

The mystery of Ghislaine Maxwell's secret love;
**REVEALED: THE UNLIKELY ROMANCE BETWEEN A BUSINESS SPY AND
THE CROOKED FINANCIER'S FAVOURITE DAUGHTER**

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Body

IN PUBLIC relations terms, it was an unmitigated disaster. Ghislaine Maxwell, the youngest and most pulchritudinous of the disgraced tycoon's children, was photographed boarding Concorde to return to her adopted city, New York.

The bankers cheated by her father and pensioners left destitute as a result of Robert Maxwell's wickedness were incandescent with anger.

A one-way trip on Concorde costs more than £2,000 - an awful lot of money for a young woman reported to be living on a 'meagre' £80,000 trust fund set up by her father.

But her departure for New York is notable for a very different reason. Unnoticed by almost everybody, travelling with her was a greying, plumpish, middle-aged American businessman who managed to avoid the photographers.

It is to this man that 30-year-old Ghislaine has turned to ease the heartache of her father's shame.

His name is Jeffrey Epstein, a shadowy, almost maverick New York 'property developer' who, for over a year, has helped Ghislaine become a coveted fixture on the Manhattan social scene. During the last year, say friends, she has fallen in love with him, and the couple are inseparable.

DESPITE the dubious fame of having been nominated as Cosmopolitan magazine's Bachelor of the Month, Epstein walked into her life at a time when she was desperately lonely.

Even before her father died a year ago, Ghislaine had split from her great love, Count Gianfranco Cicogna. A dashing, charming member of the Ciga hotels clan, Cicogna was the man who moulded the Ghislaine we now see. He told her where to get her hair cut, and what to wear.

Their affair lasted for four years, and finished in 1990. His new girlfriend is TV-am weathergirl Tania Bryer.

On the rebound, Ghislaine had no permanent boyfriend. And when her father died, she went into a deeper malaise.

But by Epstein's side, Ghislaine is building a respectability in New York which would be impossible in London, where the wounds created by her father cut deepest.

In New York, they adore the progeny of felons as much as the felons themselves.

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Epstein is the key. A fortnight ago, they were at a restaurant opening in Manhattan. Ghislaine was billed as the 'celebrity' invitee. She is also a regular guest at his Upper East Side apartment.

His most public association with Ghislaine came, pointedly, when he sat next to her and her mother, Betty, at a tribute dinner at the Plaza Hotel last year in New York in Robert Maxwell's memory.

This was, for Ghislaine, the first step in publicly announcing her deep affection for him.

And yet, like much associated with the Maxwell clan, little is known about Mr Epstein.

One outrageous story links him to the CIA and Mossad. Another that Epstein was a concert pianist. Yet another that he was a maths teacher at an exclusive girls school.

THE most intriguing rumour is that he was a corporate spy hired by big businesses to uncover money that had been embezzled.

But what is the truth about him? Like Maxwell, Epstein is both flamboyant and intensely private.

His telephone number is listed under the name 'Jeffrey Edwards'. The door bell at his home on East 69th Street simply carries the initials 'J.E.'

Any request to speak to Jeffrey Epstein is met with the reply from a male voice: 'He may be here, or he may not. Who wants to know?'

Ghislaine lived in a \$ 500-a-week one-bedroom apartment on the Upper East Side close to Jeffrey's home, but a fortnight ago she was reported to have moved to a cheaper studio apartment.

His friends say Epstein's social rise has been accompanied by a remorseless attraction to well-connected, rich and beautiful women. One of his first notable dates was Nikki Haskell, a former TV talk-show hostess who met him six years ago. Haskell was giving some of the most prominent parties in New York, and Epstein, who lived close by, became a regular guest.

'Jeffrey didn't talk about his past, although he claimed to have been a concert pianist,' she said last week.

She experienced Epstein's love of intrigue. 'He told me he was a spy hired by corporations to find major amounts of money which had been embezzled,' she says. 'He made it sound very exciting and glamorous.'

Epstein escorted Haskell to the annual BEST Awards in New York, a meretricious event celebrating the best dressed people in America.

Haskell said: 'In the middle, Jeffrey got up and said 'I have to go'. When I asked why, he said: 'Just look at me as a doctor who has to make a house call.' Who was he meeting at midnight on a Saturday?'

Dorothy Sowell, another New York socialite, came across Epstein at roughly the same time. 'Jeffrey is the type of person whose stories sound far-fetched, but you never know when you will run into him,' she said at her Park Avenue apartment. 'There is something about him that must ring true.'

Epstein told Dorothy Sowell that he had once been a stockbroker and investment banker for the Bear Stearns securities group. But the National Association of Securities Dealers has no record of him with that company.

According to friends, Epstein was born and raised in New York. His parents were relatively poor, and now live in a house he bought for them in Palm Beach, Florida. He appears to have an inexhaustible supply of money and yet no one seems able to answer the question of precisely what the source is.

HIS Madison Avenue office is decorated with fabulous works of art, and he has been known to drive a Silver Spirit Rolls-Royce.

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He once lived in a building which also housed socialite and fashion guru, Mary McFadden, and several children of the Walkmeister family, part of New York's tightly-knit circle of Jewish philanthropists.

According to a close friend, Epstein is now the right-hand man of Leslie Wexner, the founder of the Limited Corporation, a giant retailing chain. Ghislaine's New York friends are very supportive of her relationship with Epstein whom they see as a gentle father figure.

When she first arrived in February 1991, in the wake of her father's triumphant entrance into Manhattan as the saviour of the New York Daily News, she had one important role - as Captain Bob's ticket into New York society. She accompanied him to all the right parties and helped to woo the Kennedy clan. When Kerry Kennedy, Robert Kennedy's daughter, was married Ghislaine was a guest.

Recently, she was seen warmly greeting John Kennedy Jnr, JFK's only son, at a New York party. As they kissed on meeting their friendship was obvious.

INDEED, men have always been important to Ghislaine. Some have been mere accessories. Others like Epstein, Svengali figures who appear worldly, she has fallen in love with.

'Jeffrey is much more like her father,' said one friend.

But what is he - property developer, concert pianist, maths teacher, corporate treasure hunter, stockbroker, merchant banker or globe-trotting businessman?

A friend laughed. 'I think you'll find there is probably a bit of truth in all of them.'

For Ghislaine and Epstein, the flamboyant departure on Concorde proved one thing: the girl shattered by her father's exposure as a crook, the girl who went to Manhattan to build a new life, is back doing what the Maxwells have always been good at: displaying a virulent sense of bravado in the face of intense hostility.

Graphic

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