



THE **PAGE  
TURNER**

A Novel

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE EDGE OF SUMMER*

**VIOLA SHIPMAN**

**A young romance writer makes a discovery that throws her elitist family into chaos in this sharp, witty and entirely delightful family drama for fans of Elinor Lipman and Jennifer Weiner.**

Emma Page grew up the black sheep in a bookish household, raised to believe that fine literature is the only worthy type of fiction. Her parents, self-proclaimed “serious” authors who run their own vanity press, The Mighty Pages, mingle in highbrow social circles that look down on anything too popular or mainstream, while her sister, Jess, is a powerful social media influencer whose stylish reviews can make or break a novel.

Hiding her own romance manuscript from her disapproving parents, Emma finds inspiration at the family cottage among the “fluff” they despise: the juicy summer romances that belonged to her late grandmother. But a chance discovery unearthed from her Gigi’s belongings reveals a secret that has the power to ruin her parents’ business and destroy their reputation in the industry—a secret that has already fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous publishing insider with a grudge to settle. Now Emma must decide—as much as she’s dreamed of the day when her parents are forced to confront their own egos, can she really just sit back and watch The Mighty Pages be exposed and their legacy destroyed?

Whisking you from the wealthy enclaves of the Hamptons to the sparkling shores of Lake Michigan, *The Page Turner* is a delectable glimpse inside the world of publishing and Viola Shipman’s most glittering achievement yet!

\* \* \* \* \*

**KEEP READING FOR A SNEAK PEEK OF THE  
FIRST CHAPTER OF VIOLA SHIPMAN’S  
THE PAGE TURNER**

## 1.

“Why are you wearing that dress, Emma?”

“The better question is, why is everyone here dressed like Wednesday Addams?”

Jess pinches the fabric of my colorful summer dress with her talons. Her nails are like beautiful, lethal weapons.

“People wear black because it’s a serious literary event, not the Kentucky Derby!” Jess says. “You look like a rube.”

“Rube?” I say, widening my eyes in amazement at her choice of words. “Someone’s been reading Flannery O’Connor.” I run my fingers up her bare arm like I did as a girl when I’d pretend they were a spider, and I wanted to annoy her. “Oh, I get it. Someone’s trying to impress Daddy.”

She doesn’t wince. My family has grown up *Game of Thrones* literary-style. We just use words to wound. Our armor is Armani.

“No, I’m simply trying to act like a grown-up,” she says. “Which you are now, remember? You’re a shiny, new college graduate, Emma.”

“But it’s a beautiful summer day in Michigan. You’re supposed to wear color.”

As soon as the words leave my mouth, I know my sister has defeated me. I sound like a child. I don’t mean to act like such a baby, it’s just that my family’s pretentiousness has a way of pushing every one of my buttons nonstop, like a kid at a vending machine that just ate his quarters.

“Just not today,” Jess says. “It’s a matter of respect.”

Jess is wearing a little black summer dress that hits just below her knees. It has spaghetti straps, is formfitting on top with a touch of flounce at the hem. Her blond hair and makeup are perfect, and the gloss on her lips shimmers in the filtered summer light. She’s one of those girls who looks like she

hasn't even made an effort to look beautiful. I called her Peony when I was a girl because she was just so damn perfect, like GiGi's favorite flower.

"Well, you look like you're going to a funeral," I quip. "Which, I guess, we kind of are."

Jess shakes her head at me.

"Not *today*," she repeats.

I open my mouth to retaliate, but the screened door creaks and bangs shut, sounds that sing to me like the call of the gulls and the soft crash of waves on Lake Michigan. My family has always wanted to put a new front door on Eyebrow Cottage, but I refuse to let them. One summer when I was a girl, I positioned myself in the doorway all weekend, staging a screened door sit-in so that my parents couldn't change the historic red entrance, no matter how much it squawked and banged and disrupted their need for quiet and a "literary life."

"It's old, Emma," my father had tried to reason with me as the workers stood on the front porch, shaking their heads and laughing at my histrionics. "It's loud."

"It's supposed to be old and loud," I argued. "It's history. Do you know how many people have touched this handle? How many times you yelled, 'I'm home, Mom'? How many times I ran as fast as I could to open this door to see GiGi?"

My dad motioned for the men to come help move me. As they lifted me, I looked my father square in the eye and said, "This front door is like the perfect opening sentence to a book. You wouldn't change that if it was perfect, would you?"

My father shook his head, motioned for them to set me back down and sent them away. The opening sentence to our family cottage remained untouched.

But some things should never change no matter how much time has passed, right?

The screen door squawks and bangs again.

I watch well-heeled literati enter our shingled family cottage like a swarm of dragonflies, twittering and buzzing, as if they were carried from New York by the lake breeze and gently placed down at the crushed gravel pathway that winds past the white fence and lollipop-colored hydrangeas.

All of the men are in dark suits, hair slicked back, while the too thin women, like so many human X-rays, wear little black dresses similar to my sister's that dangle from protruding clavicles as if they're still on a hanger. Big diamonds glint in the sunlight.

These are my parents' literary friends, all of whom have descended from the city to the flyover state of Michigan for my father's latest book release.

Everyone must please my parents.

Their world is built on favors and compliments.

These city guests look so out of context away from their ivory towers, here in an old cottage on the beach. The guests remove their giant sunglasses, look around, waiting to be noticed. They move about as quietly as ghosts. Their heels don't even clack on the wooden floors.

"Old money doesn't make a sound," GiGi used to tell me. "New money screams."

Emma waves at those entering Eyebrow Cottage, the name my grandmother bestowed on this beach house a lifetime ago.

"Welcome to Michigan, Malcolm! Oh, Felice, you look stunning!"

Jess pokes me in the back with one of her talons, and I smile and parrot my sister.

"See?" Jess asks after the guests have moved on. "It's not so hard to act like an adult now, is it? Why don't you go change? Mom and Dad would be so pleased."

"You're right," I say. "I should wear black."

My sister is so surprised by my response that her body deflates and her shoulders soften.

"Thank you," Jess says.

"I mean, his book is already dead."

"I can't believe you."

“It’s true,” I say. “Haven’t you seen the reviews?”

She continues to smile and wave at arriving guests.

“Did you read it?” I ask.

“Of course, I read it,” she says in a dramatic whisper, shaking her head.

“And?”

“And I support his literary instincts.”

I laugh. “Good answer, Switzerland.” I wait until Jess looks me right in the eyes. “But what would The Swans say?”

My sister shakes her head at me. My whole family shakes its collective head at me. They don’t understand why I can’t just play along. Wear black. Act serious. Be “literary.”

It’s just that I don’t like pretention. I can see through it. It’s like my superpower. The more you try to be pretentious, the more I call you out.

And yet that seems to be the hardest thing to do in this world. *Especially* in the literary world, where too many want the next big thing that is exactly like the last big thing.

“The Swans are going to give it a rave,” she whispers fiercely, “because it’s literary fiction. It’s high art. Effort and experimentation should be rewarded.”

I nod my head dramatically. “Right,” I say slowly. “How much is he paying you?”

Jess was one of the original BookTokers, hired by my parents in a stroke of genius to support their flailing independent press, The Mighty Pages, and its highbrow list of fiction. And now she’s one of America’s biggest book influencers.

Long before Truman Capote or his Swans—a collective of rich New York society wives—swam back into the public’s attention, my sister, and parents, became fascinated with Manhattan’s elite and their ability to make or break a person, business or book. Capote’s “Swans” were the ultimate influencers of their time, and my sister’s goal was to emulate that glamour and power.

Jess's Swans are a bevy of over two million strong now. The original purpose was for women to read and support women unequivocally, just like Truman's Swans. However, most of Jess's followers are teens and young women more enchanted with my sister's beauty and lifestyle than they are with my parents' books. My parents "list"—the list of books they publish each year—are not romances filled with angsty young lovers and fantasy realms so beloved by TikTok readers these days.

And I do give my parents credit for committing to what they believe in.

My eyes drift into the paneled library lined with bookshelves. It is filled with light, the lake sparkling beyond the wide, wood frame windows.

This was GiGi's sacred spot, the place she stored all her books, had tea with her boarders, talked about books with anyone who crossed her path, held book club meetings and handed beloved copies of her favorites to girls like me who she knew needed to read them.

GiGi loved summer novels with strong female characters—beach reads, as we now call them—and her library used to be as colorful as the umbrellas perched in the sand outside the expansive windows, a sea of aquamarine, yellow and pink spines, walls filled with bright paint-by-numbers paintings she completed with her boarders on winter weekends. Now her library houses my parents' published books, a dark collection that looks like it might belong to an evil magician. GiGi's collection—especially of her beloved S. I. Queris novels—has largely been relegated to her upstairs office or hauled off to Goodwill, but I keep a stack of her novels I've yet to read in my bedroom for whenever I return.

So I can remember her.

So I can remember why I'm writing *my* book.

So I can escape my parents' snobbish indifference to my chosen genre.

So I can guarantee a happy ending.

Publishing has changed greatly over the years, just not the judgment placed on what women generally prefer to read and write.

The incredible thing is there is more representation now than ever before—publishers like my parents are literally tripping over themselves to find books featuring characters—and written by authors—of all backgrounds, race, culture, ability, sexual identity, body types and neurodiversity.

I stare onto the lake sparkling outside.

There has been a sea change in the types of books I can access since I was a freshman in college. And yet we still judge what readers read.

“Earth to Emma,” Jess says. “Did you even hear a word I was saying?”

I shake my head.

“Of course not,” she continues. “I said, ‘I’m paid in gratitude for the work I do.’ Dad doesn’t pay me. I only want his work and The Mighty Pages to return to its former glory.”

“You should be the writer and not the promoter,” I say.

“They’re the same things today,” Jess says.

Most readers do not understand that many influencers are paid for their adulation, either in cash or product. They say they loved a particular book, although they may never have read it. In essence, influencers piggyback on a title that a celebrity has already endorsed.

*Pay for play.*

Jess now gets lots of attention and lots of money for promoting every kind of book, save for the ones we grew up loving to read with GiGi. She believes, for profit’s sake, that only one kind of book matters, just as my parents believe that only one type of book matters. The only catch is her influence isn’t helping sales of our parents’ books.

“Every book is important to someone,” GiGi used to tell us.

The screened door bangs shut. A heavily made-up woman makes a beeline for Jess.

I recognize her as a heavyweight agent.

“Deborah! You look stunning as usual,” Jess says, kissing the air.

“I have a book and author we need to discuss,” she says to Jess.

“Of course!” Jess gushes. “Anything for you. Is that the new Birkin bag? Where did you find it?”

The way my sister speaks when she meets a rich or famous person would be amusing if it weren't so sad. Every word comes out in an up-speak lilt, every statement tossed into a Kardashian blender and remixed as banal blather. Jess is so smart, confident and pretty, and yet she becomes one of her followers when someone more influential enters her sphere.

“You don't have it?” the agent asks. Jess shakes her head. “Well, *I* have a client who could help you put a dent in the down payment.”

“Really?” Jess asks, all doe-eyed.

She sounds as if she's questioning her own existence.

“Establish a relationship with my author and help her book break out,” the agent continues, “and I'll help you establish a relationship with my Hermès consultant.” The agent smiles. “You scratch my back, and I'll scratch up a Birkin for you.”

Jess nods her head so hard, I'm worried her long neck will snap.

I watch the agent depart onto the deck overlooking the lake.

I wonder if my parents' “dear, dear friends” came to support my father or schmooze my sister for their clients and future books.

Jess grabs a glass of champagne off the tray of a passing waiter and takes a long sip.

Her big eyes are still like saucers, her long lashes casting a butterfly shadow on her porcelain cheek. It's like my sister has never seen the sun.

“Is that the new Birkin bag? Where did you find it?” I finally say, mimicking her tone. “I'm still embarrassed for you. You're acting like Taylor Swift asked you to be her publicist.”

“Such a grown-up,” Jess says, shaking her head. “You will never understand publishing.” She deigns to look at me. “And to think you want to be an author. Publishing is like chess. You have to know your next move way before anyone else. But you don't even know the next chapter of your life, even with that newly minted Michigan degree, do you? Now, please, go change. Have some respect.”

I pluck a pretty pink peony from a small glass vase sitting on the black tablecloth and tuck it behind my ear.

I actually cut fresh peonies—big powder puffs of white and pink that smell like heaven—from GiGi’s gardens and added them to all the bars and tables as a tribute to my family. I wanted to honor GiGi’s love of summer as well as pay tribute to my sister, but she doesn’t remember my childhood nickname for her.

My family chooses *not* to remember.

Ironic how our memories become so selective when we believe our tastes have become so discerning.

My mother, of course, will have the delicate blooms removed as soon as she sees them.

“My God, are we at high tea on *Bridgerton*?” she will likely scoff.

When I don’t respond, my sister looks at me and says, “GiGi’s not here anymore. You can’t love a ghost.”

Jess’s emerald eyes narrow, and I can tell she wants to take it back, but it’s too late.

A family of writers, readers and influencers, I think, who can edit a single sentence countless times but has never learned how to edit one damn thing before it leaves their mouths.

“You all should be ashamed for trying to forget her so quickly,” I say. “She’s not even been gone that long.”

My sister’s face falls, and she opens her mouth to say something when I hear, “The party has arrived!”

I instantly recognize the face. I’ve seen it on the back of countless book covers, including the one I read in college.

“Marcus Flare!” Jess chirps.

They meet in front of the bar. Jess leans in for an air kiss, but Marcus grabs her, places a hand on the small of her back, kisses her cheek for much too long and then whispers something into her ear.

“Champagne, please,” he barks when he pulls away.

“Yes, of course,” Jess smiles awkwardly. “Welcome to Michigan.”

“I didn’t even know this was a state until now,” he laughs.

I can’t even with this jackass already.

Jess nearly trips over herself to get him a drink.

“How was your flight?” Jess asks.

“I didn’t know there were airports here.”

And now I’m done.

“Really,” I deadpan. “Are you Kimmy Schmidt? Do you live in a bunker? Don’t have a TV or cell phone? Didn’t realize Michigan is the tenth largest state in the US or that the University of Michigan just won the national football championship, or is one of the best universities in the world, that Detroit is the hottest city in the country, or even, mind you, that the state is now one of *the* preeminent vacation spots in the US?”

“Who have we here?” he asks, bewildered but amused.

“This is my sister, Emma.”

Jess gives me her “Behave!” look.

Marcus reaches in to grab me, but I step back, bumping into the bar.

“We’ve met before,” I say. “Not in person, actually, but in class. I’ve read one of your books.”

“Just one?” he asks. “So you’re not one of my Solar Flares yet?”

“Solar Flare?” I ask.

“One of my devoted fans whose love for my work burns so brightly they scorch the earth to buy my books as soon as they’re released.”

I stare at him, eyes wide. “Are you serious?”

“Really? Are you serious, Kimmy Schmidt? Do *you* live in a bunker? Don’t have a TV or cell phone?” He laughs in my face, mocking me. “You didn’t realize I’m the world’s bestselling romance novelist?”

Jess doesn’t even try to hide a smile, payback for my earlier mocking of her.

“Funny,” I say, “but I remember reading in class that you refuse to call yourself a *romance writer* and yet you just did. You’ve conducted countless interviews where you proudly pronounce that you don’t write romance novels, only ‘love stories.’” I shut my eyes. “I just want to get this right. Oh, yes.” I open my eyes, clear my throat and continue in a tone close to Marcus’s own voice. “‘I would be rejected if I submitted any of my work as romance novels,’ you once said. ‘I do not verge into melodrama. I write drama.’”

“So you *are* a Solar Flare,” he says. “Just in the closet.”

His choice of words enrages me as he’s not only been targeted as a homophobe in the past but also there are rumors of his sexually harassing women in publishing for years. I want to go there, but I look at my sister glaring at me and take a breath.

“When I was a student,” I say tightly. “I studied your work in a lit class that focused on female writers.”

“I’m flattered.”

“You shouldn’t be.”

Jess glares at me to shut up. I can’t.

“We studied your work in Women in Literature and Popular Culture. Your books failed The Bechdel Test every single time.”

“The Bechdel Test?” he asks in a bemused tone.

“Yes, it’s a famous cultural litmus test,” I answer. “Yours failed every time because only a single female character was ever featured, and she was completely, utterly dependent on a man.”

The light from the lake glints through the cottage windows and falls across Marcus’s face.

He is ruggedly handsome in a manicured, bookish sort of way, like if you merged a character from *Yellowstone* with one of the Rockefellers: sandy hair, five-o'clock shadow, piercing grass green eyes, a crisp white shirt opened one button too far. I'm sure he became famous partly because of his good looks. Marcus is marketable.

He takes a step closer to me and stares into my eyes. I can feel my spine bend backward like a willow in the wind.

"The last thing I need is a lecture about my books from a woke lit major in a Forever 21 dress," he says. "Fifty novels and counting, 100 million books sold worldwide, all *New York Times* bestsellers. You get to that level, then we can talk."

I snap.

"Hashtag MeToo," I reply.

My sister grabs another glass of champagne from the bar and thrusts it into Marcus's hands as a diversion even though he's yet to touch his first glass. I think he's going to toss it in my face, but he sips it and says, "Ah, Moët not Veuve."

*Snotty jerk.*

I grab a glass of champagne and slam it back in one gulp.

"Tastes good to me," I say. "I just love that rich people are difficult simply to be difficult."

He clinks my empty glass, eyes me closely and says, "You are rich, sweetheart." Marcus waits a beat and then adds, "Hashtag NepoBaby."

Rage makes Marcus swim before my eyes. He has hit a nerve.

I never think of myself as well-off. It's my grandma's money. I'm just lucky. I did nothing to earn it. I feel I should protect it, use it to better the world. My parents believe it's their personal piggy bank, and they use all the pretty pennies to fund their publishing house and live a literary life in the city.

My whole life I've tried not to be defined by my parents. I've tried to swim in my own direction. And yet, here I am, just another swan.

“Cat got your tongue?” Marcus asks, before adding, “Something tells me we were meant to meet.”

He stops. “IRL.”

Marcus sets down one glass of bubbly and walks away, saying to Jess, “You need to tame that filly. Find me later.”

Jess tilts her goodbye until he disappears into the crowd.

“*Filly?*” I seethe. “He just said that out loud. Did you hear him?”

“You provoked him, Emma.”

“No, he’s a bully, and you just stood by and watched it happen.” I glare at her. “You’ve turned out to be such a staunch supporter of women’s rights, sis. Women deserve to be mistreated when they speak their minds or, God forbid...” I give her appearance and dress a long look “...wear something provocative.”

“Don’t lecture me,” Jess says. “I’ve been bullied. I know what it’s like.”

I laugh out loud. “You’ve been bullied? What, did they use to call you, ‘pretty girl’?”

Jess’s face droops. Her cheeks quiver. I’ve hit a nerve. She closes her eyes for the longest time.

“You’re only proving me right,” she finally says, her voice steady. “Why can’t you be nice?”

I think of Mom.

“Nice implies blandness,” she’s said so many times. “No one wants to look or be considered *nice*. It’s like being invisible.”

“Have some dignity, Jess. He’s gross.”

“He’s misunderstood.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll set him *straight*,” I say, not attempting to hide my disgust at anti-LGBTQ comments he made a while back which he claimed were misrepresented. “Why can’t you and The Swans do to Marcus what the original Swans did to Capote?”

Jess turns, grabs the glass from my hand and sets it on the bar.

“You don’t bite the hand that feeds you, Emma.”

I study her face. “Is there something going on I don’t know about?”

“There is nothing you need to know right now except that if you’re going to behave like an animal then have the dignity to act like the well-mannered purebred you are and not some mongrel fighting for scraps and barking to be heard,” Jess says, her voice rising.

People turn, and she continues in a hush.

“Believe me, you wouldn’t be acting like such a brat if all of this disappeared.”

Applause explodes around me.

People swarm back inside from the deck. I watch Marcus inch his way through the crowd like a roach.

I glance at him and then Jess.

Why is he even here? I thought my parents only knew him in a cursory way. Maybe he’s planning some big media endorsement for my father’s latest novel, although it’s a totally different genre. My father has always secretly dismissed Marcus’s writing, and my mother has treated him as she has everyone in her life: an errant piece of trash she doesn’t want to touch, but picks up with a smile—and gloved hand—because people may be watching.

Jess catches me staring, nods with her head and mouths, *Smile!*

I turn, my face a ray of sunshine.

My parents, Phillip and Piper Page, glide down the stairs, holding each other’s hands. My father is wearing a vintage tux, shoes as shiny as the polished railing, my mother in an Oscar de la Renta black sleeveless cocktail dress that’s a bit too short but shows off her stunning legs that she’s drenched in baby oil.

Magazine writers and publishing editors have described them as a modern-day Jackie and JFK, old-fashioned elegance come to life.

But that’s not an accurate reference. As a writer, I know who my parents really are.

Moira and Johnny from *Schitt’s Creek*.

Rich, entitled, driven, obsessed with their lives, careers and personas. They believe in their hearts they are—as my grandma used to say—“salt of the earth,” but the salt is pink Himalayan. They love Jess and me, they really do, it’s just that if you asked our mother out of the blue what our middle names were, she would likely not be able to answer but blame it on the fact she hadn’t gone to yoga or barre class that week.

In fact, my entire family is the Rose family from *Schitt’s Creek*.

Jess is pretty Alexis, who loves the surface beauty of her life, and I am cynical, sarcastic David, who watches the spectacle with horror and bemusement but cannot keep my mouth shut to save my life.

I feel like I’m the only one in on the inside joke.

My parents wave as they descend. They stop on a landing before a grand portrait they commissioned of us on the beach at sunset when we were not these people. I glance at their faces then and now. They are the same people, a bit older, a bit more work, but I don’t recognize our family any longer.

“Speech!” someone yells.

“Soon,” I hear Jess call. “Could everyone grab a cocktail and gather on the patio, please?”

My parents do not yell from landings. This is a choreographed dance. Their lives are a choreographed dance.

A swarm of people rush the table to nab a cocktail.

When the line clears, I make my way to the bar.

“I’m going to need something a bit stronger than champagne to make it through this night,” I say.

“Could I have a gin and tonic with extra lime and extra gin please.”

The bartender laughs, and I realize he’s about my age and looks like Michelangelo’s *David* come to life.

“I like your dress,” he says.

I smile. “Thank you.”

“Your gin and tonic,” he says, handing me the glass. “Extra lime. Extra gin.”

“Thank you,” I repeat.

I take a selfie of myself with the cocktail and text it to Gin and Juice.

In honor of you.

“Now that I know what you like, maybe we could get a drink sometime,” he says.

*He’s good.*

“I’m so sorry,” I say. “You sure are pretty, but I don’t have time for boys right now. Except in books.”

His chiseled face softens, and I can see he’s never been turned down.

“Rejection stinks, doesn’t it?” I look at him. “I’m a writer, so it’s going to be a big part of my life. As my parents have told a million writers about their manuscripts, ‘I’m sorry, it’s just not right for us at this time, but I’m sure it will be scooped up by someone who loves it.’”

“You’re a writer?” the bartender asks. “Have you written anything I’ve read?”

“Ah, the question every writer hates at a party,” I say. “I’m sorry to sound so dismissive,” I continue, “but next time maybe just ask a writer what she writes.”

He nods, his curly dark hair falling in his eyes.

Behind him, in the library, is a portrait of my grandparents with our family when we were all still babies.

Beyond, I see Marcus on the deck. He waves at me.

His nepo baby remark haunts me, partly because the creepy bastard is right and partly because the matriarch who started it all is hidden away, like her beloved books.

I look the bartender in the eyes.

“Can I ask you a question?”

His eyes light up. “Of course! Anything.”

“Why is it so damn hard to talk about anything other than a man?”

He cocks his head at me, not understanding.

I grab my drink and start to turn. “Thanks for the extra lime. I may die tonight, but at least it won’t be from scurvy.”

He still doesn’t understand me. Few do.

As I start to walk away, the bartender calls, “Hey!”

I turn.

“What do you write?”

I wink at his effort.

“I write happy endings,” I say.

“But you don’t seem happy,” he says.

I smile.

“That’s why I write.”

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE PAGE TURNER** is on sale April 8, 2025!

Order your copy now!

-----

Copyright © 2025 by Viola Shipman