



**EVERYBODY
RISE**

A NOVEL

Stephanie Clifford

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*To my parents,
with thanks*

I was loved, happiness was not far away, and seemed to be almost touching me; I went on living in careless ease without trying to understand myself, not knowing what I expected or what I wanted from life, and time went on and on. . . . People passed by me with their love, bright days and warm nights flashed by, the nightingales sang, the hay smelt fragrant, and all this, sweet and overwhelming in remembrance, passed with me as with everyone rapidly, leaving no trace, was not prized, and vanished like mist. . . . Where is it all?

—ANTON CHEKHOV, “A LADY’S STORY” (1887)

That faraway shore’s looking not too far.

—STEPHEN SONDHEIM, “OPENING DOORS,”

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG (1981)

Part One

CHAPTER ONE

Sheffield-Enfield

“Your pearl earrings are rather worn down. They’re starting to look like molars,” Barbara Beegan said to her daughter, poking with a cocktail knife at pâté that was so warmed by the sun that it was nearly the consistency of butter. “Don’t you ever take them off?”

Evelyn’s right hand jolted up to her ear and rubbed at an earring, which did feel lumpy. She’d bought them as a prep-school graduation gift for herself, and over the years, wearing them during showers and swims and tennis games must have eaten away at the earrings’ round perfection, but it wasn’t something she’d noticed until now. “You wanted me to wear them,” she said.

“I wanted you to look like you were dressing to watch the lacrosse game, not playing in it. You could at least polish them every now and then. People must wonder if you can’t take care of your things. I think this pâté has salmonella. Can’t you find something else to put out?”

Evelyn sidled along the edge of the 1985 beige Mercedes. Her mother had bought it, used, after Evelyn’s orientation at Sheffield, her prep school, once Barbara saw none of the old-money mothers would deign to drive a fresh-off-the-lot BMW like the Beegans had

shown up in. The Mercedes was parked just a few inches from the next car, an aged Volvo—there was hardly a post-1996 car to be seen on the field—and Evelyn opened the door to slide her hand into a picnic basket in the backseat. She groped wedges of warm cheese in Saran Wrap, warm wine . . . a warm container of cream cheese? No, olive tapenade; and, guessing that the tapenade was the least likely to cause food poisoning, retrieved that. A roar went up from First Field, a few hundred yards away; the crowd approved of her choice. It was Sheffield-Enfield, her prep school's version of a homecoming game, and the spectators were absorbed in the lacrosse matchup.

Shaking her hair forward to cover her earlobes, Evelyn side-stepped up to the table at the car's trunk, one of the freestanding tables lined along Sheffield Academy's Second Field, which had been transformed into a parking lot for the day's game. A few tables had special banners draped across them, SHEFFIELD-ENFIELD SPRING 2006; the alumni association gave these to alums who donated more than \$10,000 a year. Tables to Evelyn's left held rounds of triple-crèmes that were melting onto their trays in the May heat. To her right, bottles of white wine and Pellegrino were sweating from the exertion of being outdoors. She noticed ancient alumni toddling by in their varsity sweaters, which they insisted on wearing even in May, and made a mental note. Her bosses at People Like Us would be interested in that.

She was turning to go to the field house when there was a squelching sound, and she saw Charlotte approaching, waving two boxes of water crackers in triumph in one hand and a Styrofoam cup in the other. For such a tiny person, narrow hipped enough that she often shopped at Gap Kids, Charlotte was leaving enormous gullies in the ground as she took huge steps in her rain boots. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail, but the humidity had created a walnut-brown halo of frizz all around her pale face. "Success!" Charlotte said, stomping toward Evelyn. "Babs would have sold me into white slavery had I not found these."

“She didn’t send you for crackers, did she? I told her not to. Sorry, Char.”

“Listen, at least water crackers are actually something I can find. I was worried she’d send me to root you out a husband.” Charlotte stuck out her tongue, and Evelyn side-kicked her in the shins, but the rubber of the boots made her foot bounce off.

“Here,” Charlotte said, handing over the Styrofoam cup. “Cider.”
“In May?”

“In May?” Charlotte mimicked, in a British accent. “What, you’ve been working at People Like Us for a day and you find the common people’s habits confusing?”

“I’ve been working there three weeks, Char, and my plan for signing up the nation’s elite is already in full effect.” Evelyn gestured toward the spectators. “It’s basically People Like Us membership sign-up day today. The people here just don’t know it yet.”

“Ah, Charlotte, you located some crackers.” Barbara Beegan had reemerged, casting a blockish shadow over the girls. Her pedicured toes were strapped into flat sandals, which merged into pleated powder-blue pants with sturdy thighs bulging within, up to a crisp white oxford. She ended in dry butter-colored hair arranged in thick, fat waves, and a pair of big black sunglasses. In her prime, after a diet based on green apples, Barbara Beegan had been thin; now she was the kind of stout woman who covered up the extra weight with precisely tailored clothes. She smelled, as she always did, of leather. She frowned as she examined the boxes. “These have pepper in them, though.”

Charlotte made a silent Munch-scream face at Evelyn. “Well, Mrs. Beegan, they were all I could find.”

“They’ll have to do, I suppose,” Barbara said, looking over Charlotte’s head.

“Say thank you, Mom,” Evelyn said.

“Yes, thank you,” Barbara said listlessly, and opened a box to begin arranging the crackers in a semicircle.

“I live to serve,” Charlotte said, bowing briefly. “Ooh, there’s

Mr. Marshon from prep-year history. Do you think he's still mad at me from when I reenacted the defenestration of Prague with his snow globe? I'm just going to say hi. Back in a jiff."

Evelyn took the opportunity to slip away. Second Field's grass had turned muddy and choppy with tire tracks and Tretorn tracks—Charlotte was smart to wear boots—and Evelyn picked her way over the chewed-up terrain to the field house. She watched in amusement as one alum tried to rein in a toddler while wiping down a Labrador who had apparently been swimming in the Ammonoosuc, but when the alum looked at her, she quickly coughed and looked away.

In the eight years since she'd graduated, she had not been back to Sheffield much, not wanting to see her classmates boasting about their children and jobs and weddings while Evelyn muddled along at her textbook-marketing job. Barbara, on the other hand, had been a steadfast alumna despite not actually attending Sheffield, and every year would call up Evelyn, pushing her to go to Sheffield-Enfield, and every year Evelyn would say no. Evelyn's penance for this resistance was a recurring lecture about how she was aging and needed to meet someone soon and shouldn't give up chances to meet eligible alumni.

This year, though, was different. After the textbook publisher laid her off a few months ago, she'd managed to talk her way into a job at People Like Us, a social-networking site aimed at the elite's elite. Even Charlotte, who was brilliant about business, thought that social-networking sites were going to be huge, and Evelyn sensed if she was a success at People Like Us, she could choose whatever job she wanted.

In the interview, Evelyn had dropped a few references to Sheffield and, pulling from her memory of her upper-year class *Novels of the Gilded Age*, Newport. When the co-CEOs asked her how she'd access the target members, she'd bluffed, mentioning two Upper East Side benefits and making it sound like she'd attended them when she hadn't. The made-up details she'd provided about the parties, the

flower arrangements, and the specialty cocktails came out of her mouth surprisingly easily, and though it had made her feel uneasy, she'd reasoned that everyone stretched the truth in interviews. For \$46,000 and a lot of stock options—Charlotte said this was how it worked these days—Evelyn became the director of membership at People Like Us, charged with recruiting society's finest to set up profiles on the site. Now, three weeks after she'd started, she needed some actual recruits and had headed to Sheffield's homecoming for that reason.

She could hear the fragments of a cheer coming from First Field, where the game was in its third quarter. It was the same cheer she had learned when she had arrived at Sheffield as a prep, the school's term for freshmen. The cheer was a paean to the school's mascot, a gryphon. Hearing it, a stooped man with watery blue eyes looked toward the sound and valiantly waved a tiny Sheffield flag, as though he were expecting troops from that direction to liberate him.

The cool gray stone of the field house offered respite from all the sound, and Evelyn followed the familiar path to the girls' bathroom, past the hockey rink on one side and the water-polo pool on the other. Inside, under the fluorescent lights, Evelyn leaned over the gray-concrete slabs of the sink, which stank of beer (that was the recent alumni; she'd barely seen a beer among the older alums all day) and was littered with red plastic cups. She reached into her bag, pulled out a sunglasses case, flipped it open, and extracted a flannel lens cloth. Leaning so close that she could see the thin film of grease forming on her nose, she carefully rubbed one pearl earring to a Vermeer-like shine. It was pockmarked, she admitted, but in her usual self-examination that she performed before seeing her mother, she hadn't caught it.

She briefly made eye contact with herself. Precisely one time, when she was twelve, she was told by one of her father's law partners that she'd be a heartbreaker someday, but it had yet to come true. At twenty-six, she felt like she still hadn't grown into her features, and if

she hadn't by now, she probably never would. Her hair was mousy brown and hung limply past her shoulders, her face was too long, her nose too sharp, her blue eyes too small. The only body part she thought was really spectacular was her pointer finger. She'd resisted her mother's suggestions—"suggestions" was putting it mildly—of highlights, lowlights, a makeup session at Nordstrom. "You're telling everyone around you that you don't care," Barbara liked to say.

At least at Sheffield-Enfield this weekend, she and her mother had reached a tentative truce. Going to the school was one thing Evelyn had done right in her mother's eyes, even if, as Barbara said, Evelyn had failed to build on it. Evelyn had made a promising start when she became friends with Preston Hacking, a Winthrop on his mother's side ("Fine old Boston family," Barbara said) and, obviously, a Hacking on his father's. She'd remained close with Preston, but she had failed to parlay that into anything useful, Barbara believed. Evelyn's other best friend from Sheffield was Charlotte Macmillan, who was the daughter of a Procter & Gamble executive and whom her mother still referred to as "that girl in the pigtails" after the hairdo Char had worn when she first met Barbara.

Evelyn rubbed at the other earring. Folding her upper body over the sink until she was an inch from the mirror, she rotated and polished the earring, then rotated and polished it again for good measure. Her mother couldn't get her on that front.

As she heard people approaching, she jumped back from the mirror and turned the faucet on, so when alumnae with maroon S's on their cheeks burst in, she had a plausible explanation of what she had been up to. "Good game," she said brightly, pulling a paper towel from the dispenser.

With the mud trying to suck off her ballet flats, Evelyn resumed her post at the card table behind her mother's car and spread olive paste in careful curves on one of the offending pepper crackers.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't my cheerful little earful."

Preston Hacking's voice was reedy and nasal and familiar, and, hearing it and seeing the edge of his worn-down Top-Siders behind

her, Evelyn let the guarded smile that had been fixed on her face since she'd left the field house balloon to a full grin. She spun on her toes and threw her arms around Preston, who picked her up with a yelp, then set her back down, out of breath from the exertion.

Preston looked exactly the same as he had at Sheffield, tall and thin, with thick, loosely curled blond hair, red glasses, and lips that were always in a half smile, the fine features of someone who had never gotten into a fight and instead had politely submitted to the hazing imposed on the well-bred boys as preps. Evelyn remembered hearing he'd been duct-taped to the statue of the Sheffield founder for several hours and, upon release, had offered his tormentors a cigar that he had in his sport-coat pocket; it was a Cuban. An ancient, scratchy-looking Sheffield sweater was hooked over his elbow—his grandfather's, or his great-grandfather's, Evelyn couldn't remember.

"Pres! I thought you were leaving me with the geriatric society. What took you so long?"

"I had, and still have, a massive hangover, and felt I could not take the cheer and school spirit of people such as you. Good God, woman, what was in those martinis last night?"

"Maybe they roofied you."

"If only. Perhaps it was the bathtub gin they seem to serve at these things. I knew I should have brought something up from the city. You can never trust the liquor service in rural New Hampshire. Would you get me a Bloody?"

Evelyn brought out one of the cut-crystal glasses her mother had brought up from Maryland and mixed a bit of vodka from a leather-covered flask with tomato juice. She wondered where her mother had obtained all these bartending accoutrements. They had showed up en masse when the family moved from their exurban ranch house to the grand and crumbling old house in Bibville when Evelyn was in elementary school. With that came aristocratic airs and fine glassware, she thought as she watched the vodka glug out from the flask. "I think my mom brought celery, but she's run off somewhere. And

there was ice, but I think it's all melted. You might have to have warm tomato juice."

"Horseradish. Poppycock," Preston said. "More vodka. More. More. More. Good. If I don't get a drink in me soon, I might have to regurgitate all over this pretty picnic." He gulped down a long slug.

"Now that your thirst is being quenched, why don't you make yourself useful? Babs and I have been trying to sort out how these chairs unfold, and we clearly have not been able to master it," Evelyn said.

"Yes, we all remember your ill-fated forays into manual labor. Put me to work. I've always dreamt of being your handyman." Preston balanced his glass on the car's bumper and was crouched, fiddling with a washer, when Barbara Beegan returned. He jumped up. "Mrs. Beegan, what a pleasure," he said.

"Preston, what a delight. Evie said she saw you last night, during the young people's outing, but I'm glad I got to see you myself today."

"Well, not so young anymore. Did she tell you we're now in the middle-aged alumni grouping? Once you're more than five years out, it's all over."

Evelyn elbowed him in the ribs and tried to make it look like an accident in case her mother was watching, but it was too late.

"She's almost thirty. It's not surprising," Barbara said.

"I'm twenty-six, Mom. I'm not almost thirty," Evelyn muttered. When she'd walked by the current students, though, she'd realized that, to them, she was one of the sea of vaguely old alums who meandered through the dorms during Sheffield-Enfield and talk about what color the carpet was in their day.

"Almost twenty-seven," Barbara said, turning to look at her daughter.

"Nearly twenty-five," Evelyn said.

With a kick, Preston got one chair, then the other, into place. "Done and done. You both look like you've found the fountain of youth. Your daughter has me hard at work as usual. Is Mr. Beegan here as well?" he said.

Evelyn returned his drink to him. "For your labor," she said. "No, Dad had to work this weekend."

"Ah, well, I'm sure he's sad to miss it." This drew no response, so Preston picked up a cracker. "I read about a case he was involved in, in the *Journal*. I think it was a lawsuit against a pharmaceutical company in—"

"Aren't they all," Barbara interrupted with a bright tone. "It's been ages since I saw you last. You've been in London?"

"Just moved back to New York," Preston said.

"That's wonderful. Isn't that wonderful, Evie? I always tell her she needs to keep better track of her old friends. How are your old friends? That darling Nick? And that handsome brother of yours? Are they single?"

Evelyn handed her mother a cracker with cream cheese on it. "All right, Mom, we don't need to review every single person Preston knows for marriage eligibility."

"I'm just having a conversation, Evelyn. She can be so sensitive. Now. Tell me about you, Preston. You must be dating someone."

"The course of true love never did run smooth, Mrs. Beegan," Preston said.

"Of course, you have ages before you need to settle down," Barbara said.

Evelyn rolled her eyes and stuffed a cracker in her mouth. To Barbara, Preston asserted that New York life was treating him well, and his work as an independent investor was going swimmingly (though Evelyn had never been able to pin down exactly what it was Preston did or invested in). He said that Evelyn was doing terrifically in the city, which Evelyn thought he lied about rather nicely, and Barbara raised her sunglasses to the top of her head, her albino-blue eyes brightening and a satisfied smile emerging with the compliment, which Barbara accepted as though it were about her. Exchanges complete, they separated, stepping away from one another as smoothly as if they were finishing a minuet. Barbara completed the encounter by saying she would find them all seats in the stadium, and she walked off.

A bellow from three rows of cars away arose, with a “Ha—CKING” an octave apart. Then a “Beegs!”

“Oh, good Lord,” Preston said to Evelyn.

The caller, whom Evelyn finally diagnosed as Phil Giamatti, a kid from rural New Hampshire who’d overdosed on caffeine their lower year, trundled over. To the untrained eye, Phil appeared to be dressed even more snappily than Preston. His checked purple shirt, Evelyn guessed, was Thomas Pink. His pants were Nantucket Reds. He wore sockless Gucci loafers. Evelyn remembered when he’d arrived at school in his oversize chambray button-downs and jeans. He smacked of price tags these days, and he was drenched in cologne, some brand that no doubt came in a black-leather-encased bottle.

“How are you guys?” He grabbed Evelyn with meaty hands to lean in and smash his wet lips on her cheek. “Nice to be up here out of Manhattan, huh?”

“It’s always nice to be at Sheffield,” Evelyn said flatly. She hadn’t liked Phil in high school, where he was always trying to copy Charlotte’s tests, and she liked him even less with money.

“I know, right? Good to leave work, too. Banking is crazy, man.”

“So I hear,” Evelyn said.

“It’s like, when you’re doing deals the way I am, it’s just nonstop. It’s like up at five A.M. and in the office till one A.M. But it’s work hard, play hard, right? Models and bottles?”

“‘Models and bottles’ is not exactly my scene,” Preston said haughtily.

“Models not your style, Hacking?”

Evelyn felt heat in her ears; she hoped Phil was not going where he seemed to be going. “Pres’s style—” she began.

But Phil continued. “You need male models and bottles? That better?”

Evelyn didn’t have to look at Preston to know that her friend would be scarlet. “Preston *is* a male model, Phil,” she said icily, which wasn’t the greatest of retorts, but she couldn’t think of anything else. “Good luck with your banking.”

“Hey, I was just joking,” Phil said as they walked away. “Hey, hey, Hacking? Hey, Beegs?”

Evelyn strode back to the card table, where she rearranged some of the cocktail knives to give Preston time to compose himself. Finally, he swallowed so hard she could hear it. “I don’t know what he was talking about,” Preston said.

“Me, either,” Evelyn said evenly. She refilled his drink, armed with a topic change. “So, would you rather?”

“Ooh, what?” said Preston, seizing on their old game.

“Would you rather have to spend every dinner party for the rest of your life seated next to Phil Giamatti or have an aboveground pool in your front yard?”

“So elitist, Evelyn, my dear. What’s the website you’re working for now? Not Our Class, Dear?”

“Very funny. You know I’m going to sign you up.”

“Nay! I eschew technology.”

“You’re going to have to embrace it. You have lineage and a respectable old name and, presumably, alcoholic uncles leaving you grand fortunes. You’re exactly who they want. Don’t worry. I’ll help you make a charming profile.”

“The answer, by the way, is aboveground pool. Dinner parties are too precious to spend with the likes of Phil.”

“Agree,” Evelyn said.

“What are we talking about?” Charlotte had skipped up and thrown her thin arms around both of them.

“Phil Giamatti,” Evelyn said.

“You’re not recruiting him for PLU, are you?” Charlotte said.

“Dahling,” Evelyn held her nose and looked down at Charlotte. “He is not PLU caliber.”

“Dahling, I wouldn’t have ventured. Certainly not PLU,” Charlotte said in her British voice. “I think Ev gets bounty-hunting points the more ancient the family money she signs up.”

“Well, if People Like Us gets Evelyn back to Sheffield, I’ll accept it,” Preston said. “It’s good to all be here together.”

“I mean, of course we couldn’t get our act together to hang out in New York,” Charlotte said. “Isn’t that New York, though?”

Evelyn tightened the cap on the vodka bottle. New York when you’re young, everyone in her hometown of Bibville said with reverence when they heard where she lived, having never lived in New York when they were young. Evelyn tried to love it, and sometimes did, when she was wearing heels and perfume and hailing a cab on Park on a crisp fall night, or when the fountain at Lincoln Center danced in the night light, or when she watched Alfred Molina as Tevye sing “Sunrise, Sunset” from her seat in the second balcony and felt her brain go still. The city hummed in a way Bibville never had, and the taxis were hard to get because everyone had somewhere to go, and it was invigorating. And then it became grating: the taxis just became hard to get.

She’d learned how to live in New York. She knew now never to eat lunch from the hot bar at Korean delis, never to buy shoes from the brandless leather joints that popped up in glass storefronts in Midtown, that there was more space in the middle of subway cars than at the ends, and that the flowers sold at bodegas were usually sourced from funerals. Yet she wasn’t living a New York life. Despite her grand plans, she’d spent most days plodding to work and home from work without moving her life ahead. It was crowded, and loud, and dirty, and too hot, then too cold. It required an enormous amount of energy and time just to do errands like getting groceries. She was always sweaty after she got groceries.

She had expected to feel more at ease now that Charlotte and Preston were both back in New York. She thought the three of them would hang out all the time, a merry band of Sondheim characters working at love and life from their tiny apartments, all getting together on Sundays to punch each other up and drink wine on the roofs of their buildings. Instead, Charlotte, after working as a Goldman Sachs analyst—a year in which Evelyn saw her friend maybe once every two weeks and all Char talked about was how much she was working—had gone back to Harvard for business school. Charlotte

had been back in the city almost a year, working for the intense private-equity firm Graystone, which meant her nights and weekends were mostly spoken for. Preston, meanwhile, had submerged himself into his preppy set upon his return from London. Evelyn had kept up with the few friends from Davidson College that had moved to the city, but their lives were starting to take wildly divergent directions. One was an actress and had just moved to Bushwick, and it would take three subways and, probably, the purchase of a shiv for Evelyn to navigate there safely. A second had gotten engaged and was moving to Garden City, Long Island.

The four years since her Davidson graduation had gone by at once too slowly and too quickly, and Evelyn found herself in her mid-twenties without the life she had expected to have. Girls her age were either forging ahead in their careers or in serious relationships that would soon produce rings and engagement parties. Her mother had offered to pay for Evelyn to freeze her eggs, and she hadn't turned down the offer right away. It wasn't so much that she wanted a husband and babies. But it would be nice to have a place for once, to have people look at her and think she was interesting and worth talking to, not to have them politely fumble for details about her life and instantly forget her. (Murray Hill, right? No, the Upper East Side. Ah, and Bucknell? No, Davidson.)

People Like Us could be her chance, even if her parents didn't see it that way. Her father said that that group hardly needed another way to cut itself off from everyone else. And her mother's response when Evelyn had told her about it was, "So rather than bothering to get to know the interesting social set in New York, you're now acting as a sort of paid concierge to them? This is why we sent you to Sheffield?"

She admitted she'd long been intimidated by the group of people she was now supposed to recruit. Earlier at the game, she had scouted out some of them, wondering if this social set would get its comeuppance as time went on, the guys devolving into thick-stomached drinkers, the girls becoming haggard. That would prove that her

mother hadn't been right about the appeal of this group. Yet the girls looked great, easy and free with just the tiniest hint of private-beach tan, enamel Hermès bracelets clinking on their wrists, and the guys looked handsome and self-assured, bankers and lawyers and politicians-in-training. Eavesdropping, she'd overheard them dissecting an etiquette violation at a San Francisco private club and had initially backed away, worried they would pass her over and make her feel like nothing. Given her new job, though, she forced herself to talk to a couple of them whom she knew through Preston, and she'd managed to line up a few candidates for PLU. Evelyn was determined to make this work, to prove to her parents and to the people who'd overlooked her that she was someone. The city thought she wasn't going to make it. The city was wrong.

Preston had been sidelined by a friend of his father's, and Evelyn and Charlotte started heading toward the stadium. Another cheer started, and the girls did their accompanying hand motions in unison:

*When - we fight - we fight - with literary
Tropes - and themes - and leit - motifs because we
Are - the school - that's known - for melancholy
Wri - ter types - and po - et laureates and
If - lacrosse - is not - our forte then we
Urge - the oth - er team - to try composing
I - ambic - penta - meters, allusions,
Ripostes, similes
And puns!*

Close to the end of the cheer, the Sheffield side lost the rhythm, but they screamed out "puns" in unison, as though it were the ultimate insult to the other team.

Barbara, taking up half a row of seats with a giant stadium blanket, waggled her fingers at Charlotte and Evelyn. Sheffield got the ball and the crowd started shouting as Evelyn squeezed in.

"Your earring looks smudged," Barbara said.

“Mother, I am going to throw the earring into this crowd if you do not stop harping on it,” Evelyn said as she heard a snort from Charlotte.

Barbara rearranged herself on the blanket, and the crowd howled a mass downward arpeggio when Enfield took the ball back.

It's all right, it's okay, you're gonna work for us someday, rose the cheer from the Sheffield side.