

TEXT B: In this extract from her memoir 'Hungry', columnist, author and food critic GRACE DENT recalls her work as an editorial assistant.

I was not really there to write anything. This was a freebie. In glossy magazines the freebies were abundant. At *Eva* magazine the only things I'd been sent for free were 'women's neck massagers'. At *Marie Claire*, the freebies were much classier. We were knee-deep in free luxury leave-in conditioner, designer boar-bristle tangle combs, nail-strengthening vitamins and eye caviar. Oh, and flowers, never-ending flowers.

'Will someone take these vile Blushing Bride canna lilies that McQueen sent and give them to a hospice?' my favourite fashion editor Liz would shriek as I whisked away the offending bouquet – about 300 quid's worth – and left it out by the toilets. All this excess had probably begun to change me a bit. I was definitely not ringing Mam and Dad as much. With my job now permanent and my life faster and more glamorous, I was getting bad at keeping in touch with Clare too. She had left *Marie Claire* and gone to work on a special project in a different magazine house. We'd been missing each other's calls. And now I was distracted by a trip to Vienna.

'Next weekend?' I said to Tilly, the managing editor.

'Yah, it's a pharmaceutical thing, they want some press bods out there,' she said.

This editor liked me a lot, as I could perform magic tricks like 'retrieve a Chanel jacket from one of London's fanciest, grumpiest dry cleaners without the actual ticket' – a feat of

charm and bloody-mindedness that would earn me a round of applause when I came back carrying the item.

'They can't teach that at Roedean,' she once said to me.

Stuff like this, and the lack of other good applications, is possibly why I got the job.

So now here I was, one year into officially being Editorial Assistant, checking in at the exceedingly grand Hotel Imperial, Vienna, being escorted by the manager to one of their largest suites for a two-night stay. He turned the key in the lock and I squeaked with joy. This was an enormous apartment, with a large sitting-room area, two bedrooms, many sofas and decorative chaise longues and a glittering chandelier lighting up the main room. This suite was at least three times the size of the Dents' self-catering accommodation all those years ago in Spain, where me and David had slept on pull-out beds.

I stood, mouth ajar, not quite listening as the manager reminded me two, no, three, maybe four times that if I required anything, literally anything, it would be his pleasure. He left, moving backwards, sort of genuflecting as he closed the door. I immediately flopped onto the super-king-sized bed and lay in the middle, flailing my arms and legs out like an octopus. Then I did some shots from a tray of the finest small-batch schnapps, which was in a little glass jug on a tray on the antique dressing table. I considered calling my old Brown Owl from the phone beside the loo in the second bathroom to tell her to shove her Sixer Badge up her arse, but it felt petty, so instead I opened the handwritten letter from the hotel manager, which came in a thick cream envelope with a seal of soft red wax. This letter assured me – Miss Grace Georgina Bente – that I was an absolute priority. And should the merest hint of any whim that might accentuate my pleasure during this trip cross my mind over the next two days, I needed to contact him personally.

Day or night.