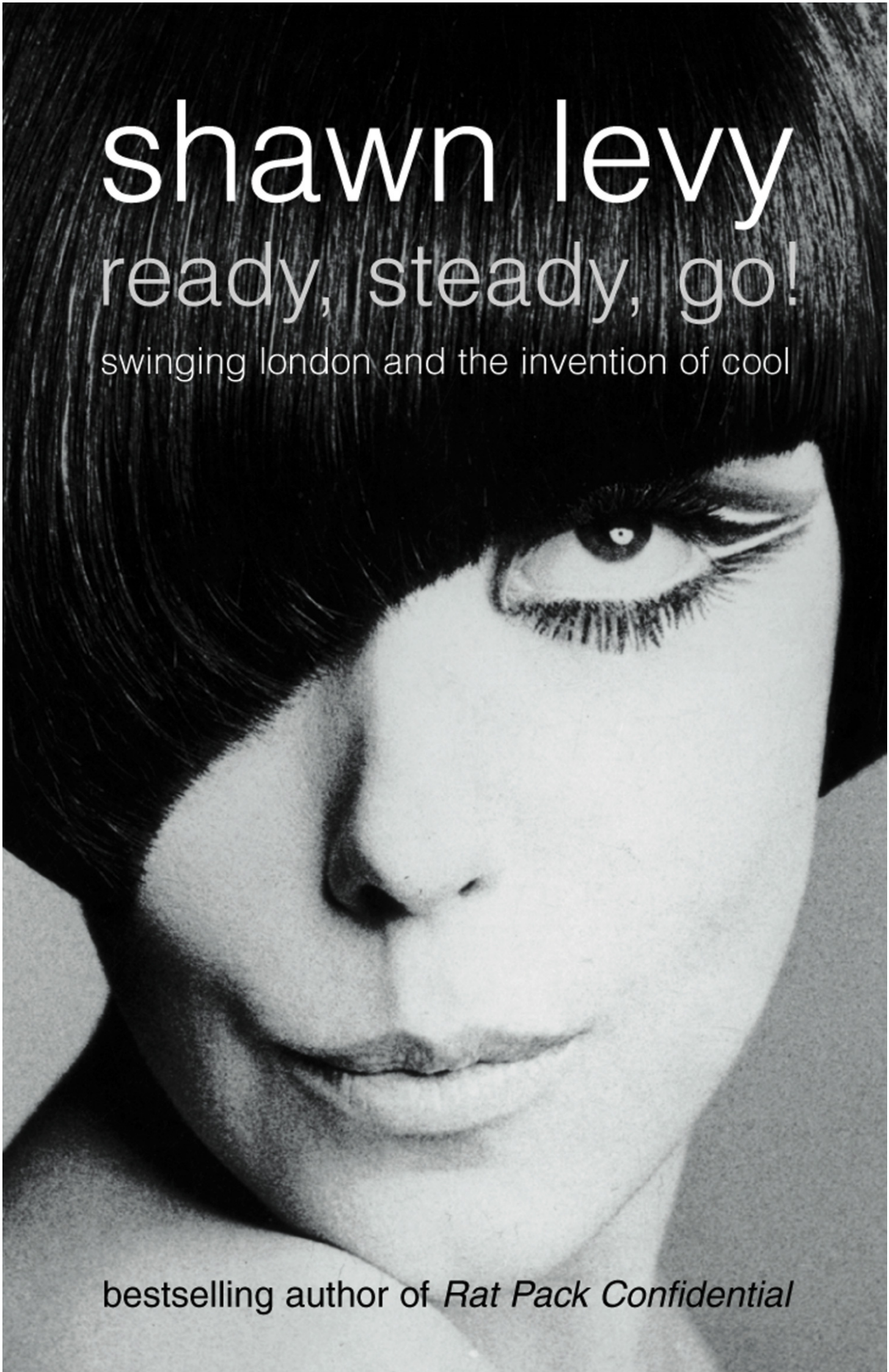
shawn levy
ready, steady, go!
swinging london and the invention of cool
bestselling author of *Rat Pack Confidential*

Shawn Levy

Ready, Steady, Go!: Swinging London and the Invention of Cool

«HarperCollins»

Levy S.

Ready, Steady, Go!: Swinging London and the Invention of Cool / S. Levy — «HarperCollins»,

Shawn Levy, author of ‘Rat Pack Confidential’ brings alive London in the swinging Sixties with a gripping, groovy story of those who created the scene that changed the world.This edition does not include illustrations.For a few years in the 1960s, London was the coolest city on earth: a spontaneous, dizzying stew of pop music, fashion, film, scandal, drugs & sex, crime, the avant garde underground and the tabloid obsession with fame. The rest of the world watched in awe.Snaking through it are such eminent swinging Londoners as The Dreamer (actor Terence Stamp), The Chameleon (Rolling Stone Mick Jagger), The Loner (Beatles manager Brian Epstein), The Snapper (photographer David Bailey) and The Blue Blood (art dealer Robert Fraser), as well as such figures as comedian Peter Cook; hairdresser Vidal Sassoon; singer Marianne Faithfull; fashion designer Mary Quant; supermodels Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy; gangsters Ron and Reggie Kray; actor Michael Caine; actresses Catherine Deneuve, Lynn Redgrave and Julie Christie; pop groups The Beatles, The Who and The Kinks; filmmakers Roman Polanski, Richard Lester and Michelangelo Antonioni; as well as the various participants in the Profumo scandal, the Great Train Robbery, the rise of LSD, the radical underground, the heyday of the gambling club and the fashion boutique and various and sundry scandals, scenes and sensations.Due to a combination of massive talent and sheer luck, they dominated the world scene. But the party was to end – after seven short years it seemed that everyone was now a Swinging Londoner and the same vibe was found in Paris, New York and San Francisco.‘Ready, Steady, Go’ recreates the whole show and contrasts a series of emblematic lives with the great events that shaped the time. Through these stories, Shawn Levy, author of ‘Rat Pack Confidential’, shows how the city reinvented cool and then seemed to lose its swing altogether.

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Ready, Steady, Go!

Swinging London and the Invention of Cool

Shawn Levy



For Mary, finally…

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I

It happened to happen. All at the same time. Every day was a party. It was like a child who has been under the parents' control, and all of a sudden on the eighteenth birthday, they say, 'Here is the key to your Ferrari, here is the key to your house, here is your bank account, and now you can do whatever you like.' It was enough to go mad! The new century started in 1960. After that, it's only been perfecting what we started.

Alvaro Maccioni, restaurateur

Grey.

The air, the buildings, the clothing, the faces, the mood.

Britain in the mid-1950s was everything it had been for decades, even centuries: world power; sire of glorious intellectual, aesthetic and political traditions, gritty vanquisher of the Nazis, civilising docent to whippersnapper America, bastion of decency, decorum and the done thing.

But somehow, in sum, it was less.

Its colonies were demanding freedom and getting it; such unilateral forays into geopolitics as Suez were fiascos; its cuisine, architecture, popular entertainment, fashion and cinema succeeded only when mimicking continental or American models, as Matt Munro, Lonnie Donegan, Diana Dors and Norman Hartnell had done; it stood stubbornly outside a centralising Europe while shrinking alongside the US as standard bearer of Western values in a crystallising Cold War; it was a noncompetitor in the arms race, the space race and, more and more, the prestige race. Winston Churchill, hero of decades ago, sat in Parliament, and the spoor of antique manners lay thick in the air; it seemed a nation not so much in decline as left behind.

The States, France, Italy all felt modern. Rock music and the rise of the teenager as tastemaker made the American scene come on, naturally, loudest, while decadent, savvy, grown-up style made existential Paris and *La Dolce Vita* Rome meccas for both the international jet set and an emerging global bohemian underground. England by contrast was dowdy, rigid and, above all, unrelentingly *grey,* grey to its core.

In '53 – fully eight years after the war had ended – Britons were still eating rationed food, answering nature's call in backyard privies, and making their daily way through cities that bore the deep scars of Luftwaffe bombing. Germany, Italy and Japan – the *losers,* mind you – were seeing their economies revitalise; France, which had been ravaged, was in recovery. But in Britain, the hard days still seemed alive. For many Britons, the mid-1950s were materially and psychologically a lot like the mid-1950s. It was, in the words of critic Kenneth Tynan, a 'perpetual Dunkirk of the spirit', made more bitter, perhaps, with the false glimpse of spring that was a young queen's coronation.

Within a few years, however, that was to change. By 1956, the British economy had finally relaunched itself: key industries were denationalised by a conservative government; American multinationals were choosing Britain as the home base for their expansion into Europe; unemployment dipped, spiking the housing, automobile and durable goods markets; credit restrictions were eased, encouraging a boom in consumerism; and the value of property – particularly bombed-out inner-city sites – soared. In just three years, the English stock market more than doubled in value, and the pound rose sharply in currency markets.

Inevitably, as in America, prosperity led to complacency and nostalgia for a pre-war era that only in retrospect seemed golden. The mood, taken at large, was smug—or would have been, if smugness had been considered good form. The Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, patting himself on the back in 1957, declared 'You've never had it so good.' And in many respects he was right—if you were of certain tastes and strains of breeding.

The common conception of big city excitement – women in long skirts, men in dinner jackets, dance band music, French cuisine, a Noël Coward play and a chauffeured Rolls – was just as it might

have been in the 1920s. 'London was kind of a grown-up town,' remembered journalist Peter Evans. 'It was an old man's town. Nightclubs were where you went if you wanted to hear people playing the violin. There was nowhere to go. Even Soho closed early. There were drinking clubs, but they were private.' There was nothing for young people,' remembered fashion designer Mary Quant, 'and no place to go and no sort of excitement.'

But as, again, in America, there were intimations of a burgeoning dissatisfaction with the status quo. And, perhaps because it had been beaten down for so long, or perhaps because its increasing marginalisation on the world stage liberated it from grave responsibilities, Britain seemed particularly fertile ground for this sort of seed.

At a pace that seemed wholly un-British, various strains of unofficial culture – defiant, anti-authoritarian, and hostile to such commonplaces of tradition as modesty, reserve, civility and politesse – were coalescing, not so much in unison as in parallel. Bohemians in Chelsea and Soho; radical leftists from the universities and in the media; teens with spending money, freedom and tastes of their own; these three groups would evolve and meld over the next few years to bring forth a dynamic that would centre in London and become a global standard. You could point to a few shops, pubs, coffee bars, theatres and dance halls where it all started; you could walk to all of them in a single fair day; and you would, in so doing, encompass an entire new world.

Ten years, maybe fifteen, maybe six.

London rose from a prim and fusty capital to the fashionable centre of the modern world and then retreated.

The '50s were Paris and Rome.

The '70s, California, Miami and New York.

But the '60s, that was Swinging London – the place where our modern world began.

Hardly any of the elements were unique: there had been bohemian revolutions and economic renaissances and new waves in the arts and popular culture and lifestyle before. There had even been other moments when youth dominated the scene: the Jazz Age of the '20s, the brief rock 'n' roll heyday of the '50s.

But in London for those few evanescent years it all came together: youth, pop music, fashion, celebrity, satire, crime, fine art, sexuality, scandal, theatre, cinema, drugs, media – the whole mad modern stew.

Decades later, the blend that was Swinging London has come to seem organic: whole empires would rise and fall on the mix, the bread and circuses and lifeblood of the contemporary mind; no one could imagine life without it or remember when things were different. Yet prior to the day when London hit full swing – some time, more or less, in August '63 – it hadn't existed. Within three miles of Buckingham Palace in a few incredible years, we were all of us born.

It wasn't youth culture that England invented – from James Dean to Levis to Elvis, that was America through and through – but where American official culture at the end of the '50s had effectively tamped down the expressive impulses of young people, England had embraced them as a way of emerging from decades, maybe centuries, of slumber. It let them grow, coalesce, strut. London was where youth culture finally cemented its hold on all forms of expression, and made itself loudly and exuberantly known. Youth, once something to endure, transformed in the span of a few years of British sensations into a valuable form of currency, the font of taste and fashion, the only age, seemingly, that mattered.

The Brits who created Swinging London were unique in their resilience, their ability to absorb and transform elements of American and continental culture, and the cocksureness with which they flaunted their invention of themselves. 'Quite a tough bunch of kids made it through the war,' reflected tailor Doug Hayward. And their toughness was one of their chief assets in their attack on tradition, as Barbara Hulanicki, who outfitted so many of the hip young girls at her Biba boutique, concurred:

'The postwar babies had been deprived of nourishing protein in childhood and grew up into beautiful skinny people. A designer's dream. It didn't take much for them to look outstanding.'

It was as much a revolution in English society as any the island nation had ever experienced. 'My generation,' recalled the actor Sir Ian McKellen, 'was brought up to think that you would peak in middle age. There was such a thing as the prime of life. And when you were secure financially and secure in what you believed in the world and what you could contribute to it, then your big years would come, and it would be in your 40s or your 50s. And suddenly it was all knocked on the head. Suddenly 40 was old.'

David Puttnam, then working in advertising, experienced it first-hand: 'I had a little office that I had taken pains to make attractive, putting up the ads that I was responsible for. But I used to wear a white suit, and my hair was longish. And when they were showing a new client round the agency, invariably, they would kind of walk rather quickly past my room. Within a year, my room became a stopping-off point: "Look at this crazy young guy" – I looked about 12 – "and here's his room with all his ads." I moved literally within a year from being a liability to being an asset.'

Like all capital cities, London was used to hosting sensations, but this one wowed 'em not only in the provinces, but everywhere on Earth. By the early '60s, the city positively overflowed with out-of-nowhere high energy. At night in London, anything could happen: you might attend a concert by a band of geniuses who would create music worth remembering for decades, or see a fortune come and go gambling at an elegant casino in Mayfair, or learn the Twist at a trendy discotheque near Piccadilly, or smoke pot at an after-hours Caribbean shebeen in Nörting Hill, or laugh out loud at the old fart prime minister being lampooned on a West End stage or at a nightclub in Soho.

And those were just the outward signs. If you looked harder you could find a bold, spirited and, crucially, *employed* generation of young people with education, access to birth control, freedom from mandatory military service – a new culture of morals and sensations being reinvented daily and no particular sense that the old ways were set in stone. These were English people who'd absorbed the sensibilities and attitudes of the French and the Italians and grafted them onto the materiality and energy of the Americans. They'd invented themselves as living works of art in a way no Britons had since Oscar Wilde.

More, too, than any free-thinkers in the history of England, this generation felt themselves unimpinged on by any of the caste conditioning that had divided them for centuries; their world would never truly be classless, as some of them liked to swear it was, but the illusion that it was was valuable, and there were specks of truth in it. If the American '60s were about breaking away from the establishment, England in the '60s was, at first at least, about joining in – *finally.* By mid-decade, a new aristocracy was in place: a popocracy, a hipoisie, a stratified pantheon of pop bands and actors and models and new-style entrepreneurs and a few tided and moneyed and privileged sorts who were hip enough to fit into the mix. It wasn't a wide-open world, but it was perforated in ways it had never been before.

Streaming through the holes were foreigners eager to have a close-up look at things. London had suddenly become the hottest place in the world: New York and Paris and Los Angeles and Rome combined. Nowhere previously had such an agglomeration of globally notable talents combined at one time and with such a sense of common tenor – not to mention the inestimable advantage of tender age. For a few years, the most amazing thing in the world was to be British, creative and young.

'The fashion and the art and everything was just exploding,' said American hepcat Dennis Hopper, who made the trip over more than once to take part in the party. 'Music. It was just amazing. The dance clubs and the jazz and these packed places, it was just incredible … I've never been anywhere that had that kind of impact on me, culturally. You can think of Haight-Ashbury and the hippie thing later, but this was more of a style and cultural explosion. It wasn't the anti-, drop-out, tune-in whatever thing that we did. It was really about culture, painting, music, sculpture, fashion,

clothes. I'd say for about five years, no one could touch them. They were dictating culture to the rest of the world.'

It changed, as it was bound to, as it was discovered and imitated and grew pleased with itself. By the middle of the decade, it wasn't just a matter any longer of being talented and eager and lucky enough to be invited to sit at the adult table. The adult table itself was being shunned – along with everything that was eaten off it and what the diners wore and how they spoke to one another and what they smoked by the fire afterwards. The sharp, clean-shaven cool of the first phase of Swinging London was replaced by a defiant new mien – hairy and druggy and enamoured of strange fabrics and eccentricities acquired on foreign travels or in granny's attic. By 1966 it was as if the young were so confident that they'd won that they didn't need approval any longer. The most switched-on cat of 1963 could pass for straight; three years later, hip and square were different continents.

Things had become political – always a divisive step. And the cool new ways were being exported, too. The preferred new lifestyle of the young wasn't quite built for London. Hippie may have looked swell in Hyde Park in July and August, but try it in January or November, making your way to some club through a downpour barefoot or in a peasant skirt. The aesthetic was far better suited to California or Majorca or the countryside. And, in fact, it was being practised and defined in such places, making the whole world seem hip when just a few years earlier only a handful of postal districts north of the Thames qualified. In 1963, a cool-looking person could only be from London; by 1969 standards, a person who looked with-it could be from anywhere.

Same with a pop record or a movie or a wild new outfit or haircut or art gallery or *anything,* really: London wasn't alone any longer and it surely was no longer the centre or even the top. It was alongside New York and Los Angeles, Paris, and Rome and Berlin, and even Tokyo and Amsterdam and even, for a few minutes, Prague. The world had soaked up everything London could think up and was still thirsty, so it started brewing its own. In a real sense, London was losing because London had won. Its passing may have been inevitable – it had, ironically, helped cement the very notion of ephemerality in popular culture – but it was nevertheless a shame.

Yet for all the sweep of history and the pop artifacts and the indescribable meteorology of human taste, attitude and passion, Swinging London was built of individuals. People became icons because they did something first and uniquely. Everybody overlapped and partied together and slept and turned on and played at being geniuses together, but a few stood out and even symbolised the times – eminent Swinging Londoners, wearing their era like skin.

It would be possible, in fact, to explain the age by telling their stories.

David Bailey was one of the first on the scene, an East End stirrer and mixer and the most famous of the new breed of fashion photographers, who helped revolutionise the glossy magazines and popularise the new hairstyles, clothing and demeanour.

Vidal Sassoon, also from an East End background, but Jewish and, amazingly, a real warrior, who freed women from sitting under hairdryers and ascended into an unimaginable ether: flying to Hollywood to cut starlets' hair and branding himself into an international trademark.

Mary Quant took a Peter Pan-ish impulse not to grow up and sicced her craft, inspiration and diligence on it, creating a new kind of women's fashion that spoke to the rapidly expanding notions of what it meant to be cool, free and young.

Terence Stamp, another one from the stereotypical Cockney poverty, wound up winning acting prizes, with his face on magazine covers, the most beautiful women in the world on his arm and a home among peers and prime ministers in the most prestigious part of London – and then wandered out the back door of the decade into spiritual quest.

Brian Epstein failed miserably at everything until he helped create the greatest entertainment sensation of the century while warring internally against the self-doubts he'd borne his whole life.

Mick Jagger, a suburban boy with a bourgeois upbringing, could mimic whatever he wished: black American music, the stage manner of raunchy female performers, the go-go mentality of rising

pop bands, the chic manners of slumming aristocrats, and the arcane sexual and narcotic practices of bohemians both native and exotic – a quiver of cannily selected arrows that let him survive the decade unscathed while the road behind him was littered with the corpses of friends.

Robert Fraser, who had every tool that traditional English life could offer a man – birth, schooling, military appointment, connections, polish, bearing – was cursed with a restless imagination and a decadent streak that led him into art-dealing and sensational living that brought him down.

Lay these lives alongside one another, bang them together, hold them up to the light, and you could open an entire time.

You could see how people lived and rose and changed and stumbled and faded or kept on rising until they disappeared into the sun.

You could see how people made a glory of their day or their days into a glorious apotheosis of themselves.

You could hear the music, feel the energy, see the Paisley and the op art and the melting, swirling colours.

You could go back to Swinging London.

II

A Cloud of Pink Chiffon

The story of David Bailey's early life and career would come to sound a cliché: scruffy working-class boy aspires to a field normally reserved for the posh and sets the world on its ear without bending his personality to fit the long-established model. But like the jokes in Shakespeare or the Marx Brothers, it was only familiar because it was repeated so often from the original. All the pop stars, actors, dressmakers, haircutters, club owners, scenesters, satirists and boy tycoons who exploded on the London scene in the early '60s did so after Bailey, often in his mould and almost always in front of his camera.

Before Mod and the Beat Boom, before Carnaby Street and the swinging hotspots of Soho and Chelsea, before, indeed, sex and drugs and most of rock 'n' roll, there were the laddish young photographers from the East: Bailey, Brian Duffy and Terence Donovan – 'The Terrible Three', in the affectionate phrase of Cecil Beaton, an iconoclastic snapper of another age whose approval of the new lot made it that much easier for them to barge in on what had been a very exclusive and sedate party.

The trio – and a few others who came along in the rush – dressed and spoke and carried on as no important photographers ever had, not even in the putatively wide-open worlds of fashion magazines and photojournalism. They spoke like smart alecks and ruffians, they flaunted their high salaries and the Rolls-Royces they flashed around in, they slept with the beautiful women who modelled for them, they employed new cameras and technologies to break fertile ground in portraiture and fashion shoots. They were superstars from a world that had previously been invisible, perhaps with reason. 'Before '60,' Duffy famously said, 'a fashion photographer was somebody tall, thin and camp. But we three are different: short, fat and heterosexual.'

Duffy could enjoy such self-deprecating boasts because, recalled Dick Fontaine, who tried to make a documentary about the trio, 'He was really the kind of architect of the guerrilla warfare on those who control the fashion industry and the press.'

But it was Bailey who would bring the group their fame and glory. Bailey was the first bright shiny star of the '60s – a subject of jealous gossip, an inspiration in fashion, speech and behaviour, an exemplar of getting ahead in a glamorous world and, incidentally, the great, lasting chronicler of his day.

David Bailey was born on 2 January 1938 in Leytonstone, east of the East End, a block over, he always liked to brag, from the street where Alfred Hitchcock was born. When Bailey was three, the family home took a hit from a Nazi bomb, and they relocated to Heigham Road, East Ham, where Bailey and his younger sister, Thelma, were raised.

Their father, Herbert, was a tailor's cutter and a flash character who dressed nattily, ran around on his wife and liked to have a roll of fivers to hand; his wife, Gladys, kept house but also worked as a machinist, especially after Bert finally left her. The family wasn't rich, but they were comfortable – they were among the first people in their street to have a telephone and TV set, and Bailey was made to dress smartly, to his chagrin ('What chance have you got in a punch-up in East Ham wearing sandals?' he later sighed). But they weren't entirely free of money worries, and one of their ways of dealing with them was, to Bailey, a blessing: 'In the winter,' he recalled, the family 'would take bread-and-jam sandwiches and go to the cinema every night because in those days it was cheaper to go to the cinema than to put on the gas fire. I'll bet I saw seven or eight movies a week.'

Bailey fell, predictably enough, under the spell of rugged (and mainly American) actors at around the same time that his parents' marriage was foundering. But Bert Bailey was nonetheless a little worried about his son's fancy for birdwatching and natural history, which loves led the boy into vegetarianism. 'My father thought I was fucking queer,' Bailey said, 'but queer didn't mean homosexual. In those days it just meant a bit of an oddball.'

Part of Bailey's 'queerness' was taking and developing photos of birds – he preferred the latter process, as it involved playing with chemicals. Even so he didn't think of taking pictures as a career ambition – 'photography was something you did once a year on Margate beach'—and he had enough on his hands at school, where his learning disabilities (undiagnosed at the time) made for a hellish routine. 'I can't read and write,' Bailey said. 'Dysgraphia, dyslexia – I've got them all. I went to the silly class – the school for idiots – and they used to cane me when I couldn't spell. It was quite tough knowing that you're smart and thinking you're an idiot.'

At 15, he dropped out of school altogether and started a series of unpromising jobs: copy boy at the Fleet Street offices of the *Yorkshire Post,* carpet salesman, shoe salesman, window dresser, time-and-motion man at the tailoring firm where his father worked, and debt collector. He developed a taste for jazz and spent nights checking out the music and women at the handful of venues the East End offered someone his age. His musical interests were underscored in his oft-quoted quip about his roots: 'You had two ways of getting out in the '50s – you were either a boxer or a jazz musician.' So perhaps it was inevitable that he followed an artistic muse, especially as he quickly learned how ill-suited he was to make a living with his fists: 'The Krays, the Barking Boys and the Canning Town Boys were the three gangs at the time,' Bailey remembered. 'They weren't gangsters, they were just hooligans. They just went around beating people up if you looked at them wrong in a dance hall. I got beat up by the Barking Boys because I danced with one of their girlfriends. They left me in the doorway of Times Furnishing.'

Bailey's aimlessness was finally punctured by the call-up: in the spring of 1956, he was ordered to report for a physical for the National Service. He tried to duck it – he stayed up two nights straight and consumed a huge quantity of nutmeg ('Someone said it made your heart go faster'), but it didn't work. He might have requested assignment to a photographic unit, but that meant a longer hitch than he was ready to sign for. In August, he reported for basic training in the Royal Air Force, and by December he was stationed in Singapore as a first-level aircraftman with duties such as helping to keep planes flight-ready and standing guard on funeral drill.

On the whole, Private Bailey found the situation pleasant enough. 'I had a good time in the National Service,' he confessed years later. 'I hate to sound like a right-wing middle-aged man, but I think it was very good for me.' There were, he admitted, drawbacks: 'The snobbery! They had a toilet for privates, a toilet for sergeants and a toilet for commissioned officers, as if all our arses were different. It made me angry, the way we were treated, almost like a slave. You were dirt compared with an officer.'

Indeed, it was a run-in with an officer that would prove pivotal in shaping Bailey's future. He was still on his jazz kick – his 'Chet Baker phase', as he later deemed it – and trying to teach himself to play the trumpet. But when an officer borrowed his horn and failed to return it, he was forced to seek another creative outlet. Cameras could be gotten cheap in Singapore, so Bailey – who'd been as enamoured of the photos of Baker on the trumpeter's album jackets as of the playing inside – bought a knock-off Rolleiflex. He was sufficiently hard up for money that he had to pawn the camera every time he wanted to pay for developing his film, but he had caught the bug.

The camera suited Bailey's growing bohemianism. He had begun to read, and where his barracks mates had pin-up girls hung over their beds, he had a reproduction of a Picasso portrait of Dora Maar. His pretensions didn't go unnoticed. 'I did used to get into fights,' he said. 'But because I was from the East End I could look after myself. I also had the best-looking WAAF as my girlfriend, so they knew I wasn't gay.'

When he was demobbed in August 1958, Bailey acquired a Canon rangefinger camera and the ambition to make a living with it. He applied to the London College of Printing but was rejected because he'd dropped out of school. Instead, he wound up working as a second assistant to photographer David Olins at his studio in Charlotte Mews in the West End. He became a glorified gofer (not even glorified, actually, at £3 10s a week) and was therefore delighted a few months later

to be called to an interview at the studio of John French, a somewhat better-known name and a man who had a reputation for nurturing his assistants' careers.

French, then in his early 50s, was the epitome of the fashion photographer and portraitist of the era: exquisitely attired, fastidious, posh, and gay (although, as it happened, married). 'John French looked,' Bailey remembered, 'like Fred Astaire. "David," he said, "do you know about incandescent light and strobe? Do you know how to load a 10×8 film pack?" I said yes to everything he asked and he gave me the job, but, at that time, I didn't even known what a strobe was. We became friends and after six o'clock Mr French became John. One night I asked him why he gave me the job. "Well, you know, David," he said, "I liked the way you dressed." Six months later everyone thought we were having an affair, but in fact, although we were fond of each other, we never got it on.'

In fact, French – 'a screaming queen who fancied East End boys', according to documentarian Dick Fontaine – was the first person to really recognise something special in Bailey. Partly it was his bohemian style – Cuban-heeled boots, jeans, leather jacket and hair over the ears – all before the Beatles had been heard of; partly it was his aptitude for the craft. French liked to compare his young protégé to the unnamed hero of Colin Maclnnes's cult novel about bohemian London, *Absolute Beginners* (a savvy insight) and he was perfectly willing, as he had with many previous disciples, to see Bailey get ahead in his own work.

'He was an incredibly decent type of man,' Bailey would say of his mentor after French died in 1966. 'I don't think he was very good as a photographer, but he had a good attitude. His photography sort of slowed me down a bit, because I had to break away from his way of doing things, but I benefited from his attitude.'

Years later, he would say 'I owe my success to two gay men, really, who told me I was wonderful and pushed me. Being a Cockney and working class, I was an outsider, and in those days gays were outcasts, too. So we felt an affinity. Anyway, John French introduced me to the picture editor of the *Daily Express,* and John Parsons, the art director of British *Vogue* – the second gay man – saw my pictures in the newspaper and offered me a job at the magazine.'

It was in the *Daily Express,* in fact, that Bailey published his first really important photo: an image of the model Paulene Stone wearing a dark knee-length skirt and a bright turtleneck mohair sweater and crouching on the leaf-strewn ground to commune with a squirrel who was nibbling on an ort. Terence Donovan, who didn't yet know Bailey, was among the people who reacted strongly to the image, pronouncing himself 'disturbed by its freshness and its oblique quality'. On the strength of that shot and a few other striking pictures, Bailey found himself hired in May 1960 as a full-fledged photographer at John Cole's Studio Five, earning £30-40 a week.

The money came in handy, as Bailey had in February of that year married Rosemary Bramble, a typist he'd met at Soho's Flamingo Club a few months previously. The couple lived in a small apartment near the Oval cricket ground in South London. Bailey's salary wasn't grand, but it was good, and when John Parsons of *Vogue* called on Bailey later that year to ask him about joining the staff of the magazine, Bailey refused because he was doing so well with Cole. 'They were offering me less per week than *Woman's Own* was paying me per picture,' Bailey remembered. 'I didn't realise that *Vogue* was different from any other fashion magazine … I thought it was just another magazine that used pictures. I wasn't that interested in fashion and preferred reportage and portraits, but fashion gradually took over because of *Vogue*.'

The next time Parsons asked, though, Bailey agreed. His first small piece appeared in the magazine in September 1960, followed by full-page work the next month and, in February '61, his first cover. The Bailey legend was about to be made.

Bailey's arrival at deluxe fashion magazines couldn't have come at a more perfect time to suit his ambitions. The media business, so long a stolid presence in English life, had grown increasingly itchy in the preceding years. English magazine culture was in the throes of an invigorating shake-

up that had begun in the least likely of places. *The Queen,* a 100-year-old society magazine, had undergone a radical change at the hands of its new owner/ editor, Jocelyn Stevens, who transformed it from a dry lifestyle report for the upper classes and those with a passion for following their lives (Stevens sniffed that the old *Queen* was all about how to 'knit your own royal family'), into the most vital publication in the country, with fresh concepts in photography and layout and a wry new attitude toward its putative subject: British tradition. *Queen* began branching out into areas that had never before been within the purview of a society magazine: articles about the Cuban revolution, a four-issue photo essay about Red China by Henri Cartier-Bresson (who was then hired by Stevens to cover the annual Queen Charlotte's débutante ball 'like a war') and a series of articles and features that tried to capture the changing mood of Britain. In one, a parody of the Eton College *Chronicle* (Stevens had attended the school), the establishment of the day, insofar as *The Queen* saw it, was ridiculed as a bunch of schoolboys. In '59, an entire issue was dedicated to the 'Boom … Boom … BOOM'—the new decorators, dress designers, cars, art treasures and overall lavish living (When did you last hear the word austerity,' the lead article asked, and then went on to chronicle England's rise as a producer of advertising, a consumer of champagne and a piler-up of consumer debt); surveys were published on the New Thinkers (including fashion designer Mary Quant, satirist Jonathan Miller and interior designer Terence Conran), the Challengers (including actor Terence Stamp) and New Faces; charts of 'Who Revolves Around Who' were run. Within three years, the magazine had nearly tripled in size to accommodate all the advertising its heat had drawn.

Queen encouraged an upsurge of native British talent, including, of course, photographers, none of whom would become more spectacularly famous than Anthony Armstrong-Jones, who had parlayed an admirable career as a photojournalist and society portraitist into the most amazing *coup* of all: marriage to the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, in one of the most celebrated matches of the time.

The wedding between the commoner (who took the name Lord Snowdon) and the princess was held up as a principal exhibit for the claim that England in the early '60s was becoming a 'classless' society in which wealth and breeding didn't matter as they had done only a few years before. Promulgators of the theory pointed to the appearance of members of the upper class in such formerly outré professions as show business, fashion boutique and nightclub ownership, as well as the vogue for lower-class accents among the upper classes and the initiation of new styles in clothes and dances not by the aristocracy but by working-class youth. 'There was a jolly collision,' remembered Mary Quant. 'People came together, and they tended to be rather one extreme or the other. Both were smart; the boring thing was to be anything in the middle.'

The effect, especially on the upsurgent lower classes, was miraculous, utterly transformatory. 'In France,' reflected Terence Stamp, 'they have that saying, *nostalgie de la boue,* which refers to aristocratic men who like to shag washerwomen. In the '60s, amongst ourselves, our age group, there was an absolute coming together. And what made the coming together was basically music and dancing. In a way it was a new aristocracy. But the main thing was that there was suddenly access between the classes. Had the '60s not happened, I would never have been able to spend the night with a young countess because I would never have met her. And as the great Mike Caine once said to me, "You can't shag anyone you don't meet." Rather Aristotelian logic!'

For the upper classes, the idea that a centuries-old stasis was coming unsettled could be either exhilarating or alarming. Young people from moneyed, privileged families felt impelled to change with the times—and as many seemed to greet the situation with a sense of liberation as with desperate entrenchment in old ways. 'People with country houses either assimilated or vanished,' remembered David Puttnam. You could count on the fingers of one hand the number who got in. They were quite few, and you knew who they were, and they assimilated, quite successfully in some cases.'

Of course, the idea that England's centuries-old traditions of class prejudice had suddenly vanished was a canard that effectively couched the stifling reality in a country where birth still

trumped ability in virtually every case. As the '60s emerged, proponents of the theory of classlessness could point to the likes of Quant and Stamp and the Beatles and a dozen other exceptions – people who'd broken into a new class where talent and the wealth that followed success mattered more than who your parents were. But it was inarguably the case that this meritocracy – with its members-only restaurants and nightclubs – was just as exclusive as the old upper class of money and birthright; you might no longer have needed to be born to position but earning it was, probably, a harder and rarer feat. And, entrance to the new world only lasted as long as the traditional elite chose to allow it. "The rich people let us play in their back garden for a few years,' said tailor Doug Hayward, 'and then they said, "Right, lads, very nice, you've all had a good time, now let's get back to it.""

Still, there was a loosening, and it was accompanied by another shift that made the rise of the Baileys and Quants and Stamps possible. English society, the British were more and more frequently being told at the dawn of the '60s, was becoming more permissive – and if the reality was only that England was loosening up as much as the Continent and the States already had, it was nevertheless more true than thinking that the Royal Family were happy to fit in with the mob. There was the evidence of teenage promiscuity: more talked-about if not more practised than in previous generations. There was the soon-to-be-available birth control pill, a boon to sexual adventurers the world over and finally available to Britons at the start of '61. And there was the embarrassing blow to censors in the '60 prosecution of Penguin Books on obscenity charges for the publication of a paperback edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* a novel written by D. H. Lawrence in '28 but banned in Britain ever since. It was a ludicrous, last-century business, with the prosecutor, Mervyn Griffith-Jones, asking jurors in his opening statement: 'Is it a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?' and debating the novelist's use of such words as 'womb' and 'bowels' with literary critics who had been called as witnesses for the defence. After a five-day trial and several days of adjournment, during which jurors read the novel, a three-hour deliberation led to Penguin's acquittal; a week later, a new edition of the novel, dedicated to the jury, sold more than 200,000 copies in twenty-four hours – and five times that during the coming year.

And while Griffith-Jones was making an ass of himself in an Old Bailey courtroom, Englishmen of his stripe were being openly mocked on West End stages: satire, a brand of hipster comedy initially practised by Americans like Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl but alchemised into a vital, all-encompassing movement by young Brits, was the rage. Four well-bred young men – comedian Peter Cook, polymath physician Jonathan Miller, history teacher Alan Bennett and the Oxford-educated pianist Dudley Moore – were goring every sacred cow of British life in their smash-hit stage show, *Beyond the Fringe.* A revue that spared neither the Crown, nor the Prime Minister, nor Shakespeare, nor memories of the war, nor sexual mores, nor Britain's geopolitical role, it liberated and legitimised years of anti-establishment grumbling and inspired a pan-cultural explosion of new venues for acid commentary: Cook's Establishment Club in Soho, where an even more scabrous review was held; the wicked magazine *Private Eye,* and a hit TV series, *That Was the Week That Was* (starring David Frost, that old person's idea of a young person), which capped (and, indeed, pricked) the satire boom by making subversive humour a weekly staple of domestic life.

'This was very new indeed,' remembered Alexander Walker, then reviewing films in the *Evening Standard.* 'Very quickly, an atmosphere of mockery and cynicism regarding public life and "our betters", to use the Somerset Maugham phrase, was created.' But in spreading, satire, of course, lost its bite. Peter Cook, the boy wonder, the sharpest and, at first, most successful satirist, watched with chagrin as something that had begun as an undergraduate impulse to mock and deflate became an institution: 'The heyday of satire was Weimar Germany,' he reminded people, 'and see how it prevented the rise of Adolf Hitler!' But if his invention didn't crush the status quo, it certainly knocked it back on its pins for long enough so that several similarly subversive new strains of culture could emerge.

In the context of these social and moral upheavals, Bailey's photographs seemed particularly vital. One of the things that John Parsons had surely noticed was that Bailey's work had more of a sense of movement and energy than that of most of the British fashion photographers who'd preceded him. In part it was the young man's inherently brash attitude, which bled into his pictures to create out of his models seemingly normal human beings, not inaccessible mannequins removed from the world of the viewer. 'Bailey was user-friendly,' remembered sometime snapper Dennis Hopper. 'The models seemed to love him. A lot of fashion photography is how well you get along with people. And Bailey had a good bedside manner. He seemed to be able to be on the level with a lot of different types of people.'

But in part, too, it was Bailey's affection for the work of American masters like Richard Avedon and Irving Penn, whose photos he studied for technical details, small effects and emotional impact. By the spring of '61, Bailey had taken the lessons he had learned from his masters and put them to work in a new idiom. He had acquired a 35mm Pentax camera, which liberated him from the tripod and allowed him to shoot his models in a kind of erotic dance (imitated in *Blow-Up* and the Austin Powers films). 'He was sort of like El Cordobés when he worked,' remembered Terry O'Neill, who took iconic photos of the expressive, energetic Bailey conducting a fashion shoot.

Away from the studio, in environments such as the grandstands of a racetrack or the busy streets of a city, Bailey's new cameras allowed him to shoot wherever the fancy struck; *Vogue* fashion editor Marit Allen recalled jumping into 'Bailey's brand-new Jaguar E-Type and taking off on the M1 to go to Liverpool to photograph girls in clothes at the Cavern because it would be fun, it would be a riot, we should do that maybe. And just picking up girls when we got there because we liked them.' The result was extraordinarily fresh imagery—a whole new feel for *Vogue,* for the men's magazine *Man About Town* and for advertising clients such as El Al, BOAC, Fortnum & Mason and the synthetic fabrics manufacturers Acrilan and Terylene.

As for Bailey, it all amounted to a ticket to a new life. He always joked about his motives for signing on with *Vogue* – 'It did allow me to pursue my three main interests: photography, women and money' – and probably he told a lot of truth in the jest. But he also relished the opportunity to work at a machine-gun pace – he developed a reputation during these years as a workaholic, and never lost it – and to try new techniques once he'd earned the confidence of his editors. 'Fashion is a good way to explore photography,' he explained. He wasn't pretentious about it exactly: 'I didn't really think about it as art. It just seemed a nice thing to do. I've never really been clear what art is. I couldn't believe it when *Vogue* gave me a contract to photograph women and get paid for it.

'They – from Mars or wherever they are – said I wouldn't be a fashion photographer because I didn't have my head in a cloud of pink chiffon,' he bragged. 'They forgot about one thing. I love to look at *all* women.' As his stock rose at *Vogue* and elsewhere, he became a kind of craze – the cute Cockney who took such wonderful shots. 'Up at the *Vogue* studio,' he remembered, 'one of the editors actually patted me on the head and said, "Doesn't he speak cute?"' (And he added with a characteristic giggle, 'Three years later, the managing director was asking me if I could move my Rolls so that he could get his Rover out.')

It was, in many ways, a calculated posture: Dick Fontaine, who grew friendly with Bailey over the years, noted, 'He's a deeply serious person, and I would say that to him, and he'd say, "Fuck off. I just wanna make money, have a good time, have dinner, drink a lot, fuck a lot." All true, of course.'

Bailey used his reputation for lower-class cheek to his advantage. 'All the posturing with the editors – "I'm not going on that gig!" – was always to do with something else,' remembered Fontaine. 'Bailey just would be the court jester, playing the trickster.'

And he cavorted as much with his subjects as with anyone else. Within a year of Bailey's arrival at *Vogue,* jazz singer and pop critic George Melly sat for him, and he recalled the excited atmosphere the photographer brought to the session: 'Here was this unposh, blatantly heterosexual young man dressed all in black … David made no attempt to disguise his Cockney accent – I suspect he may

even have put it on a bit – and jumped around like a grasshopper taking what he called "snaps" of us from every angle, rather than setting the whole thing up in a stiff, formal way like most fashion photographers did in those days. I remember he used lots of funny expressions when taking pictures like, "Lose that arm, Chief.'"

Melly was in the studio to be photographed with one of the magazine's newest models as part of a feature Bailey was shooting for the 'Young Idea' section. The idea for the feature was to photograph the new girl in a variety of outfits alongside a number of men who were just making a splash on the London scene: Kenneth Tynan, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, David Frost, Vidal Sassoon, Terence Donovan and Stirling Moss included. There was a problem, though: Claire Rendlesham, *Lady* Rendlesham, the magazine's imperious editress, didn't want to use the girl he had in mind. Bailey fought her and finally won out on the condition that he would reshoot the feature no questions asked if, as Rendlesham feared, it didn't turn out well enough.

The girl was Jean Shrimpton, and, soon after Bailey photographed her with all those up-and-coming men, she would transform in his hands into virtually the first model in England to become famous solely on the strength of posing for pictures. 'Prior to then,' journalist Peter Evans remembered, 'a model was an anonymous creature. One or two might have had a name but mostly because they were society girls. The top models were either married to or were themselves aristocrats; they could afford to do it because it wasn't a highly-paid job.'

Shrimpton wasn't well-educated or rich or from an old family. She had attended Lucie Clayton's modelling school, which she entered after indifferent tuition at the Langham Secretarial College. Barely 18 years old when she first set eyes on Bailey, she was, in her own phrase, 'waifish, coltish and cack-handed', but she was a stunning natural beauty – if uncultivated – who had been turning heads in her native Berkshire since childhood. She was only slowly making her way into the modelling world, but it would be hard to imagine that someone as perspicacious as Claire Rendlesham didn't see her obvious potential.

Bailey noticed it right away in late '60, when he walked into a Studio Five shoot that Brian Duffy was doing with Shrimpton for Kellogg's cornflakes. 'I looked in his studio and saw this vision,' Bailey remembered. 'He was taking the picture against a blue background. It was like her blue eyes were just holes drilled through her head to the paper behind.' Afterwards, he had a chance to ask Duffy who this fabulous girl was and the older man warned him off: 'Duffy said, "Oh, she's too posh for you." I said, "Well, we'll see about that, mate."'

A few weeks later, Bailey requested her for one of his first *Vogue* jobs.

'I'm Bailey,' he told her by way of introduction.

'Just Bailey?'

'Just Bailey.'

And that would be all she'd ever call him.

Shrimpton was taller than Bailey – even with his Cuban heels; she knew he was married; and she was still living in the country with her parents. Still, she confessed, 'We were instantly attracted to each other. Whenever we worked together this attraction created a strong sexual atmosphere.'

Over the coming few months, they would inch closer and closer to acting on that attraction. In that time, Bailey taught her how to dress and how to model, but he never tried to make her into something she was not. Rather, relying on the aesthetic he was developing in his life and in his photography, he encouraged her naturalness. 'She took modelling with a bit of dignity,' Bailey said. 'Honestly, I don't think she really cared if she did it or not.'

But the results, he said, were almost always the sort he was after: With Jean you never had to reshoot anything. Ever. She was always in perfect synch with the camera. It's funny, though; in terms of personal style, Jean didn't have any. She just dressed in any old rags. Most of the time she looked like a bag lady.'

She concurred with his assessment of her attitude towards the business of fashion: 'Modelling meant little to me till I met him,' she said when she became famous. 'I was just lucky getting work. Bailey has been the greatest influence in my life so far. He says when I met him I was a county chick. All MGs and Daddy and chinless wonders.' And she defined the look that he and she had cultivated as 'not beatnik and not classical either – but more beatnik than classical'.

Their technique when they worked together was remarkably simple: 'We would just drive out to the country with some clothes,' according to Bailey, 'and Jean did her own hair and make-up.' *Vogue* editors were initially ambivalent towards the off-the-cuff feel of the stuff he was giving them, referring to the results as 'Old Bailey and his scruffy look'. But Bailey was perfecting his theory about how to shoot fashion: 'If you look at my fashion pictures, there's a personality to the girls. The girl is always the most important, then the dress. If she's not looking stunning, then I figure the dress doesn't, either. The girl is the catalyst that brings it all together.' And when they saw what he managed with his new model, the editors couldn't deny that Bailey had discovered a star; their work together became a sensation. Shrimpton – at first anonymous but soon heralded as 'the Shrimp' – was becoming a pin-up darling throughout the country.

Shrimpton was a sensation not only because of her fabulous looks or the extraordinary photos Bailey took of her. The two would eventually become famous – infamous even – for their lives together. Despite the obvious obstacles to a romance, Bailey courted Shrimpton as diligently as had the lovesick public school suitors she was accustomed to – with his own personal twist. He would take her out to dinner, not to chic West End restaurants but rather to a favourite chop suey joint on East Ham High Street. With their late working hours and their increasingly common socialising, Shrimpton wasn't always able to go all the way home at night, and she stayed once or twice at Bailey's parents' home – where she was given an understandably cold shoulder. Rather than repeat the unpleasantness, Bailey took to renting them a chaste pair of rooms at the Strand Palace Hotel. Finally, it happened: on a hillside near her home, they made love for the first time.

With their passion consummated, they had to confront Bailey's marriage and the hostility of Shrimpton's parents who, astounded that their daughter – still not 19 – was carrying on with a married man, threw her out of the house and shunned her for some time; she and her father didn't speak for a year. By the summer of '61, Bailey and Shrimpton were living in a flat in Primrose Hill with a dog and Bailey's birds (he would remain an amateur ornithologist his whole life), in a rough, bohemian setting that was at stark odds with their increasingly glamorous lifestyle and public profile.

In the next year, Bailey would become a source of excitable scandal in London: 'David Bailey/ Makes love daily' went the salacious refrain. And he would become the poster boy for the rise of what one writer would call the 'photogenes', the wild young men, primarily, associated with the world of fashion magazines, models, and piles of money. 'I think the photographer is one of the first completely modern people,' Bailey was famously quoted as saying. 'He makes a fortune, he's always surrounded by beautiful girls, he travels a lot and he's always living off his nerves in a big-time world.'

Much was made of how cocky East End types like Bailey had broken so completely into what had been a rarefied line of work, and, later on, Bailey acknowledged how timing and history had abetted his rise: 'Until the '60s, the class structure here was almost like the caste system in India. If things had gone on as they were, I would have ended up an untouchable. But that all broke down.'

He didn't, of course, break it down alone. His key collaborator, who kicked at the status quo with real relish and wicked wit, was Terence Donovan, fellow Cockney crasher of the gilded gates of fashion photography. Big, stout, booming, soft-hearted Donovan was even more of a character than Bailey, a serious practitioner of the martial arts, a man so adverse to cutting a fashionable image that he bought dozens of identical outfits so that he'd never have to think about dressing. He was, too, a prodigious font of comic verbal fancies – rather than admitting to wasting his money on 'wine, women and song', he claimed he'd blown a fortune on 'rum, bum and gramophone'. Donovan was

more restless than the other photographers. He was the first to publish a book (*women throooo the eyes of smudger TD* – the title was his, as was the free association text inside), and he owned a number of businesses completely unrelated to his nominal work: a hardware store in the King's Road, a building contractors, a chain of dress shops, a restaurant. Eventually, he tried to segue out of still photography altogether, shooting commercials for the majority of his commissions.

But fashion photography, of all fey pursuits, was what he became famous for, and he was soon shooting for *Vogue* and *Queen* right alongside Bailey and Brian Duffy. They were always thought of in a group, cowing editors and clients with Cockney sass. 'Duffy laid it out,' said Dick Fontaine. 'They got access to the fashion business by producing this kind of hysteria among the upper-class women who controlled the fashion magazines. They would go in there and be totally East End, acting out in fashion offices. Lady this and that was being beset by these East End boys who were being facetious and not respectful.' Once they had their feet in the door, the three stereotypically dashed from one exciting assignment to another, partied in chic restaurants and clubs, and ran with beautiful women (Donovan left his first wife for, among others, model Celia Hammond, a classmate of Jean Shrimpton's at Lucie Clayton's).

Like Donovan, Bailey kicked against being cast as a fashionista. He did a lot of documentary work, some of it quite fine, like his '62 studies of the East End, which had an otherworldly quality reminiscent of Eugene Atget's work nearly a century earlier. But it was for 'shifting frocks', as he derisively referred to the art of fashion photography, that he was famous. And rightly: his April '62 *Vogue* feature – 'Young Idea Goes West' – in which Shrimpton was shot on the streets of New York in documentary style, was a landmark that looked breathtaking decades later. There Shrimpton stood – fully clothed, yet somehow naked and fragile, aloof and reserved, a talismanic teddy bear in hand – in Harlem and Chinatown and Greenwich Village, with men ogling her or just as often walking by without a glance. Some of the scenes were dynamically filled with detail, others so spare as to seem posed: brilliant, organic, breakthrough stuff.

New York had been an education for both photographer and model. The British *Vogue* office had been somewhat nauseated by the prospect of unleashing their bright new Cockney on outsiders. 'To give you an idea of what it was like then,' Bailey remembered, 'Ailsa Garland, the editor of *Vogue,* phoned me before we left and said, "Don't wear your leather jacket at the St Regis. Remember you represent British *Vogue*!"' But Bailey dressed as he pleased: the *Vogue* chauffeur sent to take him to the airport was horrified to find him waiting in a sweater and jeans. In New York, Miki Denhof, the editor of *Glamour,* which gave Bailey his first stateside work, remembered her shock on first seeing him: *'Nobody* came to the office in *jeans.'* But Diana Vreeland, who'd only recently taken over at American *Vogue,* knew the real thing the moment she saw it, interrupting the subordinate who was introducing Bailey and Shrimpton with 'Stop! They are adorable! The English have arrived!'

The majority of American editors weren't, however, any more prepared to give free rein in their pages to Bailey and his hand-held, freewheeling imagination and imagery than their English counterparts had been. 'You're all over the map,' he was told. In *Women's Wear Daily,* the great Richard Avedon dismissed Bailey as 'a Penn without ink'. And Bailey was even more disappointed at the treatment afforded Shrimpton: 'It was very square, very "professional". And what they did to Jean was amazing: they tried to turn her into a kind of doll – stiff hair, too much make-up, over-production. By the time they were finished, it wasn't really Jean anymore. And it had nothing to do with what we were doing in London at the time, which was much more natural.'

So they became a revolution of two. For the next couple of years – be it in London, New York, Paris or the countryside – Bailey and Shrimpton worked almost exclusively together and, until the rise of the Beatles, were the most glittering jewels in the diadem of the New Aristocracy, the set of young pretties and go-getters whose rise and adventures filled the newspapers and the dreams of young strivers in the East End, South London and the hinterlands.

Bailey, blessed by the money, access and haughty remove his status afforded him, nonetheless harboured a resentful attitude towards the glittery cage in which he believed success had trapped him, and he became frankly bristly when asked about the clichéd image of his life: ‘The whole thing about the East End fashion photographer is that it is perfect for cheap journalism. They always have me talking like a cockney but I don’t think I speak particularly cockney. And in fact I’ve never been out with girls who wear white boots. And I’ve never called a woman a bird.’

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