

Eyes on the Prize

Jeanie finished her daily workout with some yoga stretches and then sat for a while admiring the London skyline through the plate glass wall of the penthouse gym. She caught sight of her own reflection and was satisfied with her slim silhouette and artfully tousled hair. Time for a long luxurious soak in the double ended spa bath. She switched on the radio and sank into the bubbling scented water. She liked to keep up with current affairs and celebrity gossip in case conversation flagged at the many business functions she expertly hosted for Perry. The interviewer was asking her guest what advice she would give to her younger self. Jeanie laughed at the very idea. There was no need. She had always known what she wanted and had worked hard to achieve academic success. She had also pestered her parents for ballet and riding lessons, money for school ski trips, a gap year in Kenya as a volunteer in a safari park. She knew early on what attributes and skills were needed on the CV of a rich man's wife.

Initially she had set her eyes on St Andrews, but Kate had already hooked William, and so she decided on Cambridge with its veterinary and medical schools whose students, if not already rich, would be well placed to earn a good living. She decided to read Art History, specialising in the baroque period (thinking of country estates and old money) and aimed for a job at Sotheby's or Christie's (thinking of meeting rich clients). She joined all the right clubs (rowing, yachting, golf, young Conservatives, Footlights) and sat on the organising committees for all the main events on the social calendar. She quickly learned that party girl did not equal wife material and decided to change tactics.

She befriended Amelia. Amelia was plain and lacking in confidence despite her family's wealth. Amelia also had brothers. Jeanie helped Amelia to come out of her shell, gave her fashion and make-up advice and introduced her to the right sort of people. Amelia invited Jeanie to a weekend in the country and there she met Amelia's father Perry. Perry was suave, sophisticated and handsome and accompanied by his third wife, a harassed, bedraggled mother of five-year-old twins. Jeanie and Perry were married five years later in a small but tasteful ceremony at Marylebone Registry Office. Amelia didn't mind. Her mother had been abandoned for the mother of the twins.

It was time for Jeanie to dress for dinner. It was their tenth wedding anniversary and Perry had hired a private dining room at the Savoy to celebrate with a dozen or so close colleagues and friends. She walked through the glass, steel and chrome apartment kept dustless and smudgeless by an army of staff. The minimalist décor, alleviated by the odd splash of modern art, was replicated in Perry's pieds-a-terre in Monaco, Milan and New York. She had suggested softening these hard interiors with sumptuous curtains and wall hangings but had met with firm resistance from Perry who preferred acres of glass and wide-open vistas. She selected a tailored monochrome outfit partly to please Perry, but mostly to provide a blank canvas for her flamboyant jewellery which Perry indulged her in and teased her about. She favoured rococo combinations of large precious and semiprecious stones and pearls in ornate settings. Less was not more when it came to jewellery.

Dinner was mostly a success, but Perry flirted with a pretty waitress and Jeanie retaliated by paying too much attention to a young colleague of Perry's. The young man's pregnant wife was not amused. Perry had been clear about not wanting any more children and Jeanie hadn't worried about it at the time, but she was left with a nagging feeling of insecurity. Was it too late? She was on the right side of forty, but only just. The terms of the prenup, also reflected in Perry's will, would leave her with a small stipend, her jewels and Range Rover, and the use of (but not ownership of) a small flat in Bayswater. His children were already well provided for (and presumably by extension their mothers – she would have to look into that) and would inherit all his assets. She would have to give more thought about how to maintain her current standard of living in the event she became ex-wife number four, or Perry's widow.

She stood on the pavement next to Perry waiting for the car to be brought round, one hand clutching her cashmere scarf to her throat as the icy wind whipped old newspapers along the street. Advice to her younger self? Be careful what you wish for.

