

# Manhattan, 2035

There were problems with being the daughter of a former it girl. First of all, the designation, which, as her mother grew older, warped slightly across the society pages, affecting her mood. Most people remembered her mother's modelling stints, brushes with caddish playboys, yachting off Santorini. The requisite sex-tape sloppiness, a public overdose. She was a swan, and even now, S would not relinquish her swan-like ways. The trajectory was not new: this was a grouping of un-distinctive attributes of the ones who came before her, and those who, inevitably, came after. Though what constituted fame in this era had flattened and grown one-dimensional, S was lucky not to be a relic. At the moment she was not quite at the level of *doyenne*; she was a *presence*, she was a *fixture on the circuit*, still out six nights a week. Critically, her particular composition of blonde remained. Her thighs stayed coltish, tan and, it was rumoured, insured. There were affairs, couture. Her home was still photographed, notable art on the walls staged with forebodingly uncomfortable furniture and tangles of heirloom objects. She operated a whimsical social media account with questionable punctuation. The fillers were imperceptible.

Though as sea levels rose and more people of their means left the city, galas somehow still existed and S made the expected transition from flashing her teeth in front of the step-and-repeat to being chair of the board, something ostentatious sparkling at her throat. Like her mother before her, she found the proof of concept of her identity not through work but through philanthropy. She had finally become tasteful. Her daughter found her foolish.

Every night G slept, poorly. Her bed was across the room from an inherited painting that bore into her, a rendering of a 60s fashion model, lips parted, a band of colours tripping across her face. Her mother kept giving her slouchy hobo bags "from her archive". Why did her mother insist on thinking she had good style? She pushed them to the back of the closet, preferring a cast-off Birkin from her grandmother. She saw a photo of herself with it while gripping a coffee and looking puffy-eyed on a tabloid site, some roundup on 'Celebrity Spawn', walking side-by-side with her cousin. While he got the "scion" caption treatment, she was relegated to "little-seen daughter of". Her mother had already given her a long talk on the press and was fixating on how she would be making her debut, commissioning a dress from the Waldorfs. It was tedious. It was also clear that her mother hadn't gotten over the fact she turned out to be a brunette.

Shortly after G was born, her parents separated. Her father slept with his assistant, someone fresh from an MFA who used words like *hungry* to describe their career ambitions. It was, like her father's literary preoccupations, an attempt at subversion that read as extremely boring and cliché. It caused a minor scandal among *Styles* section devotees and elitish media losers, and he subsequently

tried to kick off an apology tour on the Bret Easton Ellis podcast. That was, obviously, a mistake. Eventually her parents got back together, their relationship in flux over the years. At the moment they lived separately. She was alone with her mother in the penthouse. He checked into a Bass hotel downtown with an en-suite sauna and espresso machine, an ugly austere onyx high-rise that looked like the kind of place where men took their mistresses.

Technological devices were no longer external. You could choose to have yours, dime-sized, implanted in the nape of the neck or in the crook of your elbow. He had his there, and she would see a flash of focus in his eyes as he consumed the daily broadsheets, taking *Page Six* intravenously. They met, thrice weekly, for either coffee or dinner. Though he wasn't writing much lately, he was enjoying a rare resurgence in popularity. Uncle Nate brokered a deal with his west coast connections and the movie adaptation of her father's debut novel was being rebooted as a limited series on a new streaming platform. Her dad kept messaging her about who the casting agent had in contention. He wanted to make sure the actors were "aspirational" to someone her age, and kept fussing about who would play her mother and her best friend. Still, he harboured guilt about his paternal shortcomings. A portion of his residuals ensured she got whatever she wanted. Hence, the recurring steak frites and chocolate cake dinners and credit card number. Anonymous-looking, oblong packages with clothing arrived near daily, her bedroom strewn with crumpled tissue paper. Often she sat with her back to the painting, looking out her south-facing windows, the glassy stretch of dark city rippling and reflecting back to her.

The party was in a building way downtown that housed a former power plant, on a street that, centuries before, was littered with shells from the oysters once abundant in the river. As always, the driver held the door open for her as she told him the address. It wasn't really sneaking out if no one was home. She was perfect-looking, even if her mother called her an "untraditional" beauty, her sharp limbs dressed in the flimsy way of those who never have to travel far from car to kerb to their place inside. No coat, her delicate silk sandals accentuating her long, pale feet. They would doubtlessly be ruined by an errant slosh of a drink. She fixated on the chipped polish on her big toe as the car raced down the smooth stretch of the FDR, the perfect drive with the perfect view that never really changed, and it comforted her. She waited for the hook turn at the exit by the Brooklyn Bridge, when you were suddenly thrust before the hulking tall buildings with cavernous canyons in between, lights humming in their neat repeat grids, some cells blacked out, sleek steel angles stretching up and up to the sky. They turned and eased down the narrow streets, pulling up to an unmarked door. She got out, her slides slapping the pavement, and went inside.