

POSH GIRLS

LUKE 15

By Lancelot Schaubert

A wealthy NYC heiress had two daughters – Rosario and Evangeline – around the time she retired from running POSH so that she could spend her summers at her Harwich Port on Cape Cod at the fourth house they'd bought (NYC, the Girdwood ski lodge by Alyeska, the one on the Cape, and the fixer-upper villa in central Italy – the kind you bought for a dollar and invested several million in modernizing, but hey: free vineyard). Two daughters, both styled themselves artists, man. But not like that, man. They'd take over POSH.

POSH had a rather odd building just south of Columbus circle: all pentagons angled in such a way as to make weird mountains and valleys along the sideways walls. A short, squatty building compared to the towers surrounding it – hotel towers formerly named after a con man who had merely licensed his Anglicized last name and had pissed it in the sand of every tower in the city that would let him. POSH was shorter, meaner, leaner: they owned several hundred magazines worldwide, all focused on fashion. Folks went in and out of the building during rush hour and the various tidal realities of New York City – less of a rat race, really, and more of an ebbing and receding human foam. And browned seaweed. Most of POSH actually worked outside the building – not in a telecommuting way (though that too came later), but because most of them found themselves in some notch of the food chain of a fashion shoot. For Rosario, that generally meant producing the thing: making it happen in line with the great tradition of POSH stylists and producers, moving their Great Tradition™ one click down the line into a future that never quite changed the past. For Evangeline, it meant that spotlights make bright big plants grow shiny beautiful flowers.

Their mother, Sage, had started to transition the leadership – both girls would need seats on the board, both girls would need to understand what all it took to run a company so integral to the way the world styled itself. It seemed to be going well, despite Evangeline raising a stink in the mail room every time she walked anywhere near one of the lowly workers there.

Until Evangeline came into the den one evening and poured herself a gin and tonic from her mother Sage's prized store – the one she saved for big breakthroughs and big deals with big clients. Evangeline cracked it, poured it, poured her mother one.

Who accepted with trepidation, fingers shaking, eyebrow raised.

Evangeline said, "You know how you put half the company into a trust along with the money Dad left me?"

Sage nodded and sipped.

Evangeline shook her glass, pawed the floor with her foot. "I want mine now."

"Your what?"

"Half."

Sage raised her eyebrow still higher, enough that it strained against the muscles and tendons in her eye socket. "Half."

Evangeline felt the nausea rise up in her and wondered at it. She straightened her shoulders, stuck her chest out a bit and said again, "My half."

"Of your entire inheritance?"

"Yes."

"Stock, options, real estate, inventory, employees, commodities, the sheep farm in Scotland, cash...?"

"All of it," Evangeline said again.

"Why?" Her mother asked.

"Because it'll take that to make an incredible work of art."

"A work. Of art. That costs billions?"

Evangeline said, "There's something about the poetry of life."

Her mother snorted in her general direction, shook it off, then asked, "Do you have any idea how long it would take to divest that right now with the release of six different autumn issues upon us?"

"I'd still like to have it now."

Sage took a break and stared at her daughter. "This is easier with the lawyers when I'm dead."

"I know."

"You'd rather me be dead?"

Evangeline said nothing. She hadn't really thought that through.

"Is that what you're saying?"

Again, the award-winning actress said nothing.

Sage scoffed. She would begin the process.

It took another year or so to get everything liquidated and moved from the living trust into an all-cash account so that Evangeline could do what she wanted with it. Several hundred taxable events were triggered and Sage paid those upfront so that her youngest daughter wouldn't have to worry about that. Not that she would: Evangeline was the sort that delayed the inevitable until the inevitable crashed into her at some point in the distant future.

Cash in hand, Evangeline took everything she had and chartered not a plane, but a yacht, for Ibiza, Spain. She took the slow way, pre-gaming for her island adventure the way that most football dads pregame for Friday night lights. She arrived and it felt something like the rave scenes in *The Matrix Reloaded*: rich folk and persons of great

renown and everyone got toked out on designer drugs like Flakka (alpha-PVP), synthetic cathinones (Bliss, Blue Silk, Cloud Nine, Drone, Energy-1, Ivory Wave, Lunar Wave, Meow Meow, “Bath Salts”), K2, U-47700, and Duoeclastaeqiol.

Duo did the worst to her, personally, when she took it.

She’d hopped for weeks at a zillion-odd beach parties and ended up in one of the long series of hidden coves, hopping lover after lover after lover. Then she ended up in Pacha, the FLOWER POWER DISCOTHEQUE. Space – which was an anti-gravity, space station themed party that ended up posing the Feria de Abril in Seville, where flamencas serve up manzanilla and jamon. Go-gos streamed from nowhere from Privilege and went straight down the street to Amnesia where DJ Amster Lariott (of hotel fame) ran the party. You had that lacrosse player named Yafa, that Mexican singer Maria Emeraldal, that actor Pete Blue. Each one of these cost 200€ to enter and some of the names of some of the parties I refuse to enter here.

She bought a secondary yacht that they blew up with gas out in the Mediterranean while high on ecstasy. That was fun for five minutes. They bought a flock of specialized chickens that they turned lose on the entire island – which, again, was great fun until the birds crapped everywhere. Then they decided to slaughter those for a sort of paella/biryani mix feast they hosted on the tip top of Torre des Savinar that overlooked the crags in the azure sea that looked like a cresting humpback whale (and tail). Afterwards, they spent way, way too much on climbing gear from a traveling salesman and then she joined a bunch of half naked climbing men and a couple of so-clad women to rappel down the crags of the tower.

This went on for weeks – a trail of fake lovers, fake (even almost fully abstracted) currency, fake awards, fake fame, fake island power.

Then a pandemic hit the world. It shut down all sea vessels, all airplanes, all borders. Evangeline and the rest of Ibiza found themselves stranded. But it wouldn’t be that big of a problem.

Except that an island like that serving clientele such as those relies entirely upon imported goods, particularly food and toilet paper. When the exports dried up, so did the island’s access to basic necessities. No worries, at least in Elizabeth’s mind: they’d simply go more local, go more organic.

But then the rain stopped as well. And it kept stopping, kept refusing to fall upon her or her colleagues or neighbors.

For months.

And then the winds came and turned the once lush, green island into a desert island.

She swore: she hadn’t planned on it getting this bad. She retreated into her mountain yurt – the one with the flowy canvas sails for walls – where she started to stew. It felt *awful*. Absolutely horrendous to think *not only* that she was stuck here, *not only* that they had no food, *not only* that she had been cut off from whatever funds remained (after

blowing so much of it on gambling and gigolos and the rest, she hardly had a week of travel and food expenses left in the account – the one with the debit card they'd put a stop on). What could she do?

The anxiety *boiled* up in her chest: acidic fire. She could try to find a job on the island, but as much money as she'd blown and as awful as she'd been to the service industry, it seemed that they wouldn't want her as a colleague. So anyone that *could* have been an asset for a job on the island suddenly felt like an extreme liability: no money and so the people that valued money wouldn't value her anymore and those who did not value money, or not in the same way, wouldn't want her because of how stuck up she'd been. That plus the drought, the famine, the pandemic-led export problem – all of it connected to mean that it wouldn't be the best to try and get a job here. She could scavenge. She could do a lot of things.

One of them would absolutely, positively, not include going home to her mother. And especially not home to her sister.

She would try getting a job among the servers first.

It failed miserably, quickly. It went *exactly* as she had expected, though not in the way she had expected: none of them accepted her, but they *did* do back to her – as a patron – what she had done to them as clients. They poured a pitcher of beer on her head. They threw rotten fruit at her. They took Evangeline's hair in their hands at the beauty shop and hacked it clean off... *for charity*. Seemed ironic to Evangeline to use the name of a virtue for such a vice. So she gave up on the service industry.

Stealing appealed for a time. Until an officer of the law caught her and she realized she could get locked up not only as a prisoner, but a *political* prisoner very, very quickly. That could bankrupt and shame not only her, but her whole family. She didn't want to do that: not with so many screens around the world, so many newsfeeds. Her goal wasn't to shame her sister – her sister had nothing to do with it. Certainly not her mother: Evangeline was interested in performance art. She'd often found herself standing around the clubs on the Spanish island with a hard seltzer in her hand and some groupie or socialite walking up and saying, "What are you doing?"

And heard – actually heard – her own voice say, "Networking." She'd written it off as a business expense. Problem was, business expenses got expensive if the business brought in no money.

That's how she ended up with the farmer who had illegally smuggled raccoons and possums onto the island to train them alongside the Ibizan Warren Hounds he raised. She spent her time picking road kill off the road for a couple Euros paid under the table. Considering that minimum wage for Spain was eleven hundred Euros, she was getting ripped off for the grueling work. But bringing the carrion in for the coons and possums and lizards and hounds – watching the ravenousness of these breeds, even how they

seemed to digest it fine... paying well for lodging and travel and the rest, it seemed like the caloric deficit would soon overtake her body.

The pandemic made the exports bad.

It burnt out the soil, leading to dust.

Leading to famine.

With her accounts frozen, she needed the money.

Without *enough* money... well.

She was in need.

And after days and days of that, after doing everything she could to make ends meet, Evangeline found herself using a short handled shovel to scoop up a dead sheep boiling with maggots, bloating in the island sun. Around the time she watched the circus coons and possums go to the thing, she started to wonder about how it might taste.

Then and only then did she fully accept that the folks in the mail room she so-desparately hated because of their meniality had more secure lives than her: they made \$20 an hour in air conditioning, had free subway passes, New York State health care, and weekends off.

She found a way to sneak aboard a fishing boat.

The fishing boat landed at a dock where she traded a favor as a stowaway on some yacht from some obscure Russian billionaire. She wouldn't be talking about the favor to anyone. It was the sort of favor that sullied you for life. But she felt *desperate* to get back. She started rehearsing her speech: "Mom, I missed my shot and crossed the line for you, for the company, for the state, for God himself. Don't call me your daughter. Don't call me your heiress. Don't call me a partner. Just make me a mailroom slave so that I can eat."

She dreaded it.

It sweat out her hands like the first time she ever did a school play, a clammy middle school hormonal dread.

She wouldn't get the job: too much had gone wrong on the Ibiza party island. Far, far too much.

They landed near the Chelsea cruise ship docks and she unloaded with little more than the filthy blouse on her back. Far cry from fashionista. She bathed as much as she could in the fountains at Washington Square Park. Her blouse was half see-through, but at that point she didn't care. And, let's be honest here, *it's Washington Square Park*. She wasn't even the tenth most naked person there, though catcalls came aplenty from the open air drug vendors and folks making art with etch-a-sketches.

She walked north. 55 blocks north, 3 avenues east. Miles to go barefoot still, but she did it on the hot pavement. Times Square barefoot is not a sensation you want to experience in the summer sun. It feels as if someone layered fruit roll ups about a foot thick, heated them to boiling, used them like a lint roller to clean every window and

piston and dust bunny and restaurant garbage room in the city, and then laid it back out as pavement sealed with the piss of those experiencing homeless. Her feet half stuck to the grime and the stench of it.

But she got several blocks away and a small figure stood outside the POSH building. Her mother. Her mother with cheeks swelling for worry. Her mother's heels already off from the sprinting, her mother's Bergdorf dress half ripped, picking her up in a bear hug as if she were still little – had her mother gotten a new trainer? – And kissing her on the lips as she had when a little girl.

“Mom,” she said. “I missed my shot and crossed the line for you, the company, the state, God. Don't call me your daugh–“

But her mother was already barking orders to attendants and personal assistants: to tailors to make her a new dress, to jewelers to make her a new necklace and diamond studs, to cobblers to make her new shoes, to the caterers to treat it like a wedding. “My daughter – *my daughter* – we thought dead to the pandemic or a worse fate, but here she is. She's alive. We found her after she's been missing all this time.”

Rosario was in her office, but left early and came out in the street to see a block party *on seventh avenue in Manhattan*. She turned to one of the mailroom servants. “What's happening?”

“Your sister's back. Your mom's spending her wedding dowry.”

Rosario became livid and wouldn't join the party, but went back to her office.

Where her mother came and said, “Why won't you celebrate?”

She said, “I've slaved away as your successor for years, never crossed a line, and I didn't even get a basic steak from you. And here she's squandered your property on man whores – practically wished *you* dead – and when she comes home, you reward her with her dowry? From *my portion of the inheritance*?”

“Rosy: you're with me. You're here, right? Everything I have is literally yours: why not spend it yourself? Of course we had to celebrate: your sister was thought dead. She's on the missing person list. But turns out her body isn't in the Hudson: she's here. She's alive. *She's found*. Isn't that more important than your own inheritance? Isn't your inheritance *your sister*?”