

CYNTHIA'S

Cynthia arrived in New York in 1932, stepping into high society with the kind of effortless grace that turns heads and starts whispers. She was, by all accounts, a sensation: porcelain skin dusted with freckles, a slight inward tilt to her toes, her delicate feet never quite aligned, as though she had been sculpted into a stance rather than taught to walk. People were drawn to her, though they struggled to pinpoint why. There was something about her enigmatic calm, her presence without ever being imposing, the way she always seemed to be listening. Her closest companion was Lester Gaba, the sculptor-turned-tastemaker who introduced her to the city's elite social circles.

The two were inseparable. Cynthia would sit beside him at luncheons, draped in the latest couture, smoking and listening in as socialites exchanged stories. They attended parties, dined at the Plaza, and strolled through department stores where mannequins seemed to hold their breath as Cynthia passed. There was a sophisticated stillness in her limbs, an uncanny symmetry to her features. A sculptor by trade, a window dresser by necessity, Gaba had spent years shaping beauty from brittle materials. He had crafted Cynthia for Saks Fifth Avenue. Upon completion, he decided that the department store simply wouldn't appreciate her the way he did. Instead, he took her home, lived with her.

Fame suited Cynthia. Saks Fifth Avenue issued her a credit card. Designers sent her dresses and jewellery before their runway debuts. She received invitations to exclusive events, a subscription to the Metropolitan Opera, and a column in a newspaper, though it was Gaba who penned her thoughts. She even had a radio show—his voice, her name. As Cynthia's fame grew, so did the public's fascination with the couple's peculiar partnership. In 1937, the two were photographed together by famed photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt for Life magazine. One year later Cynthia received a starring role in the Hollywood production Artists and Models Abroad. They called her a muse, a socialite, a phenomenon.

As time passed, Gaba's relationship with Cynthia took a darker, macabre twist. At one event, he detached Cynthia's hand from her arm to entertain the guests. But she, of course, had her quirks too. A fondness for hotel soaps, for one. An affectation, perhaps. It was a habit she shared with Gaba who had spent his early career carving soap figurines, shaving away excess to create something delicate. He even authored an exhaustive book on the subject. Perhaps that was why he loved Cynthia so much. She was, at her core, a masterpiece of plaster and care—one of a particularly possessive nature. Gaba ensured she was always looked after. She needed beauty treatments, new dresses, careful maintenance.

For a while, she was untouchable. A woman on every guest list, a name spoken in hushed admiration. But even Cynthia needed rest. When Gaba was called away for the war in 1942, he decided she deserved a sabbatical from her exhausting social calendar, time away from the limelight. He sent her to his mother's home with strict instructions: weekly salon visits, daily attention. Cynthia had always been high-maintenance. It was meant to be temporary, a respite from the exhausting nature of fame. But Cynthia, without the world bending itself around her, faltered. One evening, she sat in a chair, still as ever, when she suddenly slipped—falling, too fast, too hard. The impact was devastating. Tabloids reported the tragedy with solemn reverence: Cynthia, socialite and fashion icon, dead at 10.

The public mourned. Letters of condolence poured in. Gaba, heartbroken but ever the devoted craftsman, built another Cynthia: more refined, capable of speech, even. But the world had moved on. She made a brief return to the public eye in 1953 before fading into obscurity. Her current whereabouts are unknown. Some say she sits, forgotten, in a locked storage room, still waiting, smoking compulsively. Or perhaps she left nothing behind but whispers, a handful of brittle plaster and a collection of untouched little soaps.