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**Opening Extract from...**

# The Perfect Location

Written by Kate Forster

Published by AVON

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KATE FORSTER

# *The Perfect Location*

AVON

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entirely coincidental.

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There is not a writer who is published who doesn't owe somebody something at some point in their career. Writing books is collaborative, even though a few writers' egos might argue otherwise.

Without the following people in my life, who knows where I would be and what I would be doing. I want to say thank you to them, it's not nearly enough but it's a start. Yes, I could drop them a bottle of wine and a thank you card but I would prefer to see their names in print for posterity and all that jazz. They put up with me; they deserve something more concrete than a Pinot Grigio and a scrawled note. Trust me, I can be hard work.

*Warning: gushing ahead. Look away if it offends.

To my mother Joan who never censored the books in our house and who has champagne taste and a song for everything.

To Emma and Fiona for being the first readers of everything I write. Thank you for telling me to keep writing. I am here now, because of you both. You are my ideal readers and ideal best girlfriends.

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And to David for understanding I didn't have a choice and wanting me to be happy more than anything else.

**For Nicole whose 'deliberately vague'**
**directions steered me here.**

PART ONE

# Pre-Production

# CHAPTER ONE

Rose Nightingale walked into LAX, hiding behind large Dior sunglasses and ignoring the photographers that lurked at the international terminal, waiting for celebrities to come and go. They took their chance to harangue them, usually when they were holding travel-weary children and pushing a trolley full of luggage. It didn't matter how fabulous you were, travel was travel and it was a bore.

As Rose approached the United Lounge, she was greeted by a flight attendant who ushered her inside a door to the sanctity of the private space.

'Hello, Ms Nightingale. May I have your passport, please?'

Rose handed it over with a smile.

'Can I offer you champagne and a light snack?'

'No, thanks,' said Rose as the attendant led her towards a private seating area.

Rose's phone rang and she answered it as she sat down in a corner of the lounge, ignoring the flickers of recognition from other travellers.

'Slapper,' said Rose, seeing Kelly's name appear on her phone.

'Tosser, you all ready for Italia?' Kelly's thick Northern accent came down the line and Rose smiled at the sound of her oldest friend's voice.

'All sorted, babe. You and Chris there already?'

'Yeah, we got here two days ago. Shit, it's gorgeous, Rosie.

You're gonna flip when you see your villa, I checked it out yesterday, although the housekeeper is like something out of central casting. "Super Nonna", I call her.'

Rose laughed. Kelly always had a way with words that summed up a person or a situation perfectly.

Rose and Kelly were from different parts of England, both geographically and economically but these differences were never remarked upon or noticed even by each other. The only acknowledgements they made to their upbringings were their nicknames referencing people's perceptions of them, Rose being an upper class girl and Kelly being from Yorkshire.

Rose was the daughter of a successful novelist and a television writer. Her intellectual father had been nominated for the Pulitzer twice and her mother created and wrote a popular crime series for television. Rose moved amongst the society crowd at her private day school and her brief relationship with a minor European royal gave her enough social currency to be named the most eligible girl in England by *Tatler* magazine. Appearing on the cover in a dress handmade by Lacroix himself from fresh rose petals, the headline read 'A Rose by any Other Name'. Rose could have then married well and faded away from fame with an occasional photo in the social pages of *Jennifer's Diary*.

But Rose was no wallflower or country wife and she decided on a more precarious road, successfully auditioning for acting school in London. She worked hard at the school to be more than just the beautiful girl, but never overcame the stigma of being close to perfect.

It was the other women on her course who were the worst in their treatment of Rose. Deliberately excluding her from parties and events and even at one point calling a group meeting with her where they each told her what they disliked

about her in a round circle as a way of 'helping her fit in more'. Rose despaired, her self-esteem was gone, her confidence shot, and she hated herself and the way she looked.

It was Kelly who saved Rose from losing her mind. Students from The London School of Make-up Artistry were to create the make-up for the third year students' production of William Congreve's *Love for Love*. Rose had the lead role and Kelly, the best student in the course, was given Rose as her subject.

The heavy Restoration make-up required for the play meant Rose was in the chair earlier than the other actors. Even though Kelly liked to call herself psychic, it didn't take much to realize that Rose was ostracized from the rest of the cast. Kelly thought Rose seemed pleasant enough, if not a little quiet.

As the play's short run went on, Kelly realized that Rose was on the outside of the circle, deliberately punished for her beauty and her background. A shared joint at the cast party between Rose and Kelly bonded them. Kelly made an effort to include Rose in her group of interesting and creative friends from the make-up school and Rose was grateful for the company. Kelly's friends were without the affectations of her school friends and without the competitiveness of her acting school peers. They celebrated Rose's beauty and encouraged her to try new looks and styles with her face and even her clothes.

Kelly's belief in new age philosophies was at odds at her country upbringing and it was something that Rose was interested in. She wasn't sure she believed in it, but was always surprised at Kelly's ability to intuit what another person was feeling.

'You are a rose in a field of onion grass,' Kelly said to her best friend after she graduated. 'You need to go to America where they will appreciate you more.'

Rose ended up taking the US by storm and when it was Rose's turn to help Kelly after she had made her mark in Hollywood she did it without a moment's doubt. Rose got Kelly a job as an extra's make-up artist on her next film, and soon Kelly was on her way to becoming the most sought after make-up artist in Hollywood.

Bringing her thoughts back to the present, Rose tuned in to Kelly's voice on the other end of the phone.

'Hey, are Wendy and Bruce coming over to stay?' asked Kelly.

'I don't know. They're being weird about it. I think Mum thinks it all a bit much, you know, Italy and flights for her and Dad. I asked Martin and Fiona and the kids too. I just think it would be nice to spend some time together. It's not like I'm heading back to London anytime soon.'

'I'm going back for Christmas,' said Kelly.

'Really?' said Rose, not noticing the surprised faces looking at her.

'I want to show him Skipton.'

'Well, that should take half a day, what else will you do while you're back in your old stomping ground?' Rose teased.

'Piss off, big city girl,' laughed Kelly. 'We're going to visit my family and then head to London for a few days, you should come back with us,' Kelly asked impulsively, although she already knew the answer.

Rose smiled thinking of her and Kelly in London. Drinking, dancing, more drinking. God, they had had so much fun until Rose moved to Hollywood.

'I don't think so, the English paps are relentless.' Rose claimed it was too much hassle on her family to come back to London with the constant media intrusion. The truth was that Rose had only been back a handful of times in fifteen years and only then for fleeting visits, staying in a suite at The Dorchester.

Shooting *The Italian Dream* would give her the perfect opportunity to bring the Nightingales together in Italy on her own terms. When her agent was negotiating the deal, she had a number of villas to choose from. Rose chose the one with the most bedrooms on offer for her family and their brood.

Lauren, her trusted assistant, had organized a myriad of inflatable toys to be FedExed over, so Rose's nieces and nephews could play in the infinity pool looking over the endless hills of Umbria. She had also sent board games, dolls and books and had a Wii installed in the den, with a large flat screen TV and a huge selection of DVDs.

'No, I can't come back to London, I'm booked up till the middle of next year, so that's why I wanted them to come to see me,' said Rose. 'Hey, I'm really looking forward to working with TG,' she said, in an effort to change the subject quickly.

'TG's really excited to work with you too, he told Chris,' said Kelly.

'He's a great guy, I'm surprised we've never worked together till now,' said Rose.

'TG', as everyone in the industry called him, was Tim Galvin, the hottest young gun director in Hollywood. A teenage skateboarding world champion who became an NYC film graduate, he made his mark directing videos for some of the LA garage band scene. He shot his films quickly, used quick edits and loud soundtracks, he possessed a rare gift: he could create a happy film set. His best friend and Director of Photography was Chris Berman, Kelly's husband.

'He's a good egg,' said Kelly, 'although he's been around a lot since he and Lisa broke up. He's a bit mopey, I need to find him a root.'

'She was a piece of work,' said Rose, mentioning TG's ambitious actress girlfriend. 'He's better off without her. I only

met her at your place but she was scary, like a reptile. He seemed sad at the audition, more low-key than usual although maybe he was nervous.'

'Probably. I think he was amazed you agreed to audition but he said the studio wanted to see all the women.'

'Oh God, I don't mind auditioning,' laughed Rose. 'Puts me back in my box, reminds me that the fame is fleeting.'

''Tis true, 'tis true,' said Kelly. 'So, call me when you arrive, yeah? I miss you like crazy, Tosser.'

'Love you too, Slapper. Call me every five minutes,' said Rose, giggling at the use of their old names for each other.

Rose settled down in the chair and opened her script. She already knew her lines but she always liked to do as much work as possible. As she read the scenes between her and her on-screen lover, she wondered who it would be. Her agent Randy said that the role wasn't cast yet but she was so keen to be a part of the film, she signed on without knowing who would take the role opposite her. For a brief moment she panicked it might be Paul but then she dismissed it with a silent laugh. There was no way the universe or TG would be cruel enough to cast her ex-husband, she thought.

Rose stared out the window, watching the planes take off and land. The LA smog was settling in over the city and she hoped it would not affect the flight. She despised lateness and lived by a rigid schedule. Organization gave her a sense of control.

A text message came through on her iPhone from her equally organized assistant, Lauren: *Car service will pick you up on arrival and drive you to the villa. If you get stuck then call Guilia, TG's assistant. I have keyed number into your phone.*

Rose already had this information printed out neatly on her letterhead, tucked away safely in her iris calf leather Smythson

travel wallet. But she appreciated Lauren's attention to detail and concern.

Rose poached Lauren from the director, Jerry Hyman, who Rose was shooting a film with after her divorce from Paul. Daily she had watched him berate Lauren and abuse her in front of the crew. His constant comments about her weight, sexual innuendos and the ridiculous demands that she had to fulfil became painful for everyone to watch. Rose saw Lauren losing her self-esteem, wanting to please the obese tyrant and failing at every turn. Towards the end of shooting, she took her lunch tray over to sit with Lauren who was typing on the computer, with five mobile phones in front of her. Each one was labelled neatly in Dymo labels: *Home, Studio, LA, NY, Other.*

Rose put her tray aside and sat down. Lauren looked up, surprise registered on her face. 'Um. Hi,' she said.

'Hi, yourself,' replied Rose sunnily. 'How are things?'

Lauren looked at the screen, 'Fine, fine, Jerry's very busy. I've always got something to do.'

Rose looked at the phones. 'So, let me guess,' she said as she picked up the phones and laid them out in front of her. '*Home* is the wife and kids. *LA* is his agent and the studio. *NY* is his dealer. And *Other* is his whores. How did I do?'

Lauren looked shocked, and then pulled herself together. 'No, no, entirely wrong.' Rose smiled and bit into her apple.

Lauren went back to typing, feeling unnerved by Rose's correct guesses about Jerry's many phones. The stars never talked to her. Granted, Rose seemed nicer than most. Just that morning she had raised her eyebrows comically at Lauren when the director went on one of his tirades at Lauren because his latte was too hot.

Looking at Lauren's eyes twitch and her mouth tighten, Rose

wondered what the notorious director had done to her. She knew his reputation; he liked to dominate women in every way. Rose herself was too much of a class act and too outspoken for his tastes. He liked them young, thankful and ambitious.

Rose pondered a little longer then said casually, 'Anyway, I have a job opening. I really need an assistant. They need to be super organized. I like lists and Apple Macs.' She stared disdainfully at the PC Lauren was working on. 'I only have one mobile phone, so that may be a put-off to any potential applicants. I can offer them their own office, a BMW and I promise to never hit them with a phone. I will not make them do ridiculous jobs; I'm capable of buying my own tampons. I need help with schedules, Christmas and birthday lists, help with some of the charities that I work with. And someone to field the media and my agent.' She smiled at Lauren and walked away. Always leave them wanting more, she thought, as she felt Lauren's eyes on her.

That evening, after speaking to Lauren on set, Rose found Lauren's professional CV and cover letter expressing her interest in the job on hotel stationery, slipped under her hotel room door. Rose smiled when she opened the envelope; she knew Lauren was perfect for her.

The boarding call sounded over the loudspeaker and Rose's mind was brought back to the present. Rose walked to the desk, and handed her passport and boarding pass to the flight attendant. The girl took them with a smile and then passed them back to her. 'Thank you, Ms Nightingale, your flight to Italy is boarding now.'

Rose placed her passport in her bag and headed towards the plane. Italy, here I come, she thought, excited by the idea of living in a new country, even for a short amount of time.

* * *

Rose arrived in Perugia reasonably relaxed, although feeling a little grimy. As predicted by the wonderful Lauren, her car was indeed waiting for her. Surprisingly, there were no paparazzi lurking around and Rose was relieved. I hope this continues, she thought, as she sank into the back seat of the Mercedes.

When she arrived at the villa and got out of the car, the housekeeper stood on the front step, waiting to greet the surrogate grandchildren she assumed were coming from all the toys that had been sent over.

Instead it was just Rose who shook her hand and walked inside the cool foyer. Lucia walked over to the car to check there were no children inside. She shook her head. 'Bizarro,' she mumbled as she followed Rose inside.

Rose was tired but not enough to dull the beauty of her new home for the summer. A restored 200-year-old villa, it was surrounded by green lawns and a grove of olive trees to one side. There was a magnificent outdoor terrace, covered in grapevines and wisteria, giving much-needed shade throughout the day. The pool looked out over the hills and the garden was filled with roses, lemon trees and lavenders.

Inside were six bedrooms, each with its own bathroom. Lauren had sent Rose's luggage by FedEx with all the toys, so Rose didn't have to wait at the airport. Lucia had hung all her clothes in the solid oak wardrobes, marvelling at the tissue paper and the scented sachets from Maryse à Paris. Her Smythson beauty case had been unpacked and all her toiletries had been placed carefully in the bathroom cupboards. The Egyptian cotton sheets with a 250 thread count had been washed and dried in the Umbrian sun by Lucia and placed on the bed.

'Signorina, you want something to eat?' asked Lucia hopefully. She was looking forward to feeding up this skinny girl with her imaginary children.

Rose smiled. 'No, maybe just a cup of tea and a biscuit. I might have a bath and lie down for a while.'

Lucia wandered off, mumbling in Italian to herself. Rose thought she heard her saying something about ghost children and she reminded herself to listen more to the Italian lessons on her iPod. Ghost children, she thought. My Italian is worse than I thought.

Rose walked into the bathroom. It was astonishing, even by Rose's Hollywood standards. The floors were covered with beautiful stone tiles in natural colours and the surrounding walls whitewashed. At the end of the room were three steps that led down into a large sunken tub. Above the tub was a leadlight window that opened wide, letting the warm summer breeze float into the room.

At the foot of the tub was a gorgeous gift basket filled with a selection of products from Santa Maria Novella, a 13th century apothecary, once run by Dominican monks with a note from the film's producers welcoming her and thanking her for taking the role in the film. The handmade basket was overflowing with vanilla bath and shower gels, pomegranate bath salts, lily and rose water, summer candles smelling of the sea and a selection of fragrances including honeysuckle, opoponax, orange blossom, tuberose, and the stunning Angels of Florence perfume – a blend of jasmine, lilac, peach, violet and white musk.

Lying next to the basket of scented items was a tower of towels, all with the Frette crest embroidered on them, an exquisitely folded ivory bathrobe, several quilted spa mitts and a pile of beautifully folded bath sheets in dusk and sandstone.

Tiredness washed over Rose and she sat on the antique armchair in the corner of the room. Lucia knocked at the open door and saw how weary Rose seemed. Clucking in Italian and

bustling into the bathroom, she walked over and turned on the water in the bath. Rummaging through the basket of bath and body goodies, Lucia pulled out citrus bath oil and poured a few drops under the running water. She undid the robe and shook out the bath sheets.

'Come, signorina. Time to bathe, very nice for you, quiet. I bring you your tea, yes?'

Rose nodded her acceptance and was actually grateful for someone taking over while she was in her jet-lagged state.

Lucia felt the temperature of the water. 'All ready now, signorina.' She left the bathroom and brought back a tray with a silver teapot with strainer, a bone china cup and saucer, a small matching pitcher of milk and tiny bowl of little sugar cubes, a silver spoon and a selection of Italian biscuits and left Rose alone.

Rose slowly undressed and stepped down into the tub. If this was Italy, then I never want to leave, she thought.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Lucia moaned to her husband, the gardener, about Rose. No children, too skinny, too old, should be married . . . the list went on of Lucia's complaints about Rose. It wouldn't do, said Lucia to herself, deciding then and there she would have to draw Rose's future to her. All the women in the family had the gift and Lucia knew she had no choice but to magic a man and some children into Rose's life. *Pronto*!

## CHAPTER TWO

Calypso Gable woke up, fully dressed, in the biggest suite of the Hotel Brufani Palace in Perugia and checked her phone for the time. Nine o'clock in the evening. Damn, she had slept all day, she thought, exhausted from jet-lag.

She wanted to be amongst the action, not stuck in a villa in the country, playing house. Basing herself in the city of Perugia meant she could stroll the streets and explore with almost no one recognizing her. Her TV show had not been shown in Italy and her latest film had yet to be released in Europe. Besides tourists, no one knew who she was and she was looking forward to exploring the city and some of the gorgeous antique shops she had spied on the drive through the city to her hotel.

She was shocked that she had won the role. Rumour was that Jessica Biel, Carey Mulligan, and Scarlett Johansson were up for the role. Calypso only went because her manager told her she needed to be seen by a better class of directors.

Calypso hadn't worked with the director, TG, as he was known, but she did know his ex-girlfriend, Lisa. She had always been on the make, trying to get up the next step of the career ladder, fucking and sucking her way to the top. She had made quite a few films, starring in supporting roles and then starting to get more leading roles. Labelled as the next Indie Queen, she and TG were the star couple of LA and New York.

But Calypso knew it was all bullshit. She had seen girls like her before over the years. Underneath the façade of the intellectual, art house style she displayed was just another actress desperate for the Spielberg epic and the paycheque.

Now the ex was dating a studio head, Calypso had heard. An obese, sweaty man who was notorious for his penchant for sexually deviant activities. His favourite was having his partner bite him during sex, all over, till he was black and blue; he loved it even more when they drew blood, apparently. Calypso shuddered at the thought.

The audition for *The Italian Dream* had been torturous. Calypso was nervous and said 'fuck' throughout the meeting and drank from the Coke can on the table until she realized it wasn't hers but the director's. He hadn't seemed to mind and seemed to be okay as far as directors went. At least he didn't try to hit on her but he looked at her oddly throughout the audition and she wondered of she had something in her teeth.

She knew she gave a shocking read and although she could do the part, she fucked it up and would have put money on Scarlett getting the role. But apparently the director saw something in her that she didn't see in herself, her manager said when she rang with the news.

To celebrate, she had spent a morning at the Miu Miu store in LA, hoping to channel the Italian style she admired so much while trawling *The Sartorialist*. Now she looked at the piles of luggage piled in the corner of the suite and wondered if it was too much. The store on Rodeo Drive had closed for her for two hours while she tried on everything. Calypso now had in her possession bags and boxes of the latest season and even some of the upcoming season that had not yet been copied by Zara. Miu Miu's classic, super cool

look wasn't exactly Calypso's style – she preferred something a little more eclectic – but what the hell, she could always accessorize to make it a little more Calypso and a little less Miuccia.

Calypso had left the Miu Miu store in a carbon wool-fringed short jacket over her white American Vintage t-shirt. The jacket dressed up her black J Brand cigarette-style jeans and brought an almost European style to her California look. She had swept back her perfectly lightened blond hair – 'Buttercup', her colourist called it. Calypso's hair was one of her signatures and she returned to the salon every two weeks to have her roots done. A natural redhead, with tight corkscrew curls, she now wore her hair long and straight, courtesy of the Brazilian blow waves she got every six weeks. With a tiny frame and lean muscles courtesy of a combination of yoga, Pilates and a fat-free vegetarian existence, Calypso had a pretty voice and an even prettier face.

As she lay in the hotel bed thinking of the shopping spree, she remembered the paparazzi hounding her in LA outside Miu Miu. Some actors sought that attention, even tipping them off themselves with their whereabouts. But not Calypso. The media's intrusion was a recent problem for her. Now that she was a part of the film circus, she understood that often the film studios started the rumours and hired the photographers to drive the heat and interest for whatever vehicle they were pushing. Calypso wondered who had made the call to them. Her studio, her stylist, or was it one of the store employees? The more she thought about it, Calypso began to suspect who had tipped off the media, and it made sense the longer she considered it.

She remembered the last conversation with Leeza before she left for Italy.

'Hi, Mom.' Calypso had answered her cell phone impatiently; they'd only spoken an hour ago.

'Hi, baby!' Leeza breathed. Always so eager. 'How was shopping?'

'It was great, Mom. But . . . err . . . Mom . . .' Calypso licked her lips nervously. Why was she always nervous when questioning her mother?

'Mom, did you tip off the paps?' Calypso was smart enough to know she wasn't a big enough celebrity yet for her studio to have called in such an overwhelming number of photographers.

'I just made one call. Were there many there?' Leeza had sounded happy – she thought all publicity was good publicity, especially when you were an unknown.

'Mom, it's not good. It's weird. It makes me look desperate and sad. Leave that shit for Miley and Lindsay. Greg will kill me when he finds out. He's being really careful about my exposure right now. You know this already! Jesus!'

'Have you heard from Greg or Mandy?' asked Leeza, ignoring Calypso's frustration.

Calypso's hiring of a new manager, Mandy, had replaced her mother who had held the title since Calypso was six years old and in her first commercial. The decision resulted in a huge fight with Leeza who locked herself in the bathroom for six hours at Calypso's house. She only emerged after Calypso slid a back copy of *Variety*, with an article on Mandy in it, under the door and was finally satisfied that Mandy might be able to do the job.

Now Calypso felt free as she lay in bed. Free from Leeza, the paparazzi and from LA. Stretching, she stepped out of bed, peeled off her Burberry silk shorts and Calvin Klein singlet and walked into the bathroom. Turning on the shower she

examined herself in the mirror. Her hair looked amazing, straight and yet with body, thanks to the blow-dry she had just before she left LA. She was due to have another in six weeks but since she was on set for twelve weeks, she wondered if they had them in Italy. She reminded herself to ask Kelly, the head make-up artist on the film, although it may cost a lot here compared to US prices.

Calypso lived on a budget, despite her moderate wealth. It was too easy to overspend and she was mindful of her money, having worked so hard for so long. Besides, Leeza was always in her mind, reminding her never to stray from her budget. It wasn't as though Calypso was tight with money, however, she was just very aware of what it was like not to have any. No one but her and Leeza and her father knew how tough things had been for them when she was trying to make it in Hollywood. All the money her father had earned had gone into nurturing Calypso's talent. Although her father had a job, it was meagre pay and trying to make it in Hollywood was expensive. Dancing lessons, headshots, acting lessons, clothes, and flights for auditions to New York for the attempts to make it on Broadway. Her agents and lawyers both demanded a cut when she did work and it was a struggle at times. Calypso knew her parents had gone without for her. She remembered the nights without electricity; the beans on toast for dinner, or sometimes just the beans. Once she found her father in the yard, nailing the soles of his work shoes back together.

The sense of responsibility Calypso felt to ensure she was successful and to look after her parents was what drove her – and what stopped her from losing her head. Calypso had been offered drugs, sex and all the other temptations during her years growing up but she abstained, thinking of the faith

her parents had placed in their only child's talent. Whenever she was interviewed, Calypso painted the picture that she was the typical California girl, growing up in middle-class affluence and wanting for nothing. She claimed she grew up in the house she had actually bought for her parents in Brentwood, whereas in fact she and Leeza and her dad went from place to place until the money ran out. Leeza would check them into rough hotels and trailer parks when the money was really low. Sometimes they skipped paying the bill if they could, just to save a few dollars here and there.

It all changed for a while when Calypso was cast on a variety show, singing and dancing her little heart out until she grew breasts and the show was cancelled. Calypso received the news she had been let go the day before the producer found out the show had been cancelled. She never told anyone, only she and Leeza knew. That day, Leeza sent out a press release saying that Calypso was leaving to explore other opportunities. It was a smart move. She was always seen as the kid who left early and avoided being a part of an axed show. Leeza was considered an excellent manager for knowing when it was time for Calypso to move on.

The next opportunity did not come though until Calypso was nineteen. She did a few bit parts and commercials and this helped the bank balance. She urged her parents to use the money she earned from the show but her father wouldn't hear of it, so they were back to where they were before. Scrounging and living hand to mouth, job to job.

Now she was in Italy, shooting a film with Rose Nightingale and Sapphira De Mont. She could hardly believe it. Rose Nightingale was her hero and Sapphira De Mont was the hottest star in Hollywood. Why the director, TG, had asked for her, she had no idea. She wasn't a huge name yet, and certainly

not in film, she had thought when Mandy had rung to her gauge her interest in auditioning for TG.

Against Leeza's advice, she had knocked back the action film that was on offer and had jumped at the chance to act opposite Rose and Sapphira. This was her chance to move into the big league. No more TV, only film and opposite the best actresses in Hollywood. Convincing Leeza was a different story though.

'But, honey, if you take the action movie, think about it. A percentage of the profits, royalties, Comic-Con appearances and your own action figure. You'll be a movie star, honey, big time.'

'Mom, a movie star is different to an actor. Cameron Diaz is a movie star. Meryl Streep is an actor. You can't be both. Well, maybe if you're Reese Witherspoon, but there aren't many others. I want to be an actor.'

'Being a movie star is what we always wanted,' Leeza said, forgetting she had recently been demoted in Calypso's life from manager to mother, as she carefully prepared the salad with no-fat dressing for a family barbeque, protecting her acrylic nails with a new French manicure.

No, Mom, it's what you wanted, thought Calypso.

But she said nothing. Instead she signed on the next day, letting Leeza know her decision via text message. It was time she ran her own life, she thought and now that she was in Italy, she was excited.

Showered and dressed in a towel, she read the room service menu. 'Blah,' she said, putting it down again.

Wandering over to the window, she looked outside. She had meant to go for a run when she got back to the hotel but the tiredness from the jet-lag was still in her system and instead she fell asleep, fully dressed, until sounds from outside

drifted up to her window. It was nine o'clock at night, but it seemed most people were only now going out for dinner. What the hell, she thought, I'm going out.

Opening her wardrobe, she chose a pair of black vintage cigarette silk pants and teamed them with a floaty silver Catherine Malandrino camisole and pink Costume Nationale flat sandals. The hills of Perugia would murder her heels; flats were sensible and Calypso was always sensible, particularly when it came to looking after her clothes. Leaving her hair down, she grabbed a vintage beaded clutch and skipped through the door into the bustle outside.

Wandering around the ancient city, the sound of smooth jazz came up a laneway and Calypso followed the music.

She found herself in an elegant thoroughfare filled with laughing students from the university, families with sleeping children in strollers and tourists all mingling together in the warm evening.

The cafés were filled with people who spilled out onto the stone ledges and steps, listening to the jazz. Calypso thought she knew the song from an old album her dad used to play. 'There's a somebody I'm longing to see, I hope that he turns out to be, someone who'll watch over me,' she sang quietly to herself.

An older couple walked out in front of the band and started to dance to the old Gershwin classic and Calypso felt her eyes fill with tears as she saw the tenderness on the man's face.

It was an almost perfect moment except for the gnawing in Calypso's stomach. I haven't eaten in fourteen hours, she counted as she moved towards some bright lights in the side of a stone wall. *Sandri Pasticceria* it read. The window boasted some of the most delicious pastries Calypso had ever seen.

Never would she allow herself something so fat-filled in LA but here, without the gaze of the paparazzi and her trainer, Calypso decided to live a little. Stepping inside the crowded shop, she was pushed forward by the crowd until she found herself at a stool at the marble bar.

A red-coated waiter placed a chocolate-filled pastry with glazed berries on top of it in front of her with a cappuccino. 'I didn't order this,' she said to the waiter who had already turned his back. She sat awkwardly, unsure of what to do.

'I would just eat it,' said a voice next to her over the din in the bar.

Calypso turned and was faced with Eros himself. Impossibly handsome, with long, light brown hair loose and curling around his face. Smiling at Calypso, his teeth were the whitest and straightest that Calypso had ever seen, which was quite something, considering she lived in California, the state of orthodontists. '*Ciao, bella*,' he said, his green eyes dancing as he took in her face.

'Hello, gorgeous,' said Calypso, doing her best Barbra Streisand impersonation.

'I know that voice, that's Barbra, *si*?'

Calypso laughed, 'Yes, that's Barbra.'

'*Mangia*,' he said, gesturing.

Calypso paused. It did look divine and saying a little prayer to the God of Cellulite to stay away, she took a bite.

'Oh my God, it's amazing.' She sputtered pastry flakes across the table, not caring to wipe the chocolate cream from her mouth.

The Italian watched her, amused. 'You like?'

'I like,' said Calypso, her mouth full.

'So, what is your name? Barbra?'

'No,' she laughed. 'Calypso,' she smiled shyly.

'Beautiful name, the nymph of the sea, *si*? I am Marco. Lord of the planet Mars.'

His bewitching accent and the way he looked so intently at her, as if wanting her approval was endearing. Calypso smiled. She had made her first Italian friend.