

Dance Shoes, Dreams and Lattes: Chapter One

That's it, I've decided to make some changes, I'm twenty-three and I'm sitting here with a box of fluffy white tissues blowing my nose over Eastenders! How ridiculous. Although things could be worse, I could be totally skint with a limp, a bump on my right shoulder and have a hole in my shoe! Oh no, I've got to get out of here! Surely there's a glimmer of hope left for me in my life filled with dreams and jacket potatoes? Maybe...maybe it's about time I got a job! I know...I've been putting it off but someone's got to pay the bills. It'll only be whilst I'm finishing college, just a couple of days a week.

Carina convinced herself of this revelation and then spent about twenty-five minutes talking herself out of it. Carina Guarda...blessed with good looks, charisma, wittiness and a great smile, although, she'd never admit it to you. Her few annoying habits include fidgeting on a whole, not being able to keep still if nerves or excitement fill her veins, not a great sight when the two are combined might I add! And last but certainly not least, repeating herself during story telling...So annoying!

Carina rented a flat near where she studied, that her very loving parents funded, along with the Performing Arts College. Only until she could stand on her own two feet, which really ought to be when her acting, singing, dancing diploma was over. They faithfully believed in her.

"You'll go far you will," they'd always say. "Just keep your head down and never give up." Mr and Mrs Guarda owned a small, quaint deli in Hampstead and earned just enough for their baby's education and to keep a nice home.

"So like, if I get this job then I won't be able to...practice. And I won't be able to go on auditions. I won't..." she said out loud in the mirror, counting on her fingers as the ideas popped into her head.

"I know...pros and cons, I'll write a list...always works!" she said, waving her finger in the air knowledgeably whilst reaching for her journal. She scribbled on the top edge of the page:

Reasons why I should/shouldn't Get A Job?

Pros: Cons:

- | | |
|----------|---------------------|
| 1. Money | 1. No audition time |
| 2. Money | 2. No practice time |
| 3. Money | 3. No day time TV |
| | 4. Hate 9-5's |

5. Irritating public transport at rush hour

“Okay—not helping,” she said, as she threw her pen across her bed and reached for the phone.

“Hello.”

“Oh hi, babes, it’s me, what are you up to?” She’d called her closest friend to give her some sanity. Sandra was Carina’s oldest friend, they’d been pals since junior school and she only lived five minutes away from Carina’s flat. Sandra was also twenty-three and had a full-time job working as a nanny. Her ambition was that one-day, she’d open her own nursery and she’d call it “Bambini.” A desperately trust-worthy and reliable companion and always seemed to be the one of the group that kept the rest of them in check, I guess you could’ve said she was the mother hen of the girls. Favourite colour, pink and I mean, FAVOURITE and PINK! Practically everything in her room was pink, including her little trinket sets on her dresser, candle holders dressed in pink stones hanging daintily from the rim and pretty nets with matching lined curtains with tie backs...All in pink, she couldn’t get enough of it; she seriously had some issues and it was getting slightly out of control! Anyway, don’t let that cloud your judgement, she was pretty clued up on the ways of the world, plus the girls have been trying their very hardest to wean her off it gradually, by introducing other pastels into her life! Blues and greens, that sort of thing, although, it proved to be a difficult task to say the least!

They were typical girly girls. They were your regular “let’s do a makeover” kind of girls. “A good manicure never hurt anyone,” one of Carina’s famous sayings!

“Well I’m just sitting at home deciding on what to do with my dull—dreary—life! Nothing seems to be going on on the audition front; no one is interested in me. Oh I’m just feeling sorry for myself! How’s your day been?”

“Oh no, honey, I’m sorry...My day’s been fine thanks and I’ve actually got some news for you...some GREAT news for you,” replied Sandra, trying to keep her cool. Carina could tell in her thick, shaky voice, that she had something big to tell her, something like HUGE big!

“Well. What? Oh...don’t leave me hanging, com’on you always do this and you know how much it gets on my nerves!”

“Are you sitting down?”

“No I’m not! I’m standing. Why? What is it? What’s going on?” Carina responded in complete and utter anguish, jumping around on the spot as though she needed to use the bathroom.

“WHAT? WHAT?” She was now fidgeting like mad.

Sandra told her to calm down and then prepared herself by clearing her throat.

“Okay, I know a friend of a friend, of her friend’s friend, who knows an agent, a really good one, he’s looking for some acts and I think I can set up a meeting for you, it’s a long shot but hey, it’s worth a try. Could be the answer to all your prayers!...Hello? Hello? Carina? What the...”

“Oh. My. GOD! Oh my God, sorry, I think I just passed out! Did I hear you okay? Are you serious? What friend? Ohmygod ohmygod!” Carina said, quizzing her friend as though she doubted her! She couldn’t believe her ears or her luck.

Knowing how ruthless the industry was, Carina knew how hard it was to get a meeting with an agent, and getting someone to talk to you or even look at you without an agent is like trying to fit an elephant through a keyhole!

"It's Susanna, you met her that time in Q's, but you probably don't remember her? The one with brown curly hair!"

Q's was a bar they often went to. They'd meet up with friends, Alice and Rosalia, have white wine spritzers and natter all evening about boys, makeup and clothes! Sometimes they'd move onto more heart wrenching issues such as famine and world peace, but most of the time it would end in tears so they left those topics for cosy nights in over hot chocolate.

Alice, twenty-five, a junior journalist for a fashion magazine, New York Style, writing articles and columns such as "What not to wear on a first date" or "The Do's and Don'ts in fashion," not that she was necessarily more equipped than anyone else with this information, just a case of—somebody had to write it, why not her! She loved it anyway, mingling with the fake and flawless, the fashion victims, the snotty, the beautiful and the kind of people who say "did-she-have-a-power-cut-whilst-getting-ready?" turning up their noses at anyone in less than Prada. Apart from that, besides all the bitches and pretentious people, what she enjoyed most was the freebees! She'd be the first with something new or exquisite in her wardrobe. Some of which Carina had the pleasure in swiping every now and then! But Alice was a chancer; she loved taking risks and never knowing the outcome of trying something new.

Rosalia, aka Rosie, was born to be a cook, but studied like a dog at university to become a vet. Animals were her thing, she couldn't walk past a pup in the street without making "arhhing" noises like women do over babies "akuchi kuchi kuuuuu!" In fact she owned her very own pooch, Feefee, who followed her everywhere, she wasn't quite as sad as putting Feefee in a bag and carrying her around with her all day...but there was still time! She was a beautiful little cotton wool type looking thing. Very cute, except when she peed on the kitchen floor through the night, which Rosie inevitably slipped in the next morning from being half-asleep due to alcohol intoxication the night before!

"Okay I'm going to keep my cool, show determination, pretend it's all alright!" Carina said out loud after having put down the phone on Sandra whilst she paced the room nervously, clicking her knuckles and pausing every few seconds to think, wringing her hands, then changing directions! "Shit, I totally forgot to ask who it was. Oh, Lord, give me strength!" she asked herself in a singing voice.

She punched the 02085521346 keys on her phone frantically.

"Hello, Sandy? Who is it then?" she blurted out without so much as a hello back from Sandra.

"His name is Danny La Franca. Apparently he's cool but there's one tiny teeny little catch though..." responded Sandra, gritting her teeth and squinting her eyes as though she was waiting for a bus to hit her! "He's based in New York...He's in London at the moment. We've got to move quick on this one, before he goes back!"

“Are you joking? OMG, so what makes you so sure he’s even going to want to meet me? I mean, he’s a big cat. New York...Oh jeez, let’s do this, let’s set up a meeting if we can and see what happens,” Carina replied with her hand across her forehead miming to herself...Shit shit shit!

Friday 23rd April—2:00 am

I CAN NOT believe it. I can’t sleep! Pissing meeting going round and round in my head...“Hi my name’s Carina, nice to meet you” no, no...“Thanks for meeting with me, I’m Carina.” Agggghhh! I’ve got to get up early to plan for my day and my meeting, and counting sheep just isn’t working! Can’t believe it’s on tomorrow already!...Must get to sleep, 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...Will remember it forever, will make sure I’m alert and I show I know what I want...maybe he’ll make me sing in front of him...oh shit! Maybe even dance...Oh double shit! Maybe I should get up and rehearse what I’m going to do or should I leave it and do it off the cuff so it’ll seem more natural? Ohhhhhhhhhhh! Sleeeeeep, sleeeeeep, and sleeeeeep, sleeee, sl...

Carina woke up face down on her journal at 8:00 am. “HI NICE TO...” she blurted out as though she’d been dreaming about this meeting for about six years, whilst she sprung bolt upright from a warm cosy bed. She stumbled out dragging the duvet behind her and peered out the window only moving the curtain slightly to a bright sky with a slight breeze through the trees and she imagined the smell of summer coming...A nice day, good sign, she thought, and then flicked the kettle on. Scratching her head with one hand and rubbing her eye with the other, she eventually dragged a mug from the cupboard in front of her and made herself a good, strong coffee, stuffing a piece of toast with marmite into her mouth, making a complete mess of it.

“What to wear, what to wear?” she said, springing into action. “Smart jeans? Casual jeans? Errrm...” Again out loud whilst nibbling a nail. “Trendy or girly?”

She decided to jump into the shower and have a further think whilst scrubbing, polishing and detangling. Her meeting was scheduled for 10.30 am. Carina decided on a hugging pair of hipster jeans, a cute pair of pink round-toed shoes with two and a half-inch heels, and a white cotton camisole top—simple yet sophisticated. Her bag had a mixture of all the colours in, a design of embroidered butterflies on a pink shoulder bag.

Her long brown hair swayed in the breeze, almost like a L’Oreal hair commercial as she ran for the bus to meet Mr La Franca. They met in a wine bar in town, a quiet little place in a side street not far from where the bus left her. She walked in and saw a man sitting in the corner of the bar, trendy, assertive looking, with a cigarette in his hand, sipping what looked like, a JD and Coke, or something and Coke anyway! The bar was pretty empty except for the couple that looked as though it was their first date. She smiled to herself and walked directly to the man.

“You must be Mr La Franca?” she asked, interrupting his sip.

“Please, call me Danny,” he responded quickly after swallowing the remainder of drink in his mouth.

“Hi, nice to meet you, I’m Carina,” she said in a fresh, confident tone, grabbing the seat next to him and sitting down gracefully making small talk.

What a lovely day! she said in her mind and then proceeded in kicking herself under the table thinking, I couldn’t get any cheesier if I were a plate of grated Edam!

He responded accordingly, “You too...Did it take you long to get here?”

As Carina took a breath to answer, she could smell the strong scent of recently splashed on aftershave that engulfed her nostrils, and wondered whether she had embarrassing sweat marks under her armpits from the brisk walk after the bus on such a warm day. “Not really, just a bus ride,” she replied, really wanting to say, Bloody get on with it, you don’t really want to know how long it took me to get here, do you!

He ordered her a white wine spritzer...Carina didn’t make a habit of drinking during the day but thought it would be okay just this once and on that note, proceeded to have a very constructive and promising meeting, she now just needed to wait for the so-called “call”...

She thought about all the things he’d said and went over and over them time and time again. Having to go to New York for some time, doing Show Cases, meeting and dancing with Pop Stars, having auditions, the 20% he would take on anything she made. She knew it would be hard work, but she was ready! She’d been dying for this opportunity in her life, like...forever! Carina believed she was born to do this, to sing, to dance. She also knew she had to prove herself, she was more than ready, remembering everything she’d learnt and everything she’d practiced in the mirror!

The next morning Carina arranged her clothes for the day on the edge of the bed just before she jumped in the shower, she remembered today was a busy day for her, she had to hand in a college assignment, “Dancing—The Key To A Good Life.” She jumped in and out of the shower within ten minutes and stumbled into her clothes, slapping her hair back in an Alice-band and applying luxurious moisturising face cream she had “borrowed” from Alice’s beauty survival kit and kindly forgot to return it!

“She’s probably got another TEN anyway!” she said to her guilty shadow hoping it would go away. It did! Luckily Alice wasn’t too precious with the things she got given at work.

“Plenty more where that came from!” she’d always say, throwing her hands in the air and pushing her eyes up to the sky.

Carina prepped herself carefully as she did every morning after her shower. She applied face cream, eye cream and then body cream; she was very beauty conscious and made a habit of applying a mud mask or scrub.

Just as she was about to fly out the door the phone rang...

“Hello?” she said in a puffed out squeaky manner.

"Hi, Carina, it's Danny," a cool tone replied.

"Ohhh hiiii!" she replied in excitement. "How are you?"

"Very well thank you, and you?"

"I'm great thanks," Carina replied, wondering why he was calling and secretly hoping for the best.

"Listen, I've got this girl group I'm working with at the moment," he said in his thick accent. "I'd like you to come along and work with the dancers and see how you get on with the routine they've worked out."

"Sure, that sounds great," she said, knowing this was a test to see how good she was or wasn't for that matter, the thought alone making her shake in her boots!

"When were you thinking?" she added.

"How are you fixed for Thursday?"

"Great, I can do Thursday," she replied, having absolutely no idea what she was doing Thursday but responded in a cool-chilled-out-not-too-excited way!

"Wonderful, 2:00 pm suit you?"

"Yep, I'll be there—oh sorry, where will I be?"

"54 St Ann's Street, London, W5," dictated Mr La Franca as though reading the address from a piece of scrap paper he scribbled it on.

"I'll be there with bells on!" Carina said cheerily.

"Bells? You won't be needing any bells." Clearly not getting it. "Just yourself will do!"

"Hehehe, yeah, okayyy!" she said, thinking she wouldn't try and explain it because she'd look like a total geek! Instead she nodded happily and agreed to be there!

Tuesday 27th April, 10:00 pm

OH MY GOD! Just two days and I'll be dancing with a girl group...Concentrate and I'll be fine. I hope the routine is good and fairly easy for me to pick up or else I'll be stuffed...Fingers crossed I'll come out of there having made a serious impression...DOUBLE OH MY GOD!— What the hell am I going to wear? I REFUSE to get stressed out over an outfit as per bloody usual, it's pathetic, I'll just wear whatever I feel good in on that day. That's final. Just my baby pink fitted open bottom sweat pants and a white vest with my slim sole trainers or maybe my khaki pair? Ohhhh here I go. Stop obsessing; I'm seriously considering visiting Freakville!

The next day Carina arranged for a girly evening so Sandra, Alice and Rosalia bundled round her place to eat pizza and drink fizzy! They began discussing moves and what colour eye shadow to wear, crop top or navel top? And that was just the beginning! They dived into the pepperoni pizza as though they'd never seen pizza before, although Carina did only have one slice, as she didn't want to feel bloated the next day. She just thought about making sure she looked confident and competent, that was most important to her, obviously her outfit would play a part in that, but she knew it was all about state of mind and her friends made sure she felt 100% amazing before she went.

True friends don't come around every day. Each of them had brought something with them to assist in the process, Alice brought a whole bag of smelly creams and new makeup samples. Rosalia brought a few hair mags and some of

the tops she had at home, the girls were all the same size in clothes and swapped clothes on a regular basis, which helped heaps on this occasion! Sandra brought a nail file and polish, face packs, eye packs, hand and nail packs, in fact, every kind of pack, along with hair removers and eyebrow tweezers! Carina got the works, the true meaning of a "Girly pamper night in."

Her friends knew how much this meant to her and all thanks to Sandra's "connections" she actually had a chance, a foot in the door, even if it was only just a toe. They backed her 100% and prepared her for her big audition, they basically decided that's exactly what it was, a big audition, and she couldn't think it any less. That way she would perform with the importance it deserved. She braced herself for what tomorrow had in store for her and was determined to make a good impression however or whatever it took.