is not Scottie, it is Igor,' the guy behind the counter trundled over with more fries. 'I buy this place from Scottie, this is why it is called Scottie's Diner.'

'Thanks, Scottie,' Jenny gingerly picked up scalding hot chip and blew on it, 'you're good people.'

'Are you sure we could stay there? The magazine said they would put me up in an apartment somewhere.' I couldn't believe the amount of crap Jenny could eat and never gain a pound. A true disciple of WeightWatchers, I had forgone almost all foods with a calorie content higher than that of a carrot for a whole year to slim into my ill-fated bridesmaid dress. Walking the streets of New York City every single day helped, but I could never be one of those girls who scarfed ice cream, pizza and chocolate all day long without putting on weight. A girl like Jenny, who only ever put on a couple of pounds—tops; which went straight to her already curvy curves and never ever to her tiny waist. If she weren't such a great friend, I could really get around to hating her.

'We are totally staying there. Tell the magazine you're fixed,' Jenny was already halfway through the new plate of fries. 'As if I would let you stay in some

skanktastic apartment. Who knows where you would end up. Besides, my friend Joe is managing the bar and I'm due a whole heap of vacation days. The hotel totally owes me. And Joe and I totally have history, he'll look after us.'

'By history, do you mean you shagged him? And by "us" do you mean "you"?'

'Well, yeah.' Jenny's eyes glazed over slightly. 'So if it doesn't work out with me and James Jacobs, I can always call on Joe. I need to get laid already.'

'Really? And Joe, this is Hot Joe who used to work at The Union?' I asked, testing the waters. 'You're sure you're up to seducing movie stars and bartenders?'

'I'm fine,' Jenny replied, without looking up at me. 'Seriously, I'm all shiny and new.'

'Good, because I've been worried.' I slapped her hand away from the fries. 'You haven't been your usual irritating self for ages.'

'It's just winter,' she said. 'I know I've been out of it a little. I've been thinking about taking a break, so well done on the perfect timing.'

I smiled. Going to Hollywood with Jenny could be fun. 'So, we're off to LA then?'

'Angie, honey, when have I ever steered you wrong? It will be awesome,' Jenny replied, scooping up the last fry. 'And I'm sure Alex is just delightful if you're into skinny hipsters, but Joe is almost, *almost* as hot as James Jacobs. You organize the flights, I'll organize the hotel and the booty call.'

'Ick,' I shook my head. 'Just ick.'

I hopped on the L train at Union Square after abandoning my overexcited best friend outside the hotel. As the train trundled over to Brooklyn, Jenny's giddiness started to wear off. I'd almost forgotten that this wasn't a girls' holiday, it was a job. It was an interview that, if I screwed it up, could cost me my job, my visa, everything. Climbing up the subway stairs, it just seemed like such a bad idea and, on top of everything, as tragic as it was, I really didn't want to leave Alex. I couldn't tell him I loved him in case he panicked and ditched me, but if I didn't tell him, how would he know not to cheat on me with every groupie in Brooklyn while I was away?

And the potential destruction of my personal and professional life aside, what was in LA anyway? A seven-hour flight, a whole city full of super-hot, super-bronzed beach bimbettes and, most terrifying of all, a week-long interview with a real-life, genuine movie star.

Writing my blog was easy: there was always something interesting to talk about, and anyone could review some books and even a few CDs—that just meant winging a couple of hundred words. But there was no way I could bluff my way through this. There was no denying that it could be a great opportunity for me as a writer, but it was also a fabulous opportunity for me to fall flat on my arse. I was just an 'amateur', after all. The vision of me throwing myself off the 'H' of the Hollywood sign clutching a signed photo of James Jacobs played over and over in my mind until I reached Alex's apartment.

'Hey.' He opened the door, pulled me in and pushed me backwards against the wall, kissing me hard on the lips.

'I am so cold,' I breathed, shaking my scarf, mittens and coat off onto the floor. 'Give me a good reason why I shouldn't go to LA on Saturday.'

'The pizza sucks?' Alex muttered, hoisting me up onto his kitchen counter, pulling off my top two sweaters in one swift move.

'That'll do,' I nodded, trying to kick my boots off behind his back but succeeding only in bashing him in the hip seven times.

'That actually really hurts.' Alex tugged the boots off for me.

I crossed my legs behind his back as he stumbled with me into the living room. 'Yeah, it's never like it is in films, is it?'

Alex's place was just as dishevelled as its owner, with books, guitar strings and worn T-shirts strewn everywhere. Luckily, the beautiful floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out over the East River to Manhattan made up for the disgusting kitchen. Lying full stretch on the sofa while Alex strummed something new on his acoustic guitar (and I pretended not to be watching *Gossip Girl* with the subtitles on) was officially my new favourite way to spend a Monday night. I yawned, gazing out at the skyline. When you weren't outside, New York was gorgeous in the snow. The sun, sea and sand could never compete.

The apartment was also about twenty degrees hotter than mine and now, thoroughly warmed up, I was perfectly happy wearing nothing but Alex's T-shirt and my pants, moulding myself against his slowly rising and falling chest on the sofa, my bare legs tangled in his long, warm limbs. We hadn't quite made it into the bedroom, something I was always proud of. I'd come a long way from the Angela Clark who spent five or so years tucked up in her winceyette PJs before her ex came home so she wouldn't have to endure his huffing, puffing and generally uncomfortable fumbblings.

'So, any reason in particular I should be trying to talk you out of going to LA on Saturday?' Alex asked, combing his fingers through my mussed-up hair. Between getting back together with Alex and the terrible weather, my do was very much a constant don't. 'That was a pretty random request, even for you.'

'The magazine wants me to go and interview this actor.' I waved a hand around, working very hard to come across as very casual about the whole thing. 'But they want me to go on Saturday and I've never really interviewed anyone before so I don't know. I'm sort of in two minds about it.'

'Sounds like a great opportunity,' he offered diplomatically. 'LA'll be warmer than New York.'

'Yeah,' I said, twisting my neck around to get a better look at him. 'I know, it could be amazing. It's just a long way and stuff.'

'It is,' he agreed. 'But you never know, you might like it?'

'Do you?' I asked. 'Like LA, I mean.'

'Mehh,' he held his hand up to mine. My small pale hands, with the nibbled-at fingernails filed down, palm to palm with his long, calloused, guitar-playing fingers. 'I don't love it.'

'So you wouldn't want to come with me?' I asked, only briefly considering Jenny's wrath. 'It'll only be for a week or something.'

'However will I survive without you?' Alex kissed my hand.

I paused for a moment to feel his heartbeat. Perfectly even. 'I don't know. I just don't know if I should do it. Even if it could be incredible.'

'Then don't go.' Alex's heartbeat started to slow, I could tell he was about to drop off. That was my only bedroom-based problem with the boy. He always needed a post-shag nap whereas sex left me wide-awake. And since I overthought every situation at the best of times, his post-coital narcolepsy wasn't ideal for me. Depending on how the day had gone, I was either planning our wedding (I thought barefoot on the beach in Mexico; I'd never been but it sounded sort of fabulous) or panicking that the whole relationship was about to fall apart again.

I tried to toss and turn quietly, torn between running off to LA with Jenny and staying exactly where I was for ever and ever when my phone started buzzing inside my beautiful bag. Slipping out of Alex's arms, I shuffled down the sofa and answered.

'Hello?' I whispered, creeping into the bathroom.

'Angela, it's me,' a voice crackled from a long way away. 'Are you there? You're so faint?'

'Louisa! How are you? Is everything OK? You never call my mobile.' Louisa was my best friend from for ever. We'd grown up together, gone to the same university, moved to London at the same time, basically done everything together—right up until I broke her husband's hand at their wedding. But since we had resolved that tiny issue, our regular weekly phone calls could go on for hours. She wouldn't mind if I had a wee while we chatted. I hoped.

'I know, but you weren't home and I couldn't wait, it's too exciting.' I hadn't heard her so giddy since she'd told me about her engagement. 'Tim's bank got taken over by some American bank this morning, did you see it on the news?'

'Louisa, given that I was engaged to a banker for five years and couldn't even tell you what his job title was, I think you're probably going to have to fill me in on the details. Is Tim's job OK?'

'Yes, better than OK!' Louisa was still gushing. 'They've asked him and his team to go meet the US operation. We're coming to New York for a week. Next week!'

I snapped upwards so quickly I almost toppled off the loo seat. 'Louisa, that's amazing! When do you get here? Do you know where you're staying? God, there are so many places I'm going to take you!'

'Angela, are you on the toilet?'

Yes. 'No?'

'Good, because that would be disgusting,' she said sternly. 'Anyway, we're all flying out on Friday night, I'm not sure where we're staying, Tim literally just called me to tell me. Oh, Angela, I can't wait to see you.'

'Oh I know, you too,' I said, trying to wash my hands and flush super quietly. 'And Tim. Oh, I can't believe it!'

'There's just one thing that might be... but well, it's nothing really,' Louisa's excitement faltered slightly. 'I mean, New York is a big city and everything, isn't it?' 'Louisa... ?'

'It's just, well, like I say, nothing. Forget I said it. I'm coming to New York!'

'Louisa Price!'

'Fine, well, it's not just Tim coming out.' Louisa finally sighed. 'It's his whole team.'

'So... Mark?'

'Erm, yes, and... well.'

'Mark and... her?'

Even six months after finding out my boyfriend had been cheating on me, I still couldn't actually say her name. As happy as I was with Alex, as pleased as I was to be out of that relationship, girl logic prevailed—he was an evil cheating scumbag and she was a nasty skank.

'Oh, Lou,' I massaged my temples. 'Seriously?'

'It'll be fine,' Louisa insisted. 'You won't have to see him, will you? Unless, I mean, unless you want to?'

'That's not even funny.' My brain was spinning. 'Why would I want to even see him?'

'Well, it has been ages and you two were together a long time,' Louisa said slowly. 'Maybe you'd feel better if you did see him?'

'Do you remember what happened the last time I saw him?' I could feel myself getting angry, and angry was not my best look. Hence the hand-breaking incident at Louisa's wedding. 'And what happened the last time you didn't tell me something? What's going on, since when were you Mark's biggest fan again?'

'All right, yes, Mark asked Tim to ask me if I would get you to meet him,' Louisa rushed. 'But I said he had to get in touch himself if he wanted to see you. Because if you don't want to see him then you don't have to and I said I wasn't going to try and trick you or guilt-trip you or anything. He's a tit.'

I stared at Alex's bathroom ceiling, feeling the entire last six months slip away. Of course it would make sense to meet with Mark. We had been together for ten years, grown up together really. And it would make me the bigger person; help prove to everyone that I had really changed in the last six months. And it would all be on my terms: New York was my home now, after all, and he'd never even been to America. And of course I really wouldn't want to but, if forced, I would be able to flaunt my beautiful new super-cool boyfriend. Nothing intimidated a money man like a guitar boy. They didn't understand them.

But of course none of that would matter if I wasn't in New York when Mark arrived...

'Angela, are you still there?'

'I am, lovely, but I have really bad news.' I took a deep breath. 'I'm actually going to LA on Saturday for work. I forgot.'

'You're what?' Louisa said.

'I'm going to LA to interview James Jacobs, so I won't be here.'

'And you forgot that?'

'Yes.'

'You forgot you were flying out to LA this Saturday and interviewing one of the most famous men in the world?'

'He's not that famous,' I protested. 'Wow, Louisa was pissed off.'

'Is this because Mark is coming? Because you're better than that, you know.'

I paused before answering. 'Actually no, it's not just that,' I said. 'It's really something I have to do. It's an amazing opportunity, isn't it? I mean, I'm not going to lie, I'm a bit relieved that I'm not going to see him, it's not top of my list of things to do this weekend, but I do have to go to LA. I'm gutted that I'm not going to see you though.'

'Right.'

'Lou, please don't be mad?' I begged.

'I'm not mad,' she sighed eventually. 'I'm just sad that I won't get to see you. But yeah, it's no contest really, is it? I can see why you'd rather nip off to LA and meet James Jacobs than hang around in freezing New York for the week.'

And for the first time, so did I.

'You're amazing,' I smiled, excitement and relief bubbling up in my stomach. 'I'm going to email you with all the incredible places you have to go and you call me if you get stuck for anything to do at any time, OK?' We said goodbye and I hung up, breathed in deeply and then pressed speed-dial without even looking. 'Cici? Can I come in later and book my flights? I go on Saturday, right?'

Chapter Three