

Excerpt:

Catherine Carver's Diary

21st of November, 1620

The Mayflower

It has been a difficult winter. The sea does not agree with John, and we are always cold. Perhaps we will find peace in this new land, although many believe we have not left danger behind. Outside my window, the coastline resembles Southampton, and for that I am grateful. I will always long for home, but our kind are no longer safe there. I myself do not believe the rumors, but we must do as instructed. It has always been our way. John and I are traveling as husband and wife now. We are planning on marrying soon. There are far too few of us, and more are needed if we are to survive. Perhaps things will change. Perhaps good fortune will shine on us, and our situation will ameliorate. The ship has anchored. We have landed. A new world awaits!

—C.C

New York City The Present

One

The Bank was a decrepit stone building at the tail end of Houston Street, on the last divide between the gritty East Village and the wilds of the Lower East Side. Once the headquarters of the venerable Van Alen investment and brokerage house, it was an imposing, squat presence, a paradigm of the beaux-arts style, with a classic six-column façade and an intimidating row of “dentals” — razor-sharp serrations on the pediment’s surface. For many years it stood on the corner of Houston and Essex, desolate, empty, and abandoned, until one winter evening when an eye-patch-wearing nightclub promoter chanced upon it after polishing off a hot dog at Katz’s Deli. He was looking for a venue to showcase the new music his DJs were spinning—a dark, haunted sound they were calling “Trance.”

The pulsing music spilled out to the sidewalk, where Schuyler Van Alen, a small, dark-haired fifteen-year-old girl, whose bright blue eyes were ringed with dark kohl eye shadow, stood nervously at the back of the line in front of the club. She picked at her chipping black nail polish. “Do you really think we’ll get in?” she asked.

“No sweat,” her best friend, Oliver Hazard-Perry replied, cocking an eyebrow. “Dylan guaranteed a cakewalk. Besides, we can always point to the plaque over there. Your family built this place, remember?” He grinned.

“So what else is new?” Schuyler smirked, rolling her eyes. The island of Manhattan was linked inexorably to her family history, and as far as she could tell, she was related to the Frick Museum, the Van Wyck Expressway, and the Hayden Planetarium, give or take an institution (or major thoroughfare) or two. Not that it made any difference in her life. She barely had enough to cover the twenty-five dollar charge at the door.

Oliver affectionately swung an arm around her shoulders. “Stop worrying! You worry too much. This’ll be fun, I promise.”

“I wish Dylan had waited for us,” Schuyler fretted, shivering in her long black cardigan with holes in each elbow. She’d found the sweater in a Manhattan Valley thrift store last week. It smelled like decay and stale rosewater perfume, and her skinny frame was lost in its voluminous folds. Schuyler always looked like she was drowning in fabric. The black sweater reached almost to her calves, and underneath she wore a sheer black T-shirt over a worn gray thermal undershirt; and under that, a long peasant skirt that swept the floor. Like a nineteenth century street urchin, her skirt hems were black with dirt from dragging on the sidewalks. She was wearing her favorite pair of black-and-white Jack Purcell sneakers, the ones with the duct-taped hole on the right toe. Her dark wavy hair was pulled back with a beaded scarf she’d found in her grandmother’s closet.

Schuyler was startlingly pretty, with a sweet, heart shaped face; a perfectly upturned nose; and soft, porcelain skin—but there was something almost insubstantial about her beauty. She looked like a Dresden doll in witch’s clothing. Kids at the Duchesne School thought she dressed like a Dickensian urchin. It didn’t help that she was painfully shy and kept to herself, because then they just thought she was stuck-up, which she wasn’t. She was just quiet.

Oliver was tall and slim, with a fair, elfin face that was framed by a shag of brilliant chestnut hair. He had sharp cheekbones and sympathetic hazel eyes. He was wearing a severe military greatcoat over a flannel shirt and a pair of holey blue jeans. Of course, the flannel shirt was John Varvatos and the jeans from Citizens of Humanity. Oliver liked to play the part of disaffected youth, but he liked shopping in SoHo even more.

The two of them had been best friends ever since the second grade, when Schuyler’s nanny forgot to pack her lunch one day, and Oliver had given her half of his lettuce and mayo sandwich. They finished each other’s sentences and liked to read aloud from random pages of *Infinite Jest* when they were bored. Both were Duchesne legacy kids who traced their ancestry back to the *Mayflower*. Schuyler counted six U.S. presidents in her family tree alone. But even with their prestigious pedigrees, they didn’t fit in at Duchesne. Oliver preferred museums to lacrosse, and Schuyler never cut her hair and wore things from consignment shops.

Dylan Ward was a new friend—a sad-faced boy with long lashes, smoldering eyes, and a tarnished reputation. Supposedly, he had a rap sheet and had just been sprung from military school. His grandfather had reportedly bribed Duchesne with funds for a new gym to let him

enroll. He had immediately gravitated toward Schuyler and Oliver, recognizing their similar misfit status.

Schuyler sucked in her cheeks and felt a pit of anxiety forming in her stomach. They'd been so comfortable just hanging out in Oliver's room as usual, listening to music and flipping through the offerings on his TiVo; Oliver booting up another game of Vice City on the split screen, while she rifled through the pages of glossy magazines, fantasizing that she, too, was lounging on a raft in Sardinia, dancing the flamenco in Madrid, or wandering pensively through the streets of Bombay.

"I'm not sure about this," she said, wishing they were back in his cozy room instead of shivering outside on the sidewalk, waiting to see if they would pass muster at the door. "Don't be so negative," Oliver chastised. It had been his idea to leave the comfort of his room to brave the New York nightlife, and he didn't want to regret it. "If you think we'll get in, we'll get in. It's all about confidence, trust me." Just then, his BlackBerry beeped. He pulled it out of his pocket and checked the screen. "It's Dylan. He's inside, he'll meet us by the windows on the second floor. Okay?"

"Do I really look all right?" she asked, feeling suddenly doubtful about her clothes.

"You look fine," he replied automatically. "You look great," he said, as his thumbs jabbed a reply on the plastic device.

"You're not even looking at me."

"I look at you every day." Oliver laughed, meeting her eye, then uncharacteristically blushing and looking away. His BlackBerry beeped again, and this time he excused himself, walking away to answer it.

Across the street, Schuyler saw a cab pull up to the curb, and a tall blond guy stepped out of it. Just as he emerged, another cab barreled down the street on the opposite side. It was swerving recklessly, and at first it looked like it would miss him, but at the last moment, the boy threw himself in its path and disappeared underneath its wheels. The taxicab never even stopped, just kept going as if nothing happened.

"Oh my God!" Schuyler screamed.

The guy had been hit—she was sure of it—he'd been run over—he was surely dead.

"Did you see that?" she asked, frantically looking around for Oliver, who seemed to have disappeared. Schuyler ran across the street, fully expecting to see a dead body, but the boy was standing right in front of her, counting the change in his wallet. He slammed the door shut and sent his taxi on its way. He was whole and unhurt.

"You should be dead," she whispered.

“Excuse me?” he asked, a quizzical smile on his face. Schuyler was a little taken aback—she recognized him from school. It was Jack Force. The famous Jack Force. One of those guys—head of the lacrosse team, lead in the school play, his term paper on shopping malls published in *Wired*, so handsome she couldn’t even meet his eye.

Maybe she was dreaming things. Maybe she just *thought* she’d seen him dive in front of the cab. That had to be it. She was just tired.

“I didn’t know you were a dazehead,” she blurted awkwardly, meaning a Trance acolyte.

“I’m not, actually. I’m headed over there,” he explained, motioning to the club next door to The Bank, where a very intoxicated rock star was steering several giggling groupies past the velvet rope.

Schuyler blushed. “Oh, I should have known.” He smiled at her kindly. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why apologize? How would you have known that? You read minds or something?” he asked.

“Maybe I do. And maybe it’s an off day.” She smiled.

He was flirting with her, and she was flirting back. Okay, so it was definitely just her imagination. He had totally not thrown himself in front of the cab.

She was surprised he was being so friendly. Most of the guys at Duchesne were so stuck-up, Schuyler didn’t bother with them. They were all the same—with their Duck Head chinos and their guarded nonchalance, their bland jokes and their lacrosse field jackets. She’d never given Jack Force more than a fleeting thought—he was a junior, from the planet Popular; they might go to the same school but they hardly breathed the same air. And after all, his twin sister was the indomitable Mimi Force, whose one goal in life was to make everyone else’s miserable. “On your way to a funeral?” “Who died and made you homeless?” were some of Mimi’s unimaginative insults directed her way. Where was Mimi, anyway? Weren’t the Force twins joined at the hip?

“Listen, you want to come in?” Jack asked, smiling and showing his even, straight teeth. “I’m a member.” Before she could respond, Oliver materialized at her side. Where had he come from? Schuyler wondered. And how did he keep doing that? Oliver demonstrated a keen ability to suddenly show up the minute you didn’t want him there. “There you are, my dear,” he said, with a hint of reproach. Schuyler blinked. “Hey, Ollie. Do you know Jack?” “Who doesn’t?” Oliver replied, pointedly ignoring him. “Babe, you coming?” he demanded in a proprietary tone. “They’re finally letting people in.” He motioned to The Bank, where a steady stream of black-clad teenagers were being herded through the fluted columns.

“I should go,” she said apologetically.

“So soon?” Jack asked, his eyes dancing again. “Not soon enough,” Oliver added, smiling threateningly. Jack shrugged. “See you around, Schuyler,” he said, pulling up the collar on his tweed coat and walking in the opposite direction.

“Some people,” Oliver complained, as they rejoined their line. He crossed his arms and looked annoyed. Schuyler was silent, her heart fluttering in her chest. Jack Force knew her name.

They inched forward, ever closer to the drag queen with the clipboard glaring imperiously behind the velvet rope. The Elvira clone sized up each group with a withering stare, but no one was turned away.

“Now, remember, if they give us any trouble, just be cool and think positive. You have to visualize us getting in, okay?” Oliver whispered fiercely.

Schuyler nodded. They walked forward, but their progress was interrupted by a bouncer holding up a big meaty paw. “IDs!” he barked.

With shaking fingers, Schuyler retrieved a driver’s license with someone else’s name—but her own picture—on its laminated surface. Oliver did the same. She bit her lip.

She was *so* going to get caught and thrown in jail for this. But she remembered what Oliver had said. *Be cool. Confident. Think positive.*

The bouncer waved their IDs under an infrared machine, which didn’t beep. He paused, frowning, and held their IDs up for inspection, giving the two of them a doubtful look.

Schuyler tried to project a calm she didn’t feel, her heart beating fast underneath her thin layers. Of course I look twenty-one. I’ve been here before. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that ID, she thought.

The bouncer slid it under the machine again. The big man shook his head. “This isn’t right,” he muttered. Oliver looked at Schuyler, his face pale. Schuyler thought she was going to faint. She had never been so nervous in her life. Minutes ticked by. People behind them in line made impatient noises.

Nothing wrong with that ID. Cool and confident. Cool and confident. She visualized the bouncer waving them through, the two of them entering the club. *LET US IN. LET US IN. LET US IN. JUST LET US IN!*

The bouncer looked up, startled, almost as if he’d heard her. It felt as though time had stopped. Then, just like that, he returned their cards and waved them forward, just as Schuyler had pictured.

Schuyler exhaled. She and Oliver exchanged a restrained look of glee.

They were inside.

