

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a strapless blue gown with a floral bodice, sits at a round wooden table. She is looking upwards and to the left, with her hands clasped near her chin. The background is a grand, ornate room with high ceilings and architectural details, possibly a museum or a grand hall.

*History
said she was just
a man's muse.*

*History was
wrong.*

The
DISAPPEARANCE
of ASTRID
BRICARD

NATASHA
LESTER

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Also by Natasha Lester

A Kiss from Mr Fitzgerald

Her Mother's Secret

The Paris Seamstress

The French Photographer

The Paris Secret

The Riviera House

The Three Lives of Alix St Pierre

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Published in Australia and New Zealand in 2023
by Hachette Australia
(an imprint of Hachette Australia Pty Limited)
Gadigal Country, Level 17, 207 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW 2000
www.hachette.com.au

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978 0 7336 4724 6 (paperback)

Cover design by Christabella Designs
Cover photograph (woman) courtesy of Liz Martinez Bridal
Cover photograph (Versailles) courtesy of Adobe Stock
Author photograph courtesy of Stef King/stefking.com.au
Typeset in 13.7/16.5 pt Centaur MT Std by Bookhouse, Sydney
Printed and bound in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group



The paper this book is printed on is certified against the Forest Stewardship Council® Standards. McPherson's Printing Group holds FSC® chain of custody certification SA-COC-005379. FSC® promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

*For every woman who's ever had a man make her
into someone less than she truly is.*



*And to the Lesters, especially Dick Lester, who did hire a
chateau in the Loire Valley for his enormous family to celebrate
his eightieth birthday. I promise nobody in the fictional family
in this book is based on anyone I'm related to. You are all,
thankfully, much too equable and undramatic to be characters
in this book — and I mean that with love and gratitude.*

Astrid Bricard wasn't just a model. Nor was she just a designer, or just a celebrity. It's impossible to say what she was, just that — if a person could ever be said to represent an era, Astrid Bricard was the 1970s. She was a muse and a myth, and now she's the biggest fashion mystery of all time. What happened to Astrid Bricard? It's a question almost as famous as that silver dress Hawk Jones made for her.

— *Vogue*, 'Fashion Legends' issue, 2010

Prologue

PALACE OF VERSAILLES, FRANCE, 28 NOVEMBER 1973

In the same way that the Electric Circus nightclub in Manhattan is all about sensual overwhelm, so too is the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, Hawk thinks as he strides into the gallery beside four other men. The club's excess comes from bands like Velvet Underground playing so loudly the music feels like a secondary heartbeat, from the fire-eaters swallowing flames like candy, and from the light show flashing over canvas-draped walls that make you believe the room is leaning inwards and, a minute later, that you're the one who's on a slant. But the extravagance here is of a different order, manifested in so many mirrors there's nowhere to hide. Hawk can see himself caught from all sides and reflected a thousand times beneath cathedral-like painted ceilings – the kind that make you feel guilty even when you've done nothing wrong.

For one disquieting second, Hawk wonders if this is what it will come down to – a belief that this kind of history makes French couture supreme, versus six American designers trying to show that a dress meant to writhe to the Rolling Stones is what fashion is now. He wants Astrid to saunter in right now and prove that very fact. But where is she?

He glances over at Bill Blass, dressed as always in tweed and tobacco. Beside him is Oscar de la Renta in dignified black, Stephen Burrows in naiveté, and Halston in self-admiration. Hawk knows better than to ask any of them if they've seen Astrid.

'*Allons-y!*' their French chaperone calls disdainfully, as if he'd rather be accompanying Yves Saint Laurent and the rest of the French team, who everyone believes will whip the Americans so completely that not just their clothes, but their skins will be left in ribbons.

To tell the truth, some days Hawk thinks that too.

As if to bolster Hawk's fears, Hubert de Givenchy – a man Hawk couldn't have named six years ago but who he's now chatted to several times – enters. He's elegant in suit and tie, so intrinsically the French couturier that even the lines on his face look to have been pleated with a seamstress's precision. Hawk almost tugs at the sleeves of his favourite grey sweater but he remembers that he's twenty-eight years old and has earned the right to be there – which maybe only proves how thin on the ground designers are in America.

He looks around again for Astrid before the Hall of Mirrors exposes his agitation. Against all odds, the Americans have to win tonight. Otherwise Hawk and Astrid will never be together – and that's not a thought he wants to even contemplate, let alone have reflected to the whole goddamn room.

Get it together.

He rubs his hand over the stubble on his jaw and reminds himself that Hawk Jones is the man *Life* called the premier fashion designer in all America.

'*Bonjour.*' Givenchy greets them with a handshake, always a gentleman. 'Good luck for this evening.'

Halston, who'd as soon be called a gentleman as Hawk would be called conservative, mutters, 'Smug asshole,' and Hawk sees relief cross Blass's and de la Renta's faces that Halston's expletive wasn't, for once, completely offensive.

And then the mirrors show Hawk some more sober reality. A team of American designers who are really a set of squabbling egos thrown

together for a show that everyone from Princess Grace of Monaco to the Duchess of Windsor, as well as every newspaper and magazine across America and Europe, is attending. There they are at the Palace of Versailles about to do battle for their country's honour to be crowned fashion capital of the world, and the five of them are barely on speaking terms and it's seen as a win when Halston doesn't outright tell someone to fuck off.

And the whole of Hawk's happiness is riding on this.

The mirrors shift again. Now they reflect not just his terrified face, but a bundle on the floor near one of the statues. The bundle becomes, with a sudden, sharp twist of his heart, the delectable white column dress he'd seen Astrid making yesterday, a dress he'd believed would make everyone applaud her and acclaim her at last with the recognition she deserves.

Why the hell is the centrepiece of Astrid's collection lying sprawled on the floor of the Hall of Mirrors?

Hawk's feet move him forward. He's halfway across the vast glittering hall before anyone else notices the bundle.

He's three-quarters of the way across when he sees that a crimson sash of savage red now stains the silk.

His feet halt. His head turns away. But all around him, the mirrors double, triple and quadruple the violence of that dress and he swears now, loudly, the sound reverberating as if it might shatter every damn mirror before his fist does.

Because if the red staining Astrid's gown is blood, then he knows that means Astrid is dead or gone – and so too is he.

ACT ONE

The Legend Begins . . .

One

Astrid Bricard & Hawk Jones

NEW YORK CITY, JANUARY 1970

Astrid Bricard stands in front of a vitrine, face almost pressed to the glass, mouth, cheeks – even her freckles – curving into a smile that’s been waiting to be freed her entire life. She might be twenty-four years old but real life has just started, and hugging the vitrine in the archives of the fashion school at Parsons School of Design would be the best way to celebrate. She leans in closer, bumping her nose against the pane that separates her from the dress.

Most people would see a 1950s dress designed by Claire McCardell. But Astrid sees a genius of fibres. The genesis of every piece of clothing is one single fibre. Not even thread – not yet. But fibres – cleaned and carded and combed, then wound and beamed and woven. A magic whose spells cast out cloths of damask and tweed, of crepon and lush velvet.

‘You look like you’re planning to put the devil into hell with that dress.’

Astrid yelps. There’s a man on the other side of the display with a smile on his lips as if he thinks he’s delivered a not-half-bad pick-up line. He has the kind of effortless good looks that make her think he was probably homecoming king once upon a time.

'I'm at least planning to put the originality into Manhattan with it, which that line never will,' she retorts.

He laughs and he finally looks at the dress, rather than her. And she's oddly pleased when he focuses on the single most perfect element of its construction – the sash that crosses over one breast, loops around the back of the neck and then travels down the chest to tie at the side.

'I was thinking about wearing it,' she says, her eyes fixed on the knotted sash. 'If you tugged the bow just once, the whole thing would tumble to the floor. Maybe that would feel . . .' She pauses. The bow is both the dress's truss – the only thing holding it together – and its undoing. 'It would feel powerful,' she concludes.

This man couldn't possibly imagine how good that would feel for a woman – to truly be powerful. But it's what Astrid dreams of, and the smile that settles onto her face as she walks away is both her stay and her strength – but not her undoing.



'What are you wearing?' a tall girl made taller still by the height of her afro demands of Astrid at the end of class that day.

Astrid looks down. 'A blazer my dad was throwing out.'

The girl snorts. 'A man's blazer. Just a man's blazer. Nothing else.'

'Well, I have underwear on but you'll have to take my word for that.' Astrid grins and the girl cackles.

'I'm Velvet. Let's go eat. But first . . . Graham!' she hollers, and a man lopes over. 'I found us another friend. This is—'

'Astrid,' she says as they exit onto East 54th Street.

'Velvet and I met at night school a couple of years ago,' Graham tells her. 'Two people who hadn't finished high school and whose parents didn't want us to go to fashion school.' He grins but Astrid knows that behind those words, there's a whole lot that isn't funny.

'My parents don't want me to be here either,' she says as they turn into a diner.

'See? I knew she was one of us,' Velvet says. 'Outcasts unite.'

The waitress comes over to take their order. Astrid and Graham give theirs but before Velvet can say anything, the woman turns away.

‘I want the burger and fries too,’ Graham calls out. ‘And another soda.’

‘Thanks,’ Velvet says to Graham, smaller and less magnificent than she had been five seconds ago – before the waitress ignored her and then refused to look her in the face as she added the food to their tab.

Velvet lights a cigarette and exhales smoke. ‘You better get used to that or you should hang out with someone whiter,’ she tells Astrid.

And Astrid knows that even though she – a white girl from Long Island – sometimes feels like an outcast, she’s braided into life whereas Velvet’s holding onto its most frayed threads. But Velvet’s stare makes it clear that if Astrid tries to apologise for something that, let’s face it, she’ll never be able to truly understand, Velvet will leave.

So Astrid nudges Graham. ‘I already am. He’s as white as my confirmation dress.’

‘You mean you didn’t wear a blazer for that?’ Velvet says, a smile easing back onto her face.

The food arrives and Graham asks, ‘Why don’t your parents want you to go to fashion school?’

Between mouthfuls of mac and cheese, Astrid explains. ‘My dad’s a lawyer and he wants me to marry one of his junior partners.’

Velvet and Graham grimace.

‘Exactly. But . . .’ She gestures at the blazer, at the sleek blonde hair that sits in a bob just below her chin in opposition to the long locks that are everywhere right now, a style that’s entirely and idiosyncratically her own. ‘I frighten lawyers. Being a fashion designer is the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do.’

Her words are almost tripping over themselves to be told. She’s not used to it – the junior partners her father invited for dinner were always the ones with the words. They’d take her for a drive after dinner and she’d direct them to the main street in spite of their urging to go somewhere quiet. She always jumped out at the traffic lights and went to a

bar, which earned her a reputation. Never mind the junior partners who wanted to drive a girl to a quiet place to give their tongues an alternative exercise to talking – their reputations were unsullied. But Astrid of the odd clothes, late-evening bar habits and disinterest in lawyers was the one they gossiped about.

‘It’s the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do too,’ Velvet says, nodding fiercely.

‘She should come and live with us,’ Graham says to Velvet, who laughs.

‘She probably doesn’t want a mattress on the floor of a tiny place in Chelsea.’

‘A mattress on the floor is about all I can afford,’ Astrid says almost pleadingly. ‘I can’t keep commuting from my parents’ place on Long Island. I need them to believe that wanting to be a fashion designer isn’t something I’ll grow out of, like when I was a kid who ate peanut butter on her hot dogs.’

‘Ewww!’ Velvet shrieks.

Astrid grins. It’s taken her twenty-four years of cajoling, culminating in a promise to her father to take a ladylike liberal arts degree at Hofstra first. He hoped university would bore her into choosing marriage. Instead, she finished her degree. Which meant he had to stick to his side of the deal – that she could go to Parsons if she paid for herself. She’s spent the last six months working on a portfolio that won her a coveted scholarship and allowed her to start a year and a half into the course. And now she has two friends and a place to live.

Life is totally disco.



Hawk drops his rucksack by the door of the Park Avenue apartment, saunters into the kitchen and kisses his mother on the cheek.

She ruffles his hair.

‘Hey,’ he mock-complains, taking a soda out of the fridge, still thinking about the girl from Parsons. He’d gone to the archives for inspiration – he needs to make something new for his shop, but

everything he draws is less than he wants it to be. And he'd found her, wearing only a slim-fitting blazer and staring at a dress, lids half-closed, the curves of her body defined in a way that's now passé – the only girl in New York City who hasn't thrown away her bra. His hand had been suddenly desperate to draw a dress onto her body that made it look like she'd had her 1960s undergarments ravished off her.

He blinks, startled by the force of the memory. 'I met a girl today,' he says.

'So what's new, HJ?' his mother quips, then lifts an eyebrow. 'Ah. She got the better of you. Or,' she smiles wistfully, 'you've just experienced a *coup de foudre*.'

'What if it's both?' he asks, serious in a way he's never been about his mother's badly pronounced French phrases and notions of love at first sight.

Meredith Jones sits on a stool, takes out a cigarette and says, '*Coup de foudre* also means lightning bolt. One flash of brilliance and then all you have is a dull grey sky. Maybe if you saw her again, that's all she'd be and you'd wonder what trick of the light made you think she was more.'

But he doesn't want to imagine that a girl who thinks being unravelled from a dress gives her power could dull to grey upon a second meeting.

'I'll take Dad his dinner,' he says.

He finds his dad in bed, a Babe Ruth biography propped in front of him. Hawk sets down the tray and picks up the baseball from the bedside table, throwing it laconically at the wall, which bears the marks of him having done this same thing for months now – catching the ball, tossing it back.

'Good?' he asks, gesturing at the book, the thud of the ball drowning out the slurping sound his father makes when he eats, a sound that embarrasses the hell out of him. Hence the ball, a trick Hawk had landed on by accident, and that had almost made him cry when his father had said, at the end of that first meal accompanied by the ball's percussion, 'Thanks, son.'

Hawk had had to run from the room because his father didn't need him crying over that *coup de foudre* of a different kind – a lightning bolt of a stroke that had hit nine months before, leaving a brain ruined by the tempest. Matthias's face drooped, his words were slurred, and he had to make a tremendous effort to hold anything in his right hand. The idea of him returning to being a lawyer who could command a bag of gold just by answering the phone seemed as remote to Hawk as his mother ever falling out of love with Matthias and taking up with a man who wasn't twenty years older and semi-infirm.

'Babe Ruth wasn't really an orphan,' his father says carefully so that his tongue doesn't render the words incoherent. 'He went to an industrial school for orphans, but only because he was so much trouble.'

Hawk laughs. 'Don't get any ideas.'

'You're twenty-four, kid. You'll be moving out and leaving us before too long.'

There's an empty space above his shop. It would be the perfect place to live. But if he did that, then his mom would be the only one left here to care for his dad.

Hawk puts the ball down, needing to get out of there – away from the shitty future he can foresee for the two people he loves most in the world. 'Night, Dad.'

In the kitchen, he catches his mother in an unguarded moment. Her hands are pressed to the countertop, a Tom Collins sweating in a glass between them. She's staring at the wedding ring on her left hand, maybe remembering the way she used to dance with her husband every night, in love in a way Hawk wants to be one day – but worries he'll never be good enough for.

'I'll stay in tonight,' he says, even though he wants music and whiskey and to figure out, now he's graduated college and opened a shop, how to achieve what he wants his own life to be – a span of years that will never be disrupted by lightning.

'No.' His mother is firm. 'I need to have a little cry, and I want to do it alone.'

Fuck. He wraps his mother in his arms, kisses the top of her head and she pushes him away with the kind of smile that could break your heart.



At the end of the week, everyone in Astrid's class has to make a short presentation about someone from fashion history who wasn't a designer, but who influenced fashion. Velvet begins, gliding to the front as if the room is her runway. She holds up a magazine, back cover facing the class.

'This is *Vogue*,' she says. She flips the magazine to the front. On the cover is a black model.

'*British Vogue*,' Velvet clarifies. 'Meet Donyale Luna. She's American, but *American Vogue* has never put a black girl on the cover. Needless to say, Donyale lives in London now. She's the first black woman ever to grace the cover of *Vogue*. If that's not influencing fashion, I don't know what is. But will *Vogue* here ever be influenced by her?'

It's like Velvet's put a grenade in the middle of the room. Everyone's frozen, waiting for it to explode. People don't talk about these things so accusingly.

Astrid sticks her fingers in her mouth and whistles. 'Go Donyale!'

The class startles into polite applause. Velvet takes her seat next to Astrid and says, 'I bet she's the only person we see today who isn't white.'

The next presentation by Candace Winters supports that theory. But that's not why Astrid feels sick when she sees the photocopied picture Candace holds.

'Christian Dior is the one designer who influenced fashion more than any other,' Candace begins. 'This is his muse, Mizza Bricard.'

All of Astrid's joy curls up inside her like heated silk. She ought to have known someone would choose Mizza. Which means Astrid has to say it – everyone will find out soon enough. Even at conservative Hofstra it happened, although they weren't fashion people and didn't quite understand the implications. But here at fashion school, there won't be a single person who doesn't, and if Astrid reveals the fact

rather than waits for it to be discovered, she might be able to control the fallout rather than looking like she has something to hide.

‘Nobody knows where she came from,’ Candace continues. ‘She was either a dancer in a nude revue or a prostitute. She lived at the Ritz, never wore panties, but always wore fur coats – and not much else.’

Astrid stands, cutting off the applause, and Candace glares. ‘Can I go next?’ she asks the tutor.

He nods. ‘Let’s hear from our Claire McCardell scholarship winner.’

Great. Now more than a few students who maybe didn’t get the scholarship are eyeing her.

Astrid tells herself to run at it like tequila minus the sunrise. ‘I’m Astrid Bricard,’ she says. ‘I’m adopted. My birth mother was . . .’ It won’t come out, those two words that have defined her life and will continue to define her unless she does something about it.

‘My birth mother was Mizza Bricard,’ she says way too loudly.

The rustle sweeping around the room is one part shocked, and one part suspicious.

‘You’re the daughter of Christian Dior’s muse?’ Candace says, eyes narrowed, as if she thinks that’s the only reason Astrid’s standing there as the scholarship winner.

One of them, they were told yesterday, will leave Parsons and become a name designer. Five will serve name designers. The rest will be doing something else in five years. But of course Mizza Bricard’s daughter can just stroll into the House of Dior and get herself a job in couture – she doesn’t have to work at it.

But Astrid *does*. Harder than anyone. Because Mizza was just a stimulus. Astrid is determined to be the response.

‘This,’ Candace taps her finger on the photocopied page, ‘is your mother.’

Astrid knows what Candace is doing. She’s not clarifying the situation. She’s making everyone look at the photo. While Mizza’s been photographed by everyone from Avedon to Beaton, this is the image that encapsulates the famous muse. Mizza’s wearing a fur coat, body leaning towards the camera. A long strand of pearls dives into her

cleavage and the coat has slipped down her arm, baring the top of her breasts to the rim of her areola. She has a smile on her face that is most definitely come-hither.

Say the word *muse* and everyone thinks *scarlet woman*. Show a muse in fur, jewels and bared skin and everyone thinks *whore*. Or worse. Muses are the kind of women who don't even get paid for all the sex they put out there. Instead, they crave it.

Before Dior died, Mizza came to New York each year with him and she'd travel to Long Island to visit Astrid. Because Dior was more famous than the Statue of Liberty and nobody could miss a woman who dressed like Mizza, her mother's friends would pop in on the same day Mizza appeared in a leopard-print coat and more jewels than a Tiffany window, utterly out of place in green-lawned suburbia where everyone wore white gloves and hats, and one modest strand of pearls that never made acquaintance with one's cleavage. There, as in much of America, Bill Blass's style was the only style – *Women should look terribly clean and healthy and fresh*, he's fond of saying.

Nobody would put *clean* and *Mizza* in the same sentence.

It's Astrid's mission to make sure her name and Mizza's are never used in the same sentence either.

At the end of class, Candace catches up to her. 'So that's how you got the scholarship.'

A group gathers behind Candace. Be it high school, Hofstra or Sunday school, one girl, whose power is derived from her cruelty – a girl who makes it her business to discover everyone's most vulnerable places so she can prod them often and publicly – makes Mizza into Astrid's scandal.

'The muse's daughter,' Candace continues, each word tattooing the label deeper into Astrid's skin.

But Candace isn't the first, nor will she be the last, to say that. 'Or the whore's daughter,' Astrid says nonchalantly. She makes herself continue, even though maybe now she's being as mean as Candace. 'I'm sorry you didn't get the scholarship.'

The intake of breath is audible. And Astrid knows from the look on Candace's face that she was right. Astrid has something Candace wanted. And Candace will be nipping at her heels for the next eighteen months. Which means Astrid can't allow herself to be harassed at the one place she's fought so hard to get to.

'Being Mizza Bricard's daughter isn't like being the daughter of an astrophysicist,' Astrid continues mildly. 'At most, I inherited strong cheekbones. If that's my sole fortune, I'll have spent it in a couple of years. Luckily I don't rely on Mizza for anything and I make my own fortune.'

She'd meant it to come out like bland fact. Spoken aloud, it sounds like a challenge. On one side, Astrid: Mizza Bricard's daughter, possessor of great cheekbones and – Astrid hopes – a hell of a lot more. On the other side: everyone who wants to make Astrid into the daughter of a seductress, aligned with Candace – most likely nobody's daughter, possessor of a more ruthless ambition than Astrid's own.

'We'll see about that,' Candace says, as if yes, this is a challenge and it's one she intends to win.

But so does Astrid. There'll come a day when nobody will be able to call Astrid the muse's daughter ever again.



She's surprised when she hears Velvet yell, 'Wait up!', and even more surprised when she turns to see both Velvet and Graham hurrying after her.

'So we really are the outcasts then,' Velvet says as she links her arm through Astrid's.

For the first time that day, Astrid laughs. Because it seems as if, despite everything and unlike back on Long Island, she has two friends.

'We should go to a party,' Graham says. 'Let off some steam.'

Which is how Astrid finds herself in a huge loft space on Broadway, the home of a friend of a friend of Graham's.

'You gotta pay two bucks,' Graham tells her as they approach. 'It's a rent party.'

It takes a few moments for Astrid to figure out that a rent party means Graham's friend's friend opens up his loft for parties to help offset the rent. 'Is there anything you can't sell in Manhattan?' she says.

'Just your morals.' Graham winks. 'You give those away for free.' And he throws himself into the Dionysian beat of the dance floor.

Through a sound system the likes of which Astrid has never seen, the host is playing an eclectic but danceable selection of jazz and classical, soul and funk. Coloured balloons bump against her arms and Velvet's as they groove, Astrid's floppy felt wide-brim hat long gone, white singlet clinging to her skin from sweat. Eventually, Velvet beckons to her and, breathless from the dancing and the smoke that makes it impossible to see past her fingers, they move to the outer edges of the room. They each grab a banana and a drink from the table that holds none of the usual stimulants, only fruit, nuts and juice – it's BYO highs and lows, Graham explained earlier – and collapse into a beanbag.

'That was just what I needed,' Astrid says.

Velvet laughs. 'The bananas or the balloons?'

Astrid laughs too, then elbows Velvet in the ribs. 'Thanks.'

'Anytime I can provide bananas to compensate for the bitches, just lemme know.'

Astrid remembers the challenge in Candace's eyes and her laughter dies. She fights against the tears that are competing with the grass haze to blur the room, trying to think of something other than herself right now because, as far as acts of generosity go, Velvet's compassion ought to earn her a halo.

'A girl who grew up as a lawyer's daughter on Long Island and who got to finish high school and a liberal arts degree probably doesn't have much to complain about to you,' she says.

Velvet shrugs. 'When you told Candace that you were going to make your own fortune, I wanted to applaud. Because it's not fair but it's fact – just like you don't want to be anything like your mother, I don't want to be like mine. I have seven siblings and my mom did her best, but by age fifteen, I was sitting at the dining table doing alterations so we could make rent, rather than going to school. I'd look at her

across the table and I'd want to say, "Make him use a fucking condom". Feeding only three or even four kids might have meant I could stay at school. I hated that she was so passive that I paid for my dad's aversion to rubbers.'

Astrid sips her juice, wishing it was a joint, which might ease the tension in her jaw. Her words grind out. 'And I hate that, as a muse, my birth mother existed only to make a man great – that she had no greatness of her own. Here we are with Betty Friedan saying the world depends on women's passive dependence and that femininity makes us a target and a victim of the sexual sell, and I see that photo of Mizza in my head, all sex and dependence, and I want to scream. Then there's my adoptive mom, who's exactly the woman in the kitchen Friedan's railing against.'

Her fingers curl around her cup. 'So I have both the mother who's the embodiment of the feminine mystique and the mother who uses her cleavage to inspire a man. And Betty also says that if we excise our femininity, we'll finally be powerful. I don't believe that.'

She gestures at her white singlet, underneath which she isn't wearing a bra, like half the girls in the room. 'Show your cleavage if you want. Stand naked at the front of a room wearing a temptress's smile. Screw around. But do it for yourself because it makes *you* feel good. Don't do it to make a man great. So it's not just that I don't want to be Mizza. It's that I want to take women's fashion, which is the epitome of this supposedly terrible thing called femininity, and I want to make clothes that are both beautiful *and* give women back their power – clothes that damn well never make them feel like their only job is to make a man more powerful.'

The music shifts from effortless groove to something more anthemic, matching the urgency inside Astrid in this strange place where LSD blotters pass from hand to mouth as unabashedly as the private and ineloquent wishes that have just pulsed out of her like blood.

She tugs Velvet up and spins them both around to the crescendo of music and limbs and darkness. She tips her head back and feels it all on her face – the rhythm of the future.

‘I’m not the muse’s daughter,’ she says to Velvet. ‘And you’re not the girl who wasn’t allowed to finish high school. Let’s both believe that, and we’ll do all the rest too.’

They spin and they spin until they’re higher on belief and dreams than any of the day-trippers dropping acid in the corner.