

Chapter 1

Tiffany Taylor shivered in the cool night air and hopped from foot to foot to keep warm. It was meant to be June but it felt more like March, and she was seriously under-dressed in a black tutu-style skirt, silver sandals, bare legs, fingerless lace gloves, and a black tuxedo jacket. She stood out from the other girls in the line snaking outside the West End club who were all in a uniform of brightly coloured, revealing body-con dresses and fake tan, and could have given the girls from *TOWIE* a run for their money. Tiffany's style was more quirky and individual.

She checked her watch again. She might have guessed that her best friend Kara would be late. It was after midnight. Tiffany, or Tiff as all her friends called her, stifled a yawn. She had been up since seven this morning and had only stopped working an hour ago at her waitress job in a busy pizza restaurant.

An icy wind whipped her long chestnut-brown hair into her face, plastering it against her glossed lips. Great. She attempted to smooth it back, hoping that she didn't smell of pizza dough or, worse still, garlic bread. She'd sprayed on masses of Coco Mademoiselle, even though she was down to the last dregs and who knew when she would be able to afford a new bottle. Usually,

before a night out clubbing, she would have showered and washed her hair, but tonight she'd had no time. It had been a quick freshen up in the Ladies with wet wipes. Oh, the glamour . . .

'Hiya, Tiff. You haven't been waiting long, have you?' It was Kara, looking glossy and gorgeous in a turquoise, one-shoulder dress. As usual her accessories matched perfectly – a satin clutch bag and heels, and a turquoise stone necklace. Tiffany, who had studied Fashion and Textiles and wanted to be a stylist, had given up trying to point out to her that sometimes you could be a little too 'matchy matchy'.

'Ages!' she exclaimed.

'I don't know why you're standing out here . . . I'm on the guest list.' A man in his mid-twenties, suited and booted, and standing next to Kara's boyfriend Harley, spoke up. He must be Tiffany's blind date courtesy of Kara, even though she had begged her friend not to set her up.

'Oh, yes, this is Gavin, who I was telling you about. Gavin – Tiffany . . . Tiffany – Gavin,' Kara babbled away.

'Hiya,' Tiffany said, instantly deciding that Gavin was not her type. Kara had gone on about how fit he was. And he was good-looking, but he did nothing for her because he seemed so full of himself. She could tell that his clothes were expensive – the designer suit and shirt, the show-off watch – but those kinds of things never impressed her. Style wasn't about how much money you spent. And Tiffany especially didn't like the way he looked her up and down, blatantly assessing her attractiveness.

'Cheer up,' Harley whispered as they trailed behind Kara and Gavin to the front of the queue. 'If he's that bad, we'll make an excuse and leave.'

Harley was the nicest, most easy-going man that

Tiffany knew. Kara, who was a bit of a stunner with her petite body, huge brown eyes, long blonde hair and pretty face, could have taken her pick of the fit-looking blokes who worked out at her dad's North London gym which she helped manage, but she had fallen in love with Harley. He was by no means plain, with a pleasant face, the sort you felt you could trust, short brown hair and grey-blue eyes, but you wouldn't have put him in Kara's league. Though he did have two killer cards in his pack – he had a fantastic body, and he was a fireman. Way to go, Kara! She was the envy of all her female friends except Tiffany, who could only ever see Harley as Kara's boyfriend.

By now Gavin had reached the head of the queue and was remonstrating with the girl in charge of the guest list. She was flanked by two tall bouncers in long black overcoats. Tiffany envied them their coats; if she didn't get inside soon, there was a strong possibility that she would get hypothermia and end the night wrapped up in Bacofoil or whatever they used. *So* not a good look. Now she had met Gavin she had a very strong desire to go home. She was knackered; her feet were killing her after her ten-hour waitress shift. She didn't fancy Gavin, and she wasn't going to pretend to fancy him. She decided that she would make that clear as politely as possible and give him the chance to go off and find himself another date. Then at least she would be free to enjoy herself with Kara and Harley.

'Well check it again! I know I'm on the fucking list . . . I'm a friend of the fucking owner!' Gavin exclaimed. Tiffany bridled at his tone. She'd had enough experience of obnoxious customers to know how it felt to be on the receiving end of their tirades.

'Less of the attitude, mate,' one of the bouncers spoke up. A Geordie from the sound of him.

'And why don't you fuck off back to the North?'

What a charmer! Tiffany looked at Kara who grimaced and mouthed, 'Sorry.'

Tiffany fully expected to be refused entry after that but the girl found their names on the list and the thick red rope was unclipped from the stand to allow them in. As Tiffany walked past the bouncers, one of them, the Geordie, caught her eye. He was strikingly handsome but his dark brown eyes were full of scorn and she burned with embarrassment at being associated with a foul-mouthed tosser like Gavin.

Things didn't improve once they were inside the club. Gavin insisted on ordering champagne, even though there was no way Tiffany would be able to pay for another round. She sat on one of the low-slung black velvet sofas and wondered how soon she would be able to make her escape from him. Kara had spotted someone she knew and was deep in conversation some distance away, so could not be relied upon to rescue her. Gavin sat down next to Tiffany and draped his arm along the back of the sofa, as if he already had a claim on her. Well, he could dream on!

For the next twenty minutes, though it felt far, far longer, Gavin talked at her. He ran his own business selling second-hand computers. His talk was all about the money he had made and how great he was at selling, of his flash new flat, his top-of-the-range car. Big wow, thought Tiffany who had zero interest in the business world, or properties, or cars. She was on the verge of nodding off when he moved further along the sofa, so close to her that their thighs touched. She tried to inch away from him, but was already pressed against the arm of the sofa on the other side.

'So, Kara tells me you want to do something in fashion. I don't know much about it myself. I just know what I like.' He gestured at his own clothes. 'Suit by Dolce & Gabbana, shirt by Ted Baker, shoes by Ralph

Lauren.’ He grinned at her. ‘Boxers by – well, I’ll leave you to find that out for yourself.’

Or not, Tiffany thought. She couldn’t even bring herself to laugh. He was so arrogant and vile.

‘You remind me of someone,’ Gavin continued, seeming not to notice that Tiffany had failed to respond to his chat-up line. ‘It’s the eyes . . . Yeah, I know, it’s that glamour bird, Angel Summer. You look a bit like her.’ His eyes leered at her. ‘Though you haven’t got all her other assets, have you?’

It wasn’t the first time that someone had pointed out the resemblance she bore to the famous former glamour model. Tiffany had never been able to see it herself. But if Gavin had intended the comment to be a compliment, it hadn’t worked. She took a deep breath. There was no way she could sit here and listen to him a minute longer, especially as he clearly thought a shag was on the cards.

‘Gavin, mate, can I be honest? It’s not going to work out between us.’

He looked at her as if he hadn’t understood. So he was thick as well as arrogant? What a perfect combination. Time to be direct. ‘I don’t fancy you. I’m not going to sleep with you tonight. So why don’t you take your bottle of champagne and find some other girl?’

Anger made him ugly and hard, showing the bully always waiting to come out from behind the designer clothes. ‘Who the fuck do you think you are? What is it you do again? Oh, yeah, you’re a waitress. A nobody. What makes you think I wanted to shag you anyway? I could do way better than you, darling.’

And reaching for the bottle of champagne, he stood up and strode away.

While Tiffany was heartily glad to be rid of Gavin, his aggression had shaken her. The level of hostility he had directed at her had been horrible; he seemed to have a

real loathing for women. She hated men who thought they could treat women like dirt, just because they could splash the cash. She looked around the club and was relieved to see Kara and Harley returning from the dance floor.

‘I’ve just seen Gavin. He was all over some blonde,’ Kara said. ‘Sorry, babe, I had no idea he was such a wanker. I’ve only met him a couple of times and he seemed OK.’

Tiffany resisted the temptation to say that ‘wanker’ was written all over him. You only had to look at him to know that. She adored Kara but her friend was a little ditzy, and also had a tendency to see only the good in people. Harley raised his eyebrows at Tiffany. He had seen exactly what kind of man Gavin was from the off.

‘Let’s have a drink and a dance, and maybe you’ll find someone else,’ Kara added hopefully. She had been trying to line up Tiffany with another man for the last six months, since she’d split up from Billy, her on/off boyfriend of the last two years. Kara didn’t get it that actually Tiffany was perfectly happy being single for a while.

She managed to raise a smile, though. She would try and enjoy herself, for the sake of her friend.

And after she’d had a couple of Mojitos and danced to some of her favourite tracks, Tiffany felt a whole lot better. She had almost forgotten about the vile Gavin. But unfortunately she and her friends found themselves leaving the club at the same time as he was and bumped into him in the foyer. He was alone and very drunk. He had spilled his drink down his expensive shirt. Clearly things hadn’t worked out with the blonde.

‘Oh, look who it is. Little Miss Frigid! As if I’d want to shag *you*.’