

Will
**Christie
Brinkley's**
happiness
last?

CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

Summer, the prime season in Long Island's megatrendy Hamptons, is over. No more A-list cocktail parties or glittering benefits for the latest cause célèbre. The air is cool, the streets are empty and the whole area is almost eerily quiet.

Christie Brinkley likes it like this. As she strolls down a country path, fallen leaves crunching beneath her suede loafers, the woman whose romantic life has occasionally seemed like an out-of-control roller coaster is happy and peaceful. "I just love the calm of this time of year," she says.

Looking decidedly un-cover girl, the 43-year-old supermodel is wearing well-worn jeans, a beige suede shirt and no makeup. It's clear that Brinkley feels at home here in Watermill, N.Y. She moved to the town last year with her children, Alexa Ray, 11, and Jack Paris, 19 months. They traded a Manhattan apartment for a ranch hidden behind cornfields and pumpkin patches.

"Now, when the crowds go home, life is suddenly simple again," Brinkley says. She sweeps a blond strand out of her eyes. "It's what I've been waiting for."

What Brinkley has also been waiting for—possibly for her whole life—is the security and contentment of a happy marriage. But that goal has proved maddeningly elusive. Three of her unions ended painfully. In fact, she is still embroiled in an exhausting legal battle over Number 3.

Which makes it all the more surprising that she's already enmeshed in Marriage Number 4, to architect Peter Cook, 37. Brinkley

started dating Cook shortly after she divorced real-estate financier Ricky Taubman in December 1995. And eight months later, she and Cook married.

No one knows better than Brinkley how all of this looks. "Yes,

I've thought I had found Mr. Right before," she says. "And I was wrong." But this time, she insists, things are different: "This relationship is based on a great partnership," she says.

Friends confirm the couple seem perfectly matched. "They knew from the first date that they were in love," says photographer Yann Gamblin, who has been good friends with Cook for seven years and acquainted with Brinkley professionally for more than 19. "Christie and Peter are like two halves."

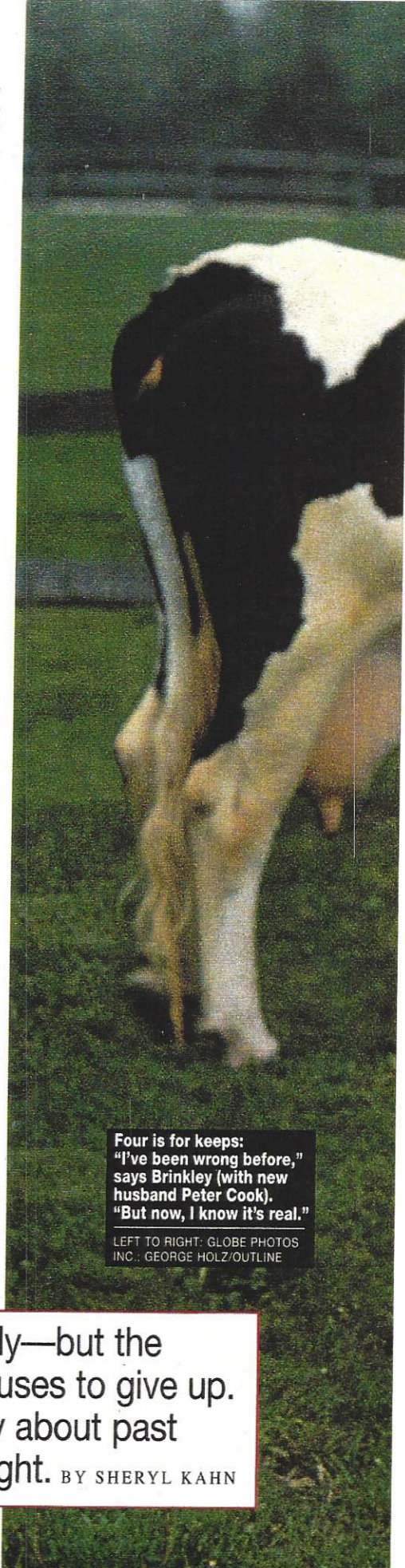
And who knows? Maybe Brinkley has finally figured out what's been missing from all of her failed relationships. The years have toughened her; there's now a self-aware, slightly weary air about the girl next door who became *Sports Illustrated's* most famous swimsuit model and represented Cover Girl makeup for 20 years.

"I've watched her grow from a child into a woman," says Eileen Ford, owner of Ford Modeling. "She has confidence, both personally and professionally."

"I'd like to think that given what I have been through, I'm finally certain of whom I want," Brinkley says. "If there's such a thing as a soul mate, it's Peter. I feel as if I've known this man my whole life." (Actually, it's more ▶



Wedding bells in Watermill: Brinkley with Cook and her son, Jack.



Four is for keeps: "I've been wrong before," says Brinkley (with new husband Peter Cook). "But now, I know it's real."

LEFT TO RIGHT: GLOBE PHOTOS INC.; GEORGE HOLZ/OUTLINE

She's lost at love before—once disastrously—but the 43-year-old supermodel and newlywed refuses to give up. In an exclusive interview she talks candidly about past mistakes and why this time, everything's right. BY SHERYL KAHN

Christie's ex-files

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like 16 years. The couple met when they were both modeling for Ford in 1980.) "I was at a party for my first *Sports Illustrated* calendar, and I remember him welcoming me," Brinkley continues. "We kept meeting over the years, but I was married. It was as if fate kept our paths crossing."

Their wedding, on September 21, 1996, in Brinkley's backyard, was arranged at the last minute to avoid leaks to the press, but it still had its fairy-tale moments. "Peter actually planned for all of the church bells in Watermill and Bridgehampton to ring. He's the most wonderful man," she says.

And the couple weren't at all disappointed to find their special day unexpectedly overshadowed by the wedding of another celebrity couple—John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette. The Kennedy heir's ceremony, the most talked-about wedding of the decade, was the clear winner in the publicity department; Brinkley's nuptials, which would have been a hot topic on any other day, were relegated to relatively minor status. But the supermodel insists the skimpy coverage didn't bother the newlyweds. "We wanted it to be just close friends and family," she says.

Starting a new family with Cook is one of Brinkley's top priorities. "This man is so perfect, he should be reproduced—definitely," she laughs. "I want to have more children, and Peter

feels the same way I do. My kids adore him, and he adores them. He's a great father."

"Motherhood is something Christie comes by naturally," Ford says. "She is a wonderful mother. Just watching her interact with her kids, you can feel it."

Brinkley's first marriage, to French illustrator Jean-François Allaux in 1974, came at a time when, as a teenage art student in Paris, she was perhaps not ready to start having children. It ended after just seven years. "I was too young," Brinkley reflects.

Things might have been better with race-car driver Olivier Chandon de Brialles, the heir to the Moët and Chandon Champagne fortune, to whom Brinkley be-

came engaged in 1981. But the relationship turned rocky and finally ended in tragedy in 1983 when Chandon de Brialles was killed in a car crash.

Brinkley waited two years after the accident before marrying singer Billy Joel, who was inspired by her beauty and seeming unattainability to write his classic song "Uptown Girl." Although they are now "good friends" (Joel made an appearance at Brinkley's wedding to Cook), their parting—after nine years of marriage and the birth of daughter Alexa—wasn't easy. "We had two different lifestyles," Brinkley says simply.

Around the time their relationship was ending, in 1994, Brinkley suffered another life-changing crisis: She was in a near-fatal helicopter crash with Taubman. Following the accident, Brinkley announced she was once again head-over-heels in love.

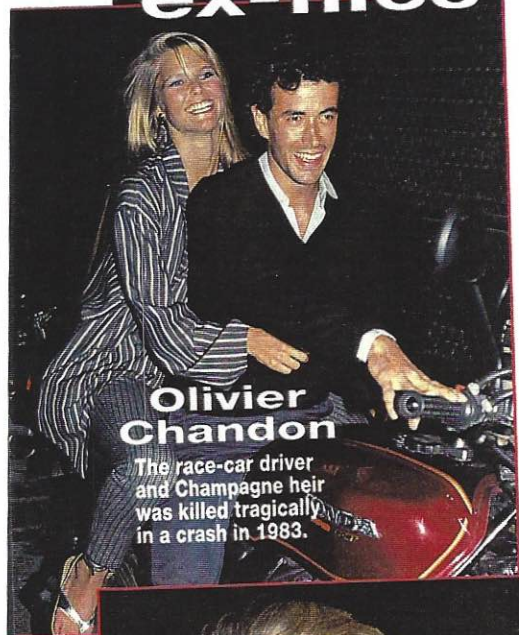
"Ricky and I want to be together all the time," she said before her December 1994 wedding atop a snowcapped peak in Telluride, Colo.

In retrospect, she says, her relationship with Taubman was a cry for love and attention. "After my divorce from Billy, I was raw with open wounds," she says. "I was suffering from posttraumatic-stress syndrome after the crash, and I was very vulnerable. He saw that opportunity."

While Brinkley once touted Taubman as the "true love of my life," now she can't bring herself even to mention his name. She refers to Taubman only as "him" or "my third husband."

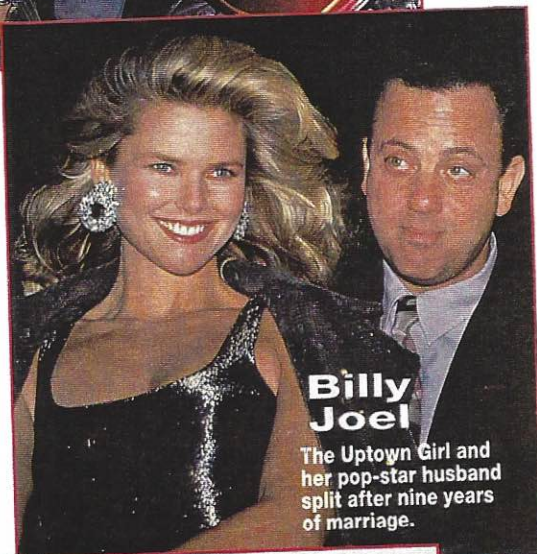
"I left when I was eight months pregnant with Jack. I gave it one more effort when Jack was six weeks old, but it was over." They have absolutely no contact now, Brinkley says, and she refuses to get into specifics about their divorce or the legal battle they went through for custody of their son. Nor will she explicitly confirm or deny the reports that her ex-husband misrepresented his financial security. "I was being conned" is all she will say.

"I was devastated by him," Brinkley remembers. "There were mornings I could barely bring myself to get up out of bed, but I had to stay strong for my kids. Alexa was very intuitive—she knew what was going on, probably before I did. She'd ask me questions I didn't know how to answer." ▶



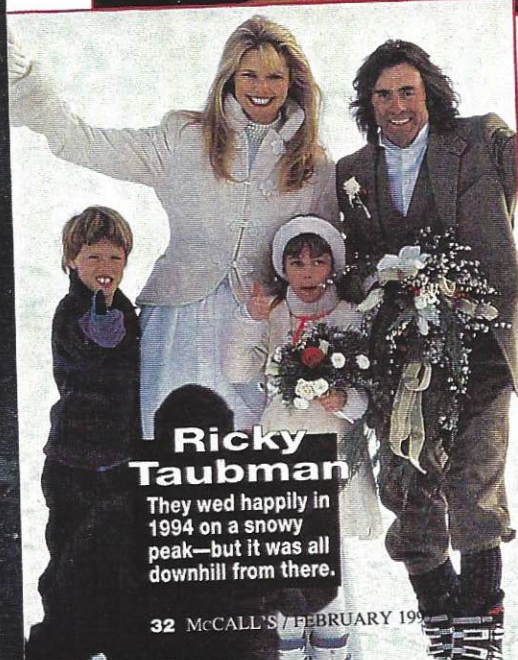
Olivier Chandon

The race-car driver and Champagne heir was killed tragically in a crash in 1983.



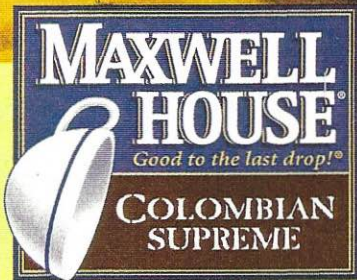
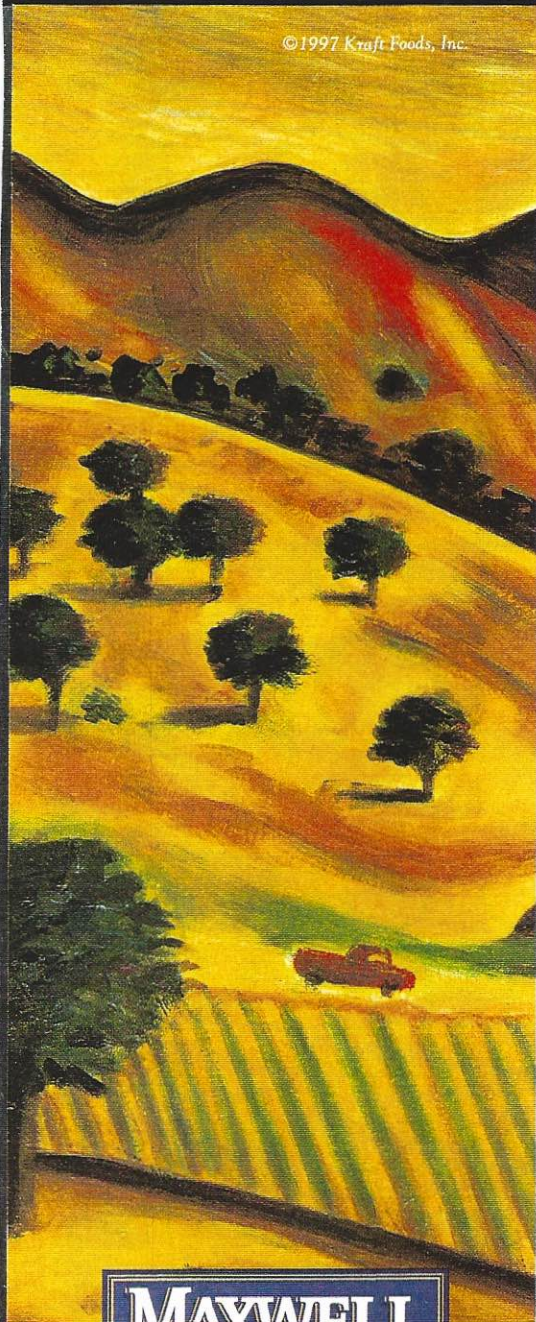
Billy Joel

The Uptown Girl and her pop-star husband split after nine years of marriage.



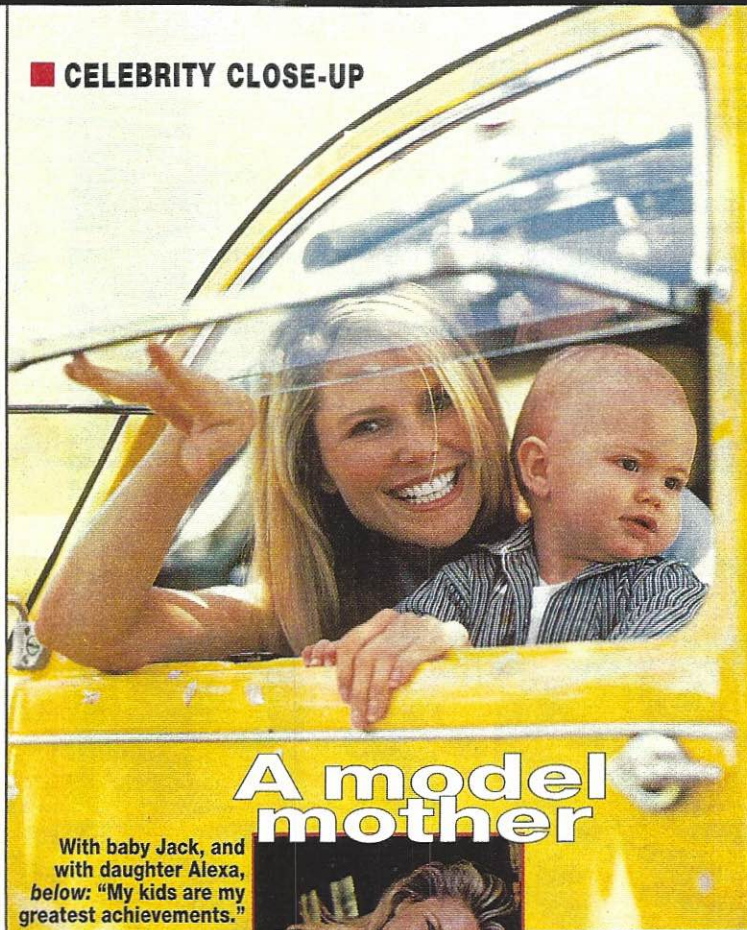
Ricky Taubman

They wed happily in 1994 on a snowy peak—but it was all downhill from there.



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■ CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP



A model mother

With baby Jack, and with daughter Alexa, below: "My kids are my greatest achievements."

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Brinkley cries while talking about this painful time, but it doesn't take too long for her to become angry. "I blame myself," she says intently. "Why on earth didn't I see this coming? Why didn't I have the kind of strength I needed? I should have seen myself getting lost."

But with her history of unhappy relationships, why would she have seen it? Still, it's hard not to sympathize with Brinkley's desire to view herself as an independent woman who doesn't really need a man, though she's quite happy to have one. "I don't have to be taken care of," she protests. "In fact, there was an interim period after my third husband when I needed to be on my own. Just me and my kids."

"This relationship [with Cook] wasn't something I jumped into—I had a lot of hurt and anger to sort through first," she continues. "I went to a spa in Arizona with some girlfriends, and we all sat around and talked about how our lives had totally been blown apart by a man."



Getting over that wasn't easy." She closes her eyes, trying to shut out the past. "But I moved on."

Now the future is all she wants to think about. "Peter is going to build us a beautiful house out here," she says, her mood brightening. His

own house, just a few miles from Brinkley's, is currently on the market. "And I have so many new projects in the works, things that really excite me." Brinkley is the spokeswoman for Nu Skin, a natural skin-care line, and she's heading up a newsletter about beauty, fitness, health, even child rearing. She appears in the upcoming movie *National Lampoon's Vegas Vacation*, is considering other movie and TV projects and is toying with the idea of writing a memoir.

"Sometimes I think I've gone through the mill just so I could arrive at this moment," she says, buttoning up her shirt against the autumn chill. "But I've learned that everything changes—and my life has definitely changed for the better." ■