

Revenge

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SHARON
OSBOURNE

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Chapter One

London, 1976

She'd made it. She was finally here.

'I'm going to be a star,' Margaret Michaels whispered to herself, staring up at the lights of Piccadilly Circus. 'I am. And nothing's going to stop me.'

As she shivered in the chilly September evening, she heard the flatness of her northern vowels creeping through, and winced. Though she was only sixteen, Margaret had been having elocution lessons for over a year, hoping to sound like her idol, Julie Christie. And here she was, in London, by herself, ready to make that dream come true.

Because ever since she was born, that was all she'd wanted to be. A star.

When she was twelve, Margaret had informed her mam and dad that she would only answer to Maggie from now on. When she was thirteen, she'd started saving her pocket money. When she was fourteen, she'd got herself a job at Toni's, the upmarket hairdresser's near her parents' small, terraced house on a drab backstreet in Sheffield. The salon was a ten-minute walk away, but it was like entering another world. A magical world, far away from rusting steelworks, tired women and men, strikes and depression. It was a glittering world of skinny, edgy girls who looked like Glenda

Jackson, delicious smells, hairspray and perfume and the promise of glamour, of escape.

Maggie swept the floor, made tea and coffee, shampooed the ladies' hair, watched as dowdy, shy housewives came in with flat greasy hair and left, faces shining, eyes aglow, smelling of Elnett and looking a little bit more like the person they dreamed of being. And Maggie watched, listened and learned, entranced. She would have done it for nothing, for the chance simply to be in this exotic world. But the pound a week wage was very welcome. And that was how she afforded the elocution lessons, the fancy hand-bag she'd bought from Castle House, the posh department store in town, the eyeshadow and the perfume.

'You're getting ideas above yourself, my girl,' Ron Michaels had told her any number of times. 'You ashamed of your father, Margaret? Is that it? Sheffield not good enough for you any more?'

'Course not, Dad,' Maggie had answered dutifully. But she was lying. It *wasn't* good enough for her. She was something special. She didn't know why, she just knew she had to make the most of it. Her dad was a steelworker, her mam was – well, there was summat wrong with her mam and no one knew what it was. She stayed in bed most days, terrified of her husband, afraid of her own reflection and increasingly afraid of her headstrong, beautiful only child, who seemed, to Maureen Michaels anyway, to be from another planet. Like someone had left her on the doorstep and she had blossomed over the years into this exotic creature living in their house, a beautiful, ethereal thing with long legs, a mane of strawberry blonde hair, flawless skin and huge green eyes that would alternately flash fire or glitter with pleasure.

No, Sheffield was not big enough for Maggie, and by the time she reached puberty, she knew she didn't belong there; she was going to London to fulfil her dreams. The girls at school hated her: they thought she came across like she was too good for them, with her posh voice and her hoity-toity airs and graces. And they didn't interest her: acne-ridden, greasy-haired girls who would hang around at the back of the toilets, smoking and listening to

their cassette players, content to moon over saps like the Bay City Rollers, or Showaddywaddy – pathetic!

She liked the grown-up stuff. Old stuff, too. The Stones – Dusty – Jimi – she loved the clever catchiness of Queen, the coolness of Bad Company, the dirtiness and the raw energy of Led Zep. *That* was music. Music that pulsed through you. Listening to ‘Can’t Get Enough’, ‘Jumpin’ Jack Flash’, or ‘Killer Queen’ – how could you not feel like a woman, a grown-up? Who the hell wanted to listen to a group of drips singing ‘Bye Bye Baby’?

They were boys. Maggie wanted a man.

As for the local boys, she ignored them too. They could drool all they wanted at her, at her smooth skin, budding, pert little breasts, and her full ruby-red lips that she would unconsciously lick, coupled with those coltish limbs and that provocative stare. But she felt nothing but contempt for them: their spots, their awkward gestures, throbbing Adam’s apples and pathetic stares, like rabbits caught in headlights.

Was Maggie lonely, growing up in the terraced brick house in the backstreets of Sheffield, walking home on her own from school, ignoring the gaggles of girls skipping on ahead of her, the loitering boys who kicked empty cans around the streets, gazing at her distractedly when she glided past, tossing her hair? No, she wasn’t. Maggie moved to her own soundtrack. In her head when she was going home through the park she was really Julie Christie, on her way to meet Terence Stamp; Faye Dunaway, about to drive off with Warren Beatty; Anita Pallenberg, a cigarette hanging off her lip. It was the soundtrack in her head, the soundtrack to the life she knew she was going to have . . .

By September 1976, two months after she’d turned sixteen, Maggie knew there was nothing left for her in Sheffield. She told the girls at Toni’s she was moving to London. ‘To become famous’, she told them, and they were so impressed, so intrigued by quiet little Maggie Michaels, that on her last day at the salon Janine, the head stylist, gave her a free set of highlights. ‘It’s a going-away present, love,’ she said, as she deftly pulled the rubber cap on to

Maggie's hair and proceeded to hook strands of hair through the colander-like holes in the cap. 'Summat to help you on your way.' Maggie had smiled at her in the mirror, anxiously. 'Not that you'll need it,' Janine said. 'Promise.'

They had waved her off as she left that evening, her strawberry blonde hair flecked with golden caramel streaks, silky and heavy, rushing in the evening wind. They had pressed a bottle of Quiktan into her hands. 'It smells disgusting,' Danielle, the owner of the salon, had told her. 'And it streaks if you don't put it on proper. But it'll be worth it. Give you a California tan. Set you apart from the others, little Maggie. Good luck, love. Let us know how you go on. Remember us when you're a big star!'

Maggie remembered them fondly now as she hugged herself, staring up at the lights of the big city. She was tired, and a bit hungry, but she wasn't looking forward to going back to the hostel she'd booked herself into, round the corner from Victoria coach station. Funny – it sounded so glamorous round there, just off Buckingham Palace Road, but it wasn't. It was dirty, there were rings in the sink, damp on the walls and she was sure it had mice. Maggie liked things tidy. For a brief second she wished she was at home, in the warm, comforting familiarity of the kitchen, with her dad reading the paper in his vest, covered in grime, and her mam making the tea. She got up to make tea in the evening, that was all she ever did, it seemed to Maggie. What would they say when they found her note, and realised she wasn't coming back?

Dear Mam and Dad

I've gone to London. You know I don't fit in here. I never have. I want more from my life. I want to be famous. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. I'll call soon.

Your loving daughter,

Maggie

Would they be devastated, upset, angry? She shrank at the thought of her dad's anger, at the magnitude of what she'd done . . . But no. She had come here for a reason, and she knew she could never go back to Sheffield, not now.

It was almost dark in Piccadilly Circus. The lights seemed brighter than ever. Maggie wrapped her thin fawn-coloured coat around her body and headed for the tube station, wondering if she would get lost on the trains back to Victoria like she had on the way there. She cast one last look up as she navigated the narrow steps down to the station. Through the railings of the balustrade, her eyes darted from one neon sign to the other, the bright red of the huge Coca-Cola sign to the glowing yellow of the SKOL lager banner and then to the Max Factor make-up logo. The lights of Piccadilly were hypnotising, the atmosphere intoxicating. She knew she was here to stay. Nothing was going to stop her.