

One Minute to Midnight

As her mother hands her a lead crystal glass filled with real French champagne, Maddie cannot contain her excitement. Seeing the reflected light shattered into rainbow colours, she is surprised by the unexpected weight of the glass. When she lifts the golden liquid toward the ceiling light, she smiles broadly at her mother. Agnes Goldman matches the gesture. "Not long now," she says. It is one minute to midnight on the thirty-first of December, and Maddie will be twenty-one tomorrow, which means she will soon be able to consume alcoholic beverages as that is the legal drinking age.

Early on the same day, her twin brother Paul, who was already of legal age, posted a picture on Facebook from Los Angeles. Several of his football teammates were drinking in his room on campus at UCLA. "Probably in breach of the college's COVID-19 restrictions," observes Maddie.

She had brushed aside this latest irritation with her usual good humour, having endured such aggravation not only on each birthday for as long as she could remember but at every new school or social club where she and her brother were enrolled. Once people found out that they were "millennium twins", there was always heightened interest in them. Every now and then, the press even decided to track them down and print a human-interest story about their progress. Maddie wasn't sure that she approved of her parents' decision to have their births, which were by C-section, on either side of midnight on December 31st, 1999. That whimsical choice, made (or so her mother assured her) on the spur of the moment, had created a blaze of publicity for her parents at the time of the twins' birth but a host of unwelcome consequences for Maddie ever since.

"Think of it this way," says Agnes as she notices her daughter's expression cloud over a tiny bit, "When Paul's in his thirties, you'll still be in your twenties for a full day. I'm sure you and your friends will be able to have some fun with that."

"You're right, of course, Mum," says Maddie, as she twists her glass of champagne in the fingers of her dominant hand, watching the bubbles fizz up to the surface. "And we need some 'happy thoughts' right now. It's a real drag that Paul is stuck in his college room in LA with a curfew in place, and we must put up with a 'stay-at-home' order here in Philly. We can't even have our cousins and friends over for our birthday celebration. And they've cancelled the ball drop and party in Times Square on TV. It's going to be some twenty-first."

As the TV starts its 30-second countdown to the New Year, mother and daughter give each other a consolation hug. "At least you'll be able to remember becoming an adult at a historical time for the whole of humanity," says Agnes. And as they both raise their glasses of champagne and turn to look at the TV, they say in almost complete unison, "Bring on the fireworks."

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