



FROM THE AUTHOR OF SUMMERSET, TWENTYONE AND WINNER TAKES IT ALL

KAREN MASON

MAD ABOUT  
THE BOY

**Mad About the Boy**

**By Karen Mason**

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Also by Karen Mason

*Summerset*

*Two Become One*

*Winner Takes it All*

*The True Tale of Jezebel Cole*

*Only You*

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

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## About the author

Karen Mason was born in London in 1971 and still resides there. She has been writing since childhood and won her first accolade aged seven when she came second in the Blue Peter ‘Write a Limerick for Goldie the Dog’ competition. Fifteen years later she came second in the now defunct *Me! Magazine*, ‘Write a Blockbuster’ competition with an early novel called *Violet’s Children*. She first published her novel *Summerset* in 2008 and has gone on to release *Mad About the Boy*, *Two Become One* and *Winner Takes it All*, *The True Tale of Jezebel Cole* and *Only You*.

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## PROLOGUE

The ballroom of The Dorchester had suddenly become the centre of the most grotesque media circus. For those members of staff who were working there just to fund their travelling; coming from places such as Bulgaria, Lithuania or some other former Soviet Bloc country, the fact that some ageing actress was attracting the attention of every photographer in London seemed quite bizarre.

The star in question was Elizabeth Maine, a former 1950s starlet who had gone on to prove herself as a competent actress, but it had been her colourful life that kept her a tabloid staple. After a lull in her career, she’d made a spectacular comeback, flying the flag for Britain, and giving the Dynasty era Joan Collins a run for her money when she landed a role in ‘Diamonds’ – a trashy 1980s US soap. In 1991, she’d shocked the showbiz world by announcing her retirement; but now she’d been lured back to join Eastwood Avenue, ITV1’s long running serial. They had masterminded this press conference to give both Elizabeth and the soap maximum

publicity – eager to ensure that when she made her first appearance, the whole nation would be watching.

Lizzie – as her friends knew her, was fast becoming bored with the inane questions being fired at her. Most of them centred around the fact that she was one of Britain's classiest actresses and yet she was going to be playing a cockney landlady. Then of course there were the questions about her son Christopher's wedding. He was a famous rock star and after years of leading a clean, Christian life, he was now marrying Marsha Bell, a notorious party girl who was renowned for turning up to nightclubs high on drugs and wearing very little. The press had gone mad over it all, but even Lizzie was astonished that they thought she would actually talk about something so personal. It was when the subject turned to her son that Lance the publicist called a halt to the proceedings.

More flashbulbs went off as she was led away by Lance and Pierre, the hotel manager, who was desperate to know if she was happy with the way it had been handled.

'Darling I'm non-plussed by the whole spectacle,' Lizzie laughed in that famous, posh raspy voice. 'It's only a bloody soap opera I'm joining, not the Royal Ballet.'

Just as they were heading for the exit - Lance passing her the obligatory dark glasses - their paths were blocked by Lorraine, the reception manager - a chubby blonde who could be pretty if she lost a little weight.

'Ms Maine,' she flustered. 'I've been instructed to take you to one of the meeting rooms. There's a lady who wants to see you.'

Before Lizzie could even open her mouth, Lance butted in.

'Who is it?' he snapped. 'Ms Maine has done all her interviews for today.'

'It's a Mrs Elaine Bell.'

'I'll see her,' Lizzie said firmly.

Lance became red faced with frustration and embarrassment.

'But you....'

‘She’s Marsha’s mother,’ she replied flatly.

Lorraine led them along another set of corridors and Lizzie wondered why her son’s future mother-in-law had come all this way to see her. The wedding wasn’t for another six weeks. Not that Lizzie wanted it to happen at all. She looked upon the whole thing as a travesty. It was quite obvious the cheap glamour model saw the wholesome and socially conscious Christopher Sellars as a meal ticket and a way into respectability. Line Out, his band were huge all over the world, and he had his pick of pretty girls Lizzie would forever wonder why he had chosen this car crash

She knew little of Marsha’s background except that her mother was American and Marsha had been brought up on both sides of the Atlantic by her divorced parents. Lizzie envisaged Elaine to be some sort of trailer trash with cheap jewellery, tattoos and missing teeth, and wondered how she’d managed to blag her way into The Dorchester.

They reached an anonymous looking door and Lorraine knocked. An answer could barely be heard, but it was enough for the girl, who pushed it open. Lizzie entered with Lance, and she immediately looked for the monster awaiting her. She received quite a surprise to find the only woman in there to be elegantly dressed, bespectacled, with short, expensively highlighted blonde hair.

‘Elaine?’ she enquired.

With a stern expression upon her face, the woman walked round the meeting table in the middle of the room, and with an outstretched hand, approached Lizzie. She smelt exquisite and Lizzie suddenly saw her future daughter-in-law in a new light. She wasn’t trailer trash after all - she was a young girl rebelling against her middle-class background.

‘I can’t stay long,’ Elaine said. ‘I’m flying back to New York tonight. I just needed to sort things out.’ She looked over Lizzie’s shoulder at Lance. ‘In private.’

Lizzie turned back to her aide, smiling.

‘I’ll be fine Lance,’ she insisted. ‘I’ll catch a cab.’

‘I can’t let you do that,’ he panicked. ‘You can’t be seen, you’ve got that exclusive deal with....’

‘My son’s future is more important than some magazine deal. Now go.’

With a dramatic turn, he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lizzie sat at the light wood table and hoped Elaine would do the same, but she remained standing, obviously wanting to maintain some degree of superiority.

‘Has Christopher told you what happened?’ she asked.

‘No. Have they had a row?’

‘A row! I wish it were just that. Your darling boy hasn’t told you that Marsha came home and found him in bed with a male prostitute?’

‘What are you talking about?’ Lizzie frowned. ‘Chris isn’t gay.’

‘I don’t know what he is. But my daughter’s heart-broken and she’s threatening to do something silly.’

‘Not kill herself?’ Lizzie uttered, still reeling from the fact that her son was at the least bisexual. He’d never given any indication....

‘No not kill herself,’ Elaine scoffed. ‘She wants me to write an expose of you and your family and if *I* don’t do it, she’ll go to a British tabloid.’

‘Write? Write? I’m confused. Are you a writer?’

The exasperation on the woman’s still beautiful face caused furrows to bury themselves between her brow.

‘Hasn’t he told you anything? I’m editor in chief of Isabella magazine in New York.’

‘He talks very little about Marsha, he knows how I feel about her.’

‘Well that’s rich given what he’s done to her.’

‘So what do you expect me to do?’

For the first time since their meeting, the anger left Elaine’s body. Tired of the whole thing, she slumped at the table, gripping her head in her hands.

‘I don’t know,’ she sighed. ‘I was just so angry, I wanted to threaten you. My daughter has been to hell and back. She only behaves the way she does because she blames her father and me for everything. She’s caused nothing but embarrassment to herself with her conduct and I truly thought Christopher was her knight in shining armour. How wrong I was.’

‘I really don’t know what to say. If I’d had any inclination that my son was gay, well I wouldn’t have dreamt of allowing him to lead some poor girl on. No-one deserves that.’

‘Children,’ Elaine sighed. ‘Do we ever stop worrying about them?’

‘I understand your anger, but dragging myself and Christopher through the papers isn’t going to do anything to improve Marsha’s image is it? After all, anything you write about me will be made up. I had no part in Christopher’s deception.’

Elaine regained her composure and sat back, crossing her legs with the elegance of a model.

‘Well you’re not entirely telling the truth are you? I think you’re good at deception too. After all, you’ve been deceiving your fans throughout your career.’

Lizzie’s blood ran cold, and a thousand dark secrets ran through her mind. She wondered what this woman had dug up about her. It could be anything from an illicit lover to...well, the worst possible thing.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘My parents were originally from Liverpool. They emigrated in the early sixties, when I was a child. When I came over to help Marsha with the so-called wedding, I thought I would stop off and see my aunt. When I mentioned your son was marrying my daughter, aunt Renee revealed something very interesting.’

‘A-And what’s that?’ Lizzie uttered.

‘That she’s positive you used to live around the corner from her. But your mother went around telling people you were dead.’

The blood that was running cold had now turned to ice and yet Lizzie’s face burned red. It was lucky for her that she was wearing thick make-up, which masked her embarrassment.

‘She must be mistaken.’

‘I read your biography on IMDB. It says you were the orphaned daughter of a racing driver, and a model who died in a car crash when you were seven, and that you were brought up by a kindly aunt in Chester. Aunt Renee swears you’re really called Lizzie Gallagher and you were brought up in a tiny house in Dingle Street; which has since been pulled down and turned into a car park. But even back when you lived there it was condemned and unfit for human habitation.’

Lizzie was mortified that her deepest secrets were being exposed. She’d lived for many years under the illusion that the people of Liverpool had believed her mother’s story about her dying, and therefore made no connection to Elizabeth Maine. She was astonished to hear that someone had seen beneath the glamorous blonde bombshell image and recognised the frightened mousy-haired teenager who’d left so suddenly.

‘I don’t see what this has to do with Christopher. I thought he was the reason you were here.’

‘He is, and part of me, that primeval mother, wants revenge for my daughter, and my greatest temptation is to expose you for what you really are; a fraud and your son a closet homosexual.’

‘And would that make Marsha’s life any easier? I don’t think so. She’ll just have even more of her private life dragged through the papers.’

‘Exactly, and that’s why I won’t do anything. But I do think we should do all we can to call off the wedding. She’s still eager to marry him, despite what he’s done. You know how silly young girls are.’

‘I do. I’ll have a good talk to him, I promise. And thank you for sparing me.’

Elaine leaned forward, fixing Lizzie with those icy blue eyes, resting her perfect chin upon her hand.

‘Why did your mother tell people you were dead? You must have done something pretty bad.’

‘I’d rather not talk about it.’

‘Have you thought about writing your autobiography? I get the feeling your story must be fascinating.’



‘No never, I’m sorry.’

‘It’s just that I’d like to stay in England to keep an eye on Marsha but she won’t appreciate it if I admit that. However if I had a pet project.....’

‘And you thought you’d ruin my life in the process?’

‘But would it ruin your life? Hasn’t it been tiresome keeping a secret for all these years? Whatever you did, it must have been fifty years ago. Don’t you want to tell the world the truth?’

‘I can’t. There are things I don’t want anyone to know, not even Christopher.’

‘Okay,’ Elaine sighed. ‘But think about it won’t you? Don’t you owe it to me and my daughter at least?’

Before the women parted, Elaine handed Lizzie her business card. Lizzie shoved it into her Fendi bag, telling herself she would never give into blackmail. Some things could never be revealed. For now she had to speak to Christopher, beg him to sort things out with Marsha – if only to prevent Elaine from becoming involved ever again.

She went into one of the hotel toilets and took a small tin of Nivea from her bag. She normally used it for keeping her hands soft during the day, but today it had another use. With it she erased all traces of ‘Elizabeth Maine’. The expensive make up made her look ten years younger and she was still considered to be one of the sexiest women in the world. Without the slap she became Lizzie Gallagher once again. From the mirror stared back the craggy-faced Scouse woman she would have become had she stayed in Dingle Street, married a docker and had a thousand children. She tied her hair back with an elastic band she found at the bottom of her bag and removed her diamond rings. If she was going to go out in public without Lance or some assistant, she didn’t want to attract any more attention to herself.

She left the hotel and hailed a cab to take her to Southgate - where Line Out had hired a studio in which to rehearse their tour. Lizzie sat and wondered to herself when her son decided he was gay and why. If all this meant he would split up with Marsha Bell, she wasn’t sorry. She also didn’t give a flying fig about his sexuality, but it did concern her that he was leading some sort of clandestine double life involving rent boys. Surely he of all people would know better than that.

The studio was in the basement of a scruffy house near a dual carriageway, and hardly befitting of a multi-award winning group who had sold out Madison Square Gardens. But this was typical of Chris. To him this was ‘keeping it real’, to Lizzie it was him rebelling against his privileged upbringing. He counted Bono, Bob Geldof and Chris Martin amongst his closest friends, and quite often Lizzie would chuckle to herself, imagining the conversation around their dinner table – Third World poverty and Fair Trade products. Hardly the same as the weekend she spent with the Rolling Stones back in 1968! How times had changed.

She made her way down to the basement and was met with the sound of one of Line Out’s hits. The room stank of smoke and sweat and young men. Chris was in the corner, dressed in his de rigueur army fatigues, retuning a guitar. The other band members were milling around and nodded at her respectfully as she entered. She tapped Chris on the shoulder and he stood up with a start. He looked so untidy; unshaven. his hair all messy. How Lizzie wished he would smarten himself up – he was such a good-looking boy.

‘Mum,’ he uttered.

‘Is there somewhere we can talk in private?’

‘Come out into the garden.’

At the back of the studio was a yard. The muggy September weather was encouraging the smelly weeds to grow, and made the place smell of urine. Lizzie lit a cigarette, mostly to help her nerves, but partly to mask the stink.

‘Mum I’m really busy. Whatever it is can’t it wait until later?’

‘I had a visit from Marsha’s mum,’ she hissed. ‘She told me everything.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Your little dalliance with a rent boy. What were you thinking about? Since when have you been gay?’

He looked around sheepishly, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

‘Mum this is neither the time nor the place...’

‘I’ve got Elaine Bell threatening me from all sides. She wants to write some sort of expose on me in her magazine as revenge.’

‘It’s nothing to do with her.’

‘Of course it’s to do with her! Marsha is her daughter, the same as you’re my son and I want some answers.’

‘I don’t have to answer to you mum. I’m twenty-nine years old. Stop stressing will you? I’ve got my own life and I know how to live it.’

‘Chris if you’re gay why didn’t you just tell me? You know it wouldn’t bother me.’

‘Because it’s nothing to do with you!’ He looked to the sky and blew out his cheeks. ‘Dear God I wish I had a brother or sister. Someone else for you to obsess over.’

Lizzie panicked. Why had he said that? Who had he spoken to? The flush returned to her cheeks and she shrunk back in retreat.

‘Come round for Sunday lunch, we can have a chat.’

‘I can’t. It may have escaped your notice, but I am rehearsing for a world tour. It’ll have to wait.’

That night Lizzie was supposed to be going to see La Boheme at The Royal Opera House, but she cancelled, preferring to remain at home, locking the doors and curling up on the sofa with her cigarettes and listening to Shirley Bassey. A typical Cancerian, when she felt under attack she would retreat into her little shell, needing time to think and mull over her next course of action. In one day she’d gone from the elation of her new beginning, her final foray in the world of soap; to this - her past smacking her in the face. If she agreed to let Elaine Bell write her biography she would have to include everything. What would that mean? Would Chris ever talk to her again? Would she be sacked from Eastwood Avenue? Would the public hate her for living a lie for over fifty years?

## **Liverpool – Merseyside**

**June 1957**

The sun started to shine as the train entered Lime Street Station; its beams casting bright lights on the dingy brown bricks, highlighting every slick of slime and growth of mould. It was dank and miserable and the sunshine provided a glimmer of hope, just like the glimmer of hope that was growing in Lizzie's heart. She'd left Southport filled with sorrow but something had happened during the journey home - a revelation hit her that this wasn't the last time she would see Mary Ann. With utter conviction she knew their parting was temporary and one day they would be reunited. All she needed to do was sort herself out. Lewis's were always taking girls on and if she got a job there she could earn enough money to save for a ticket for herself and Mary Ann to sail to Australia where she could start a new life. She could call herself Mrs Gallagher, and no one would know any different.

Lizzie may have only been fifteen, but she was returning from her exile in Southport a woman. She'd departed for Our Lady Margaret's a frightened vulnerable girl, but her ordeal had made her grow up quickly. 'The Whore's Den' as locals knew it, was in reality a mother and baby home for poor, abandoned girls who'd been led astray by some man and left alone to cope with their pregnancy. The nuns ran it with a rod of iron, and never let the girls forget their sins. But the constant cleaning of toilets with toothbrushes or scrubbing floors until they shone was no punishment compared to this home's dénouement. After giving birth, the girls were encouraged to feed and nurture their babies for six whole weeks until the time came for them to be snatched away. And that was the cruellest act of all.

Lizzie's baby was born on April 29<sup>th</sup>, and the moment she held her for the first time her heart had soared with the sort of love she never thought possible. Her conception didn't matter; all that was important was that she was Lizzie's baby – the most beautiful baby that had ever been born. Her elation was dampened when Sister Concepta reminded her not to become too attached because she wasn't hers to keep.

Over time, the scrawny bird-like baby turned into a plump-cheeked beauty, her hair strawberry blonde, her eyes blue. On her right foot she had an extra little toe, making her unusual and unique. Every day Lizzie would nurse her and gaze at her and try to memorise everything about her, ready for the day they were parted. Like a man awaiting execution, Lizzie hoped and prayed for a last minute reprieve, some miracle to happen that would allow her to keep her baby. Maybe

Kit would turn up and ask her to marry him or mam would change her mind and let her bring Mary Ann home and everyone could help in her upbringing.

Her prayers went unanswered, and at six a.m. that morning she was awoken by Sister Carmen, who thrust a form at her with one hand and took the baby away with the other. In her delirium and heartache Lizzie wasn't even sure what she was signing, but once done, the nun spirited the baby away. Another nun then entered the room - a young one Lizzie didn't even recognise. She'd brought her suitcase and her clothes from the laundry and asked if she needed any help packing.

Lizzie was returning to Liverpool after suffering a pain many women three times her age had yet to endure. But her newfound maturity also helped her to make plans. She was positive she would see Mary Ann again. She was her baby and they had no right to take her away. It would probably take them months to find an adoptive home for her, in which time Lizzie could work hard, save and buy their tickets for the New World.

The train pulled to a halt and Lizzie got out, no one offering to help her with her case. It was as though she now bore some sort of mark that told the world she was an unmarried mother. As the steam began to evaporate, she was astonished to see their Jimmy standing on the platform. She hadn't seen or heard from a member of her family for seven months and even though she didn't get on particularly well with her eldest brother, just to see someone she shared blood with made her want to run and throw her arms around him.

Ever the spiv, Jimmy was too engrossed with staring into a window and combing his quiff, trying to perfect that Elvis sneer. All the Gallagher children had amazing mouths, pouting and wanton and Jimmy was no different, and all the lasses down their street wanted to go out with him.

With a skip in her step and deep gratitude that he had come to meet her, Lizzie greeted him by tapping him playfully on the shoulder. Jimmy turned around and looked down at her, no smile, no expression at all.

'All right there Liz lass,' he said, glancing round, nervous that someone might see them.

'Not too bad la,' she smiled. 'Glad to be home.'

Jimmy said nothing, just picked up her case and walked off. Lizzie stumbled along behind him, taking it for granted they were going outside to get the number 54 to take them the short distance to Dingle Street. Instead Jimmy turned left and headed towards the Adelphi.

‘Where are we going?’ she asked, short of breath, trying to keep up with him.

‘Just shurrup and follow me.’

He crossed the road and went down the hill as far as Gino’s café; it was where their Maureen would hang out on a Saturday night before heading down to the State. By day auld fellas and young mothers who were tired after shopping populated it. The first thing Lizzie noticed was the girl in the corner with a big Basonet pram and the jealousy she felt tore her apart. The girl didn’t look much older than her, but because she had a cheap, gold ring from Woolies on her finger, she got to keep *her* baby.

Jimmy told her to sit down while he got them both a cup of tea. She chose to sit facing away from the girl with the baby and instead stared across the road at the grand Adelphi Hotel where she had once dreamt of having her wedding reception. Fat chance of that ever happening now. No man wanted soiled goods.

Jimmy returned with the steaming cups of tea and sat before her; his manner becoming more and more agitated, as if this was a great inconvenience to him.

‘Why can’t we go home Jimmy?’

‘Because mam don’t want you back there,’ he blurted out.

‘What? Why?’

‘You know why. Cos of...’ he stopped, lowering both his head and his voice. ‘The baby.’

‘But she’s still in Southport. I haven’t brought her back with me.’

‘Mam knows that but she’s scared you’re gonna do it again. You know what it’s like for her with all the auld biddies down the street whisperin’ and gossipin’ cos of our auld fella doing a runner after the war. She don’t want any more scandal.’

‘I ain’t gonna bring any more scandal!’

‘Anyway, our Maureen’s pregnant, she’s gonna need more room in the house.’

‘You mean mam’s letting her keep her baby?’

‘Yeah, well Dennis is marrying her ain’t he? If that Kit had been willing to stand by you...’

‘Kit’s stood by me all along. He’s the only person who wrote to me while I was in the ‘ome. He’s going to London y’know. Got a job in a hotel.’

‘Yeah? Well maybe you should go with him?’

‘Jimmy let me go ‘ome and talk to me mam. She’ll see sense.’

‘You can’t la, you don’t understand,’ he paused, looking down at his hands, picking at his filthy nails. ‘Last week she told Mrs O’Hara that she’d got a letter from the hotel you were working in in Southport, telling her how you’d had an accident in the kitchens and electrocuted yerself.’

‘You mean she’s tellin’ people I’m dead?’

‘And in her eyes you are. You and Kit should have been more careful.’

Lizzie went to defend herself but she knew he would never believe her.

‘You mean I can never go back to Dingle Street?’

He shook his head, reaching inside his jacket and pulling out a fold of money, secured with a silver clip. He pushed it across the table at her.

‘Uncle George felt sorry for yer and told me to give you this.’

That name filled Lizzie’s heart with both fear and hatred and the last thing she wanted was his dirty money.

‘There’s fifty quid there girl. He won it on the gee-gees and out the kindness of his heart has given it all to you. You could do anything you wanted with that.’

At first she wanted to refuse – anything touched by Uncle George was tainted, and that included her. But then she paused and thought about it. Fifty quid could probably get her and Mary Ann to

Australia. She could rent a house and get a job, pretend to be a widow. She didn't need the Gallaghers, they meant nothing to her. Mary-Ann was the only family that mattered now.

Feeling like Judas taking his thirty pieces of silver, she snatched the money, and swiftly put it into her handbag. Jimmy stood up, looking down at her, a lock of that Brylcreemed hair dropping over his forehead.

'Go to London Lizzie. Forget about us eh?'

That was the last sentence her brother ever said to her. She watched him leave the café and turn left towards the bus stop. In her heart she wanted to follow him but she knew she couldn't. To turn up in Dingle Street would cause her mother the most terrible shame, especially now she had announced her death. What kept Lizzie going was the thought of seeing Mary Ann again; of leaving Liverpool and the Gallaghers, and going somewhere warm and sunny and full of new beginnings.

She took her case and headed back to Lime Street, buying a first class ticket to Southport. She decided that she would fetch Mary Ann from the home then stay in a hotel by the sea for a couple of days before returning to town to sort out her passage to Australia. What saddened her was that she would never see Kit again. He was leaving for London that very evening and by the time he came back to Liverpool for a visit she would be on the other side of the world.

Christopher 'Kit' Hammond was Lizzie's only friend in the world. They had been born next door to each other on Dingle Street; but in 1943 his mam and dad were killed when the pub they were in got bombed, and Kit and his elder sister Miriam moved round the corner. The two children would meet every evening after school and play on the bomb sites, and when they were a little older they'd go down to the docks to watch the ships on the Mersey, dreaming about the day they could escape. When Miriam died in 1955, Kit moved in with his boss and his wife in a flat above the hardware shop they owned. But he still dreamt of escaping. He had family in London and had been there to visit, marvelling at the Capital city and all the opportunities it held.

Of course when Lizzie became pregnant, her family assumed he was the father. She'd wanted to tell the truth, but like a gentleman he insisted she remained silent and let people assume what they so wished. The truth was they had only ever been friends and had never so much as kissed. Before the local old biddies got wind of the pregnancy, Lizzie had been shipped off to the home,



but had she stayed, no doubt Kit would have been expected to marry her when she turned sixteen.

During Lizzie's absence Kit, had written to his uncle, asking if he knew of any work in London. He found him a job as bellboy at the Carlton Hotel and he was starting the day after tomorrow. His train was the 20.22 from Lime Street and in his last letter he begged Lizzie to come and say goodbye, but she knew she wouldn't be able to do that. Getting Mary-Ann back was her number one priority.

Just a few hours ago, the penniless teenager had been forced to walk the mile and a half from the 'Whore's Den' to the station. But now, with the blood money in her pocket, she could afford to arrive in style. As she pulled up outside the drab, grey building in the fancy taxi, she noticed the curtains twitching - the other girls no doubt curious to see whom it was coming to visit them. This had obviously alerted Sister Concepta, as the door opened even before Lizzie had finished paying the driver.

'And what do you think you're doing come back here Elizabeth Gallagher?' the stern faced woman barked.

Lizzie lay her case down beside her and placed her hands on the hips that had suddenly become rounded since childbirth.

'I've come back for my daughter,' she announced.

The nun gasped in horror, looking around to make sure no one was listening, and grasped Lizzie's arm, pulling her into the house.

'Come in here and don't wave your dirty laundry in front of everyone,' Sister Concepta snapped.

Stepping back into that dark hall with its eerie silence and smell of disinfectant made a feeling of cold horror run through Lizzie's body. Mary Ann was in here and she had to get her out, fast.

'I want my daughter. My uncle's given me some money and I'm taking her to Australia.'

'Your daughter is gone,' the nun replied. 'She went this morning.'

'Gone? Gone where?'

‘Never you mind. You signed her away you wicked girl.’

‘I never signed her away.’

‘You signed her away this morning. Didn’t you read the form I gave you? That child isn’t yours any more. She’s going to nice people who will take care of her.’

‘She’s here. I know she’s here and I wanna see her.’

‘If you don’t vacate these premises in one minute I shall call the police.’

‘Call the bizzies, see if I care. I want me baby.’

‘Wicked, sinful girls like you don’t deserve babies. Now leave, forget her, pretend she’s dead.’

‘No. I ain’t movin’ till I see her.’

Lizzie thought she’d gained a small victory when Concepta left and went into Matron’s office - she hoped to fetch Mary Ann. Instead she came out with Mother Superior, who was probably the most reasonable of the older nuns.

‘What is this nonsense young Elizabeth?’ she sighed in her singsong Dublin accent.

‘I’ve got some money and I wanna take me baby back, thank you sister.’

‘The baby isn’t yours to take child, you signed her away. Her adoptive parents were waiting to take her this morning. She’s gone.’

It took all of Lizzie’s strength to stop her knees from buckling. This couldn’t be true; none of it could be true.

‘But she’s mine!’ she cried. ‘Where’s she gone?’

‘By law we can’t tell you.’ The nun placed her hands upon the child’s shaking shoulders. ‘Now go. Make a life for yourself. You’re young; you can have plenty more babies. Forget this one. Think of her as dead. It’s for the best.’

As the stark realisation seeped in, Lizzie felt herself go faint. It was true. She would never see her baby again. Never kiss her tiny toes or give her a bottle or snuggle up to her when she

couldn't sleep. Someone else would do that. Whoever she was, wherever she was, Lizzie wanted to kill her.

She left the home and took a taxi all the way back to Liverpool, not caring about the fare. What was money compared to not having her daughter to hold? Not only this, she no longer had a home or a family. The only person on her side was Kit, and he was about to go to London. She wondered if he would let her go with him. He was going to live with his uncle and aunt in Notting Hill, maybe Lizzie could stay with them until she found somewhere of her own. London seemed so big and scary, but she knew she had more of a chance of making something of herself there than she did in Liverpool. Perhaps she could make enough money to find whoever had Mary Ann and buy her back off of them. After all, she wasn't their proper daughter; they couldn't really love her like she did.

She waited and waited, drinking endless cups of tea in the station café, craning her head, looking for Kit. He finally arrived at just before eight o'clock. It warmed Lizzie to see him. He was never going to win any prizes for his looks – despite only being sixteen his hair was already thinning and he was tall and lanky, but he was special to Lizzie. It saddened her to see no one had come along him to see him off; he was as much a lost soul as her.

Picking up her case she scurried out of the café and chased him as he headed for the platform, carrying his battered brown suitcase by his side.

'Kit!' she called out. 'Kit la!'

He stopped and turned around. As he spotted her, every muscle in his lean, craggy face creased into a smile. It felt wonderful to have someone who actually cared for her and was glad to see her.

He put down his case and held out his arms. Lizzie went to him and put down her own bag, folding into his embrace.

'It's good to see you Lizzie girl,' he sighed, kissing the top of her head. He pulled away and looked down at her, hands still gripping her shoulders. 'Have you heard what your mam is saying about you? She....'

‘I know. Our Jimmy came to meet me this morning. He told me everything. That’s why I’ve got to leave, there’s nothing for me here.’

‘Where are you gonna go?’

She smiled coquettishly.

‘I was rather hoping I could come to London with you.’

He furrowed his brow.

‘London? Are you sure?’

‘What else is there for me here eh? Everybody thinks I’m dead.’

Her oldest friend sighed and shrugged his boxy shoulders.

‘You’d better get a ticket then.’

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The meeting with Elaine Bell had awoken something within Lizzie. Even though she possessed secrets she’d never intended to tell, she felt a need for catharsis. For fifty years she’d had to pretend to be someone she wasn’t. Not because, like some celebrities, she was embarrassed about her working class roots; but because she’d been declared dead by a mother who was ashamed of her for doing something that wasn’t even her fault. She knew by telling the truth she could risk her role in Eastwood Avenue, but she suddenly felt very old and tired and didn’t care. There were far more important things that she would be risking, but Elaine had planted a seed and offered her a chance to rid herself of this burden.

She looked at her watch; it was ten to ten at night. She had no idea what time Elaine’s flight to New York was, but she was going to try and contact her anyway. She got out the business card the woman had given her and took a deep breath. Her hand shook as she picked up the phone and dialled the number, still questioning if she was doing the right thing.

Elaine answered her mobile promptly.

‘Elaine Bell.’

‘It’s Elizabeth Maine. I’ve been thinking about your offer. If you’d still like to do it, I’d be happy for you to write my biography.’

The woman gave an audible gasp.

‘Fantastic. Okay, well how do you want to do this? I could probably do it over a weekend. Maybe we could meet in a hotel or something?’

‘Why don’t you come and stay with me? You could arrive on Friday and stay for a couple of nights. I just want to get it over and done with.’

‘Okay, well are you doing anything next weekend?’

‘No. Shall we say next Friday?’

‘Yes, fabulous. Thank you Ms Maine.’

‘Call me Lizzie.’

By the time Friday came, Lizzie had smoked so many cigarettes that her voice was hoarse, and she wondered how she was ever going to speak. She didn’t tell a living soul of her plans, not even Chris. People would disapprove and talk her out of it and then she would hate herself for being so weak. It was easier to remain silent and make her mistakes for herself.

Elaine’s demeanour was more relaxed this time. She brought with her a Louis Vuitton overnight bag and her own supply of cigarettes, and started by apologising to Lizzie for her manner the other day. With Chris busy rehearsing, she was taking the opportunity to counsel Marsha and convince her she was doing the wrong thing. Lizzie couldn’t offer any more answers as to whether or not her son was gay or just experimenting and the two women felt it best to avoid the subject whilst they were working on this project. Lizzie showed Elaine to one of the spare bedrooms and while she settled in, made a light lunch. Afterwards they settled in the living room, within minutes creating a fog of cigarette smoke. Elaine took out a Dictaphone and laid it on the coffee table.

‘Start when you want,’ she said.

Lizzie suddenly felt a knot of terror clamp her throat shut. This was the biggest step she had ever taken and she couldn't speak. She couldn't reveal too much. Not at first.

'Would you mind awfully if I glossed over the first few bits?' she asked. 'We can go back to them later.'

'Do as you wish.'

'Okay, well I was born on July first 1941 in Dingle Street, Toxteth, Liverpool. My father was a docker who went off to war in 1942 and never returned. We don't know if he's alive or dead. Me, my four brothers and my sister were brought up by my mother and her family. Anyway, I had a childhood friend called Kit who lived near me and when I got pregnant in 1956, everyone assumed he was the father, but he wasn't. Anyway, I had a baby girl in April 1957 and she was taken away from me.'

'Who was the father?'

'I'd rather not dwell on that for now if it's okay with you. It's still so painful.'

'I understand.'

'So anyway, my mother sent me to Southport to have my baby, and while I was away, kindly told the neighbours that I had been killed, meaning I could never return to Toxteth. Luckily for me, Kit had got a job in London and let me go with him. That's when my life began really.'

## **Chapter 1**

### **June 1957**

It was six o'clock in the morning by the time they reached Notting Hill. Thanks to Lizzie's new found wealth, they'd taken a taxi from Euston Station and as the cab pulled up outside number fourteen Empire Road, it looked odd amongst the run-down houses and cobbled streets. Lizzie couldn't help but feel disappointed. She'd hoped London would be glamorous and exciting, but this road hardly differed from Dingle Street; the houses tiny and terraced, discarded carts used by children as toys and when Kit revealed that just around the corner there had been a man who'd

murdered several women and hidden their bodies around the house, she almost wanted to run back to Liverpool! But her woes were quickly forgotten when a big, red bus thundered along the top of the road, reminding her exactly where she was. Lizzie bet herself that if she got on that bus it would take her into town and that would be where she'd find the glamour.

Kit's Uncle Pete and Aunt Grace had lived in London for many years. They'd met during the Great War and had settled with her family in Lancaster Gate until they'd found their own place in Notting Hill. Kit told her that Pete worked for London Underground as a stationmaster, and Grace was a school dinner lady. Lizzie felt a little apprehensive about going to live with people she hardly knew, but after the horrors of Our Lady's, she knew she could cope with anything.

The street door was opened by a woman whom she presumed to be Grace – a stout, stern faced woman already dressed in her apron, her hair done up in tight curlers.

'Hello,' she barked at Kit in that abrasive cockney accent Lizzie knew would take some time to get used to.

'Hello Aunt Grace,' Kit smiled politely. 'This is Lizzie, me mate. She's come down here looking for work. I wondered if you could put her up for a night or two.'

'She'll have to pay,' the woman snapped. 'Come in.'

After living in a house filled with people, this place, inhabited only by a middle-aged couple, seemed deathly silent to Lizzie. Grace was obviously house-proud, every surface spotless and all furniture covered in lace doilies and the like. She explained that Pete was in bed and they weren't to disturb him. Kit was given the back bedroom, a big room with two wardrobes and a double bed; while Lizzie was taken up to the attic room - a dingy hole with a single iron bed, no wardrobe, just a rail and a washstand. There was also no window, just a skylight in the ceiling and for a moment she felt so depressed she could cry. She had just moved from one slum to another. Then she thought of Mary Ann and found a steely determination she hadn't possessed prior to becoming a mother. Whatever she was doing, she was doing it for her daughter and she could cope.

'I want ten shillings a week,' Grace demanded. 'And you pay your share of the bills.'

'Ta very much Mrs..'

‘Nicholls. Mrs Nicholls.’

‘Ta very much Mrs Nicholls. As soon as I’ve landed on me feet I promise I’ll be out of here.’

She was introduced to Uncle Pete over breakfast. She and Kit were tucking into a plate of bacon and eggs when the door flew open and he shuffled into the room. Fat and repulsive in a dirty white vest and stained trousers, he coughed and spluttered, not even acknowledging his nephew and new lodger until Grace made him notice.

‘Pete will you stop coughing like that, Kit’s starting hew new job soon, he don’t want your germs.’

‘Sorry Kit,’ the man wheezed, his accent more London than Scouse. He then suddenly noticed the pretty girl sitting opposite him and fixed her with cold, opaque eyes.

‘And who’s this?’ he asked.

‘Lizzie Gallagher,’ Kit replied. ‘She’s a mate from home. She’s come to London looking for work.’

‘Keep away from the nig-nogs,’ was all Pete could offer. ‘They’re everywhere round here. You’d be rich pickings for ‘em.’

Lizzie said nothing, but thought of the black people back home in Liverpool. They never caused her any bother. She wondered if the ones living in London were different, or if it was just a reflection of Pete’s ignorance.

‘I thought I might get Lizzie some work in the hotel,’ Kit said. ‘They must want chambermaids or something.’

Lizzie liked neither Pete nor Grace but knew that living with them was the safer option at the moment. London was a big, scary place for a young girl on her own, and it was better to have Kit with her. The money Uncle George had given her was burning a hole in her pocket and she wanted to go into town and spend some of it on new clothes. Kit however insisted they visit the hotel where he was going to work, and find her a job. They took a Routemaster bus to Marble Arch and Lizzie spent the whole journey gazing out of the window, gasping at Hyde Park and the



posh houses and ladies walking around in their finery. It looked so much fun being rich, she wished it would happen to her.

The Carlton stood on the corner opposite Marble Arch. Lizzie thought the monument was lovely until Kit informed her it used to be called Tyburn Gallows and people had hung there for all sorts of crimes, not just murder. This made Lizzie think of her brother Stanley, currently languishing in Walton Jail for the manslaughter of a boy from a rival gang. Had he been found guilty of murder, he would have faced the gallows. If he had, maybe mam would have been less ashamed of her.

A concierge in fancy red livery stood by the entrance of the huge, Art Deco building and gave the two scruffy youngsters puzzled looks as they walked past him into the lobby. Lizzie had never seen anything like it; chequered floors, chandeliers and the sound of a piano tinkling away somewhere in the distance. Behind the reception sat an awfully glamorous girl, with blonde curled hair and red lipstick that matched the jacket she wore. Lizzie hoped Kit would do the talking - she was far too nervous and tongue-tied.

‘Is Mr Hope around?’ he asked.

‘One minute,’ the receptionist replied, her voice clipped and posh. Lizzie couldn’t imagine working with someone like this. Would she laugh at her accent or her lack of manners?

The Receptionist called someone on the telephone and then asked Lizzie and Kit if they could wait. Lizzie had never felt more conscious of the way she looked or spoke, and knew she could never fit in somewhere like this. She’d rather go and work in a factory, somewhere she wasn’t on show to such important people.

Suddenly Kit looked up, an expression of recognition on his face. Lizzie followed his gaze and noticed a man walking towards them; he was tall and slim with dark matinee idol looks and an immaculate suit.

‘Hello,’ he said on joining them. ‘It’s Christopher isn’t it?’

‘Yes, thank you Mr Hope,’ Kit replied politely. ‘This is Lizzie my cousin. She’s come down looking for work. I was wondering if you had anything.’

Mr Hope turned his attentions to Lizzie, not saying anything, just examining her, furrowing his brow and gripping his chin.

‘How old are you Lizzie?’ he asked.

‘Nearly sixteen,’ she replied.

‘Have you worked before?’

‘No, I’ve just left school sir.’

He laughed.

‘You don’t have to call me sir, Mr Hope will do. I’ve a couple of senior chambermaid posts going but it would be a shame to hide such a pretty girl away. I’ve also got a post going behind the bar during the day, how does that sound to you?’

‘In the bar?’ she uttered. ‘Serving people?’

‘Yes. Unless you’d prefer to make scruffy beds all day. You’d start work at eleven and finish at three, two pounds per week.’

‘Sounds great Mr Hope, ta.’

‘Ah hah, *thank you* young Lizzie. We’re going to have to do something about that diction if you’re going to be serving the public. And I have just the person to help.’

Like a whirlwind, Lizzie was rushed off in the direction of the tinkling piano and found it was indeed coming from the bar. Her experience of bars had been the pubs back home in Liverpool when she’d be asked to go and fetch one of her errant brothers home from some spit and sawdust dive filled with Dockers and scallies. This place was like nothing she had ever seen before, the first thing hitting her wondrous eyes being the collection of exotic looking plants – palms and ferns just like the ones in the big, glasshouse in Sefton Park. A counter ran along the other end of the room, and the seating area consisted of leather chairs and oak tables. The pianist sat in the corner behind a white baby grand. The lid obscured him, but Lizzie could make out a flurry of fingers and the stripes of his blazer.

‘Bertie!’ Mr Hope called. ‘Bertie stop. Stop!’

The music ceased and 'Bertie' stood up. He was a young man in his twenties, with short, dark blonde hair and a face with odd shaped features – a broad nose and generous mouth with mischievous, twinkling eyes. Somehow it all went together and made him very attractive but not in a film star way.

'What have we here?' he asked, his voice awfully posh.

'This is Miss Gallagher, she'll be coming to work in the bar during the day. Miss Gallagher this is Johnny Duvall, our resident pianist. Miss Gallagher is from Liverpool Bertie, I thought you could help her with her diction.'

'Fantastic!' the young man exclaimed, clasping his hands together and leaving his piano. He walked over to where they stood and took Lizzie by the shoulders, easing her away from Kit and Mr Hope to study her in the light. 'Quite a beauty,' he observed in his theatrical voice. 'Such wide-eyed innocence, but what a wanton mouth?'

Lizzie stood silent, completely confused, not understanding what they were talking about. She was only here to learn how to talk properly so she could earn some money. Bertie looked at Mr Hope.

'Leave her with me. I will be the complete Professor Higgins.'

'Come along Christopher,' Mr Hope ordered and he walked off. Kit looked at Lizzie, shrugged his shoulders and followed his future boss. Lizzie looked at her new mentor, a little perturbed by his big, beaming grin.

'What's yer name?' she asked. 'Bertie or Johnny?'

'No dear. What. Is. Your. Name. Your, like it's spelt Y-A-W. Your. Say it.'

'Y-Your. What is your name?'

'That's better, my stage name is Johnny Duvall but I was born Albert Preston, so everyone who knows me calls me Bertie. And you shall too. I like you.'

Like a giggling schoolgirl, he took her by the arm and led her to one of the tables, sitting her down on a leather chair and squatting beside her.

‘How old are you Miss Gallagher?’ he asked.

‘I’ll be sixteen on the first of July. And it’s Lizzie.’

‘Lizzie,’ he sighed. ‘Like our dear Queen.’

This sounded awfully cheeky and it made Lizzie laugh. Bertie was probably the most interesting person she had ever met. She’d never spoken to someone so posh and cultured.

‘So what brings you to London?’ he asked. ‘No, don’t tell me. You’re looking for fame and fortune? And if not, why, when you’re such a stunner?’

‘I had a bit of trouble back home. I had to leave.’

He tilted his head to one side and smiled sweetly, those aquamarine eyes twinkling.

‘You know it’s a shame you’ve got to lose that accent, it’s so charming. I bet you’ve got big, burly brothers who talk like that. Like Dockers.’

‘Yeah, well we all talk the same.’

‘No, no, listen to me. *My brothers and I talk in a similar fashion.*’

‘My brothers and I talk in a similar fashion.’

‘Wonderful darling. By the end of the week you’ll sound just like Princess Margaret.’

## **Chapter 2**

By the end of the week Lizzie sounded no more like Princess Margaret than she had when she arrived. It took a lot of effort to remember to speak nicely when dealing with customers. Every day at noon, Bertie would sit her down and while they shared his salmon paste sandwiches, he would teach her the rules of Received Pronunciation. Lizzie adored Bertie; he was so interesting and had so many stories. His father was an army general and he’d gone to boarding school and his parents had wanted him to follow in his father’s footsteps, but he’d run away and got a job on a cruise ship, playing the piano. Now he lived in Soho and worked in the Carlton by day, and at night played in a club near to his flat. He also wrote songs and dreamt of being famous. He

extended his ambitions to Lizzie and reckoned that with her looks she could be a model. Something she had never considered.

She gave some of her first week's wages to Grace to cover her rent for the next month, and the rest she spent on a new lipstick. Bertie insisted that a light pink would suit her and having never bought a lipstick in her life, she took his advice. After all, they were going out that night and she wanted to look nice for him. She changed into a black pencil skirt and a white, fitted blouse she'd bought earlier this week. Since having Mary Ann, her bust had ballooned and she now took a size fourteen and yet at the bottom she remained an eight. She appeared very top heavy and didn't like that about herself, she hated staring in the mirror and seeing a woman looking back – growing up quickly was still rather terrifying.

She wondered what it was Bertie liked about her. He never leered at her like the lads she'd see in the street, or try to paw her like some of the more drunken customers in the bar. But he'd asked her out, which meant he must have fancied her. She couldn't even imagine being the girlfriend of someone like him - he was far too posh, and at twenty-seven, quite a bit older than her. Perhaps she would ask if they could just remain friends.

Before leaving the house, she stood in the hall checking her lipstick and her hair. Nancy, her colleague in the bar had told her how to roll her hair so she looked more grown up. What with this and her new, voluptuous figure, she looked nearer twenty than sixteen and the only way she could cope with it, was by pretending to play the role of an older, confident woman.

The street door opened and Pete walked in, still dressed in his London Transport uniform. He stank of cigarettes and sweat, and this made her think of Uncle George. What was it with middle-aged men that they developed an aversion to washing? The stench made her feel quite sick.

'Got a date?' he asked gruffly. It was probably the most he'd spoken to her in the whole time she'd been there.

'Sort of,' she replied, preening her hair.

Without saying another word, he squeezed past her, turning onto his side so the front of his body brushed against her. Lizzie cringed as she felt his fat stomach against the small of her back; he seemed to linger for a moment before moving off. She turned around, checking to make sure the

hall really was that narrow, but it wasn't, he'd squeezed against her deliberately. He had touched her up and this chilled her to the bone. She was starting to become convinced that there was something wrong with her to prompt this behaviour in men.

She looked in the mirror and instead of seeing a pretty young girl about to go out on a Friday night, she saw a whore. The same whore she'd been since she was thirteen, when Uncle George took her to the Anderson shelter in the back yard for the first time and asked for his special treat. All the time she was doing it, he would hiss at her that it was her fault, that she drove him to it, prancing about like a little slut. Back then Lizzie had no idea what it was she'd done to make him feel that way, but whatever it was, it seemed she was doing it to Pete too.

She couldn't bear to look in the mirror a moment longer, picking up her handbag and leaving the house. Still deeply ashamed, she lowered her head and rushed down the street, ignoring the glances of the handsome young West Indian men who hung around the street corners. She just wanted to get onto the bus and go off to meet Bertie.

They met underneath Eros, and for a moment Lizzie had to stand and take stock of the fact that she was here in London, beneath the lights and glamour of Piccadilly Circus. Just a week ago she'd been a prisoner in that austere mother and baby home, it seemed like a world away and yet Mary Ann was so close – always in her heart.

'Darling you look simply heavenly,' Bertie said. 'Heavenly. That lipstick looks as though it was made especially for you. I am just the proudest man in London.'

Lizzie giggled and let him lead her by the hand into the depths of Soho. The narrow streets filled with shops and nightclubs with flashing lights outside. Some of the shops sold magazines with photographs of scantily clad women on the front, which made Lizzie blush and Bertie giggle. Rotting food from the market littered the ground, and the the whole place stank, reminding Lizzie of Toxteth, but instead of being repulsed, she felt homesick – wishing she could go back to Liverpool. Just the once. Not exiled forever.

They stopped at a pub called The Jolly Sailor and stepped inside. It was hard to imagine the dapper Bertie frequenting such a place. It was like the scruffiest pubs back home – the air filled with smoke, the music coming from someone playing a piano. Most of the customers were men,

some in pairs, some alone. Bertie told her to sit down in one of the booths while he went to the bar. Lizzie asked for a port and lemon, thinking that sounded a very grown up request.

Bertie returned, passing her her drink and sipping his own pint of beer.

‘I’m so glad we’re chums Lizzie,’ he said. ‘I expect you’re missing your friends in Liverpool.’

‘I didn’t really have any friends. Only Kit.’

‘So Kit isn’t your boyfriend?’

‘No, I’ve never had a boyfriend.’

‘And you such a looker! My God, are the men of Liverpool mad?’

‘Have you got a girlfriend Bertie?’ she asked. He’d told her once that when addressing someone with a question, it was awfully polite to finish the sentence with his or her name. ‘You never mention anybody.’

‘Anyone dear. *Anyone.*’

He looked down at his drink and did the strange thing of turning the glass around. ‘No I don’t have a girlfriend,’ he stopped, paused, then turned around, looking over at a couple of middle-aged men propping up the bar, deep in conversation.

‘How would you feel if I told you that those two men have been seeing each other since the end of the First War?’ he suddenly asked.

‘What do you mean? Seeing each other?’

‘They’re in love dear.’

‘Two men in love?’

‘Yes. How does that make you feel?’

‘Well our Stanley calls men like that dirty queers. Sometimes after he’d been to the pub he’d wait for them by the docks and when they came along he’d beat them up.’

‘And do you agree with that?’

She had to pause and think about it. What was normal? Was what Uncle George had done her normal just because he was a man and she a woman? She looked over at the two men; they looked clean and tidy and happy to be in each other's company. No one was being made to do anything they didn't want to.

'I s'pose not. People are entitled to do what they like.'

'So if I told you I preferred men, would you think me an awful freak of nature who should be shot?'

'You!' she exclaimed. 'You're queer?'

'Yes dear, and if you want to leave now you can.'

'Of course I don't want to leave, you're my friend. But why don't you like women?'

'I love women. Women are far more beautiful and interesting than men. I just choose not to kiss them. No, correct that, I would find it mostly strange to kiss one.'

'So have you got a boyfriend?'

'No dear I'm single. The last one was a soldier home from National Service who then went back to his girlfriend.'

'Girlfriend?'

'Don't ask. And for God's sake don't go around broadcasting it. I could go to prison.'

'Go to prison just for liking men?'

'Yes. Just the same as if any man has his way with you before July, he could go to prison.'

Lizzie didn't reply, but she thought of Uncle George. Surely that meant...but how could she take him to court? She was a dead woman in Liverpool.

'So if you can't tell anyone you're queer, how do you meet other lads like you?'

'Because places like this exist. Everyone knows it, the police come in now and then and try and wreck the joint, threatening to arrest everyone. But Cyril the landlord just waits a few weeks and



opens up again. The idea is that as long as we keep it in here, and don't go outside frightening people, it isn't too bad.'

Lizzie took stock of the situation. Bertie was her friend and yet he didn't want her to go to bed with him. He cared about how she looked and thought she was beautiful but he would never force himself on her or molest her or make her feel uncomfortable. It was rather wonderful.

He took a sip of his beer and arched his eyebrows.

'I do wonder if young Christopher is queer. After all, he's got a beautiful filly like you around and yet he's never even tried to get his hand inside your blouse.'

'But we're just mates.'

'Yes, but he's sixteen years old dear. He should be on heat all the time. I can't tell if he is or he isn't, he's too young.'

'His uncle is a bit horrible, he brushed himself up against me tonight, dirty old get.'

'Dirty old *man*. Kick him in the gonads. That'll stop him.'

'It just frightened me that's all.'

'Unfortunately with looks like yours, you're going to have to put up with men finding you wildly exciting. You're a dish. Why if I were straight, I'd ravish you here and now.'

Lizzie didn't mention Uncle George, it hardly seemed the time or place to do such a thing. She just trusted everything Bertie said - he was far worldlier than her and to doubt him was silly.

'And once we have you talking like a lady, you will be the toast of London and you will have rich, handsome men hanging off your every word. You lucky thing.'

'I don't want a boyfriend,' she stated. 'Never ever.'

'And why's that my dear?'

'It don't matter, another time eh?'

'No. *Shall we discuss it some other time? This really isn't the place Bertie.*'

Lizzie laughed and her mood lightened.

‘Shall we discuss it another time? This really isn’t the place Bertie.’

His broad mouth creased into a warm, genuine smile and he reached out, grasping her fingers within his own.

‘You dear dear child,’ he cooed. ‘I feel as though we’ve been friends forever.’

Lizzie went to bed that night feeling happier than she had in a long time. The fact that Bertie didn’t fancy her made her relax and able to enjoy his company. He was by far the most exotic person she had ever met, and the fact that he found *her*, little Lizzie Gallagher from the back streets of Liverpool, equally interesting, blew her away. With Bertie guiding her along, she felt little could go wrong.

### Chapter 3

Two weeks on and Princess Margaret was a little nearer in sight. Bertie was a patient teacher and had given up many of his evenings to sit coaching Lizzie. It wasn’t easy to get peace and quiet in the bedsit where he lived, his neighbours were made up of whores and showgirls, and their constant screeching provided an unwelcome backdrop to their lessons. Bertie taught her three words - *your*, *hello* and *darling*. Up until then, in typical Scouse fashion Lizzie had said *yer* for something belonging to someone, and on greeting somebody it was usually *alright* or *hi’ya*, and she never said darling, only *luv*. Bertie found it all very endearing but it was not acceptable for someone serving in the bar of one of London’s top hotels. Over time, without Lizzie even realising it, she was beginning to drop a lot of her Liverpool affectations and was indeed calling people *darling*, and always greeted with *hello*.

Kit was beginning to regret ever recommending his friend to the hotel. As a lowly bellboy he had no-one to teach him diction and the guests – particularly Americans – found it difficult to understand his accent and often complained when he mumbled or dropped things. He confessed to Lizzie that he was considering cutting his losses and returning to Liverpool, something she couldn’t even consider. If Kit left, she’d have no choice but to remain in London and try to find some cheap digs.

They often met for lunch in the staff canteen on the top floor. Lizzie had started to refer to it as *lunch* but Kit still called it dinner. When she told him dinner was what people ate in the evening he laughed at her pretentiousness. Despite their emerging differences, they remained good friends – they'd been through too much not to. Lizzie just wished she could find the courage to tell him about Pete and the looks he gave her, and the excuses he'd find to brush himself against her.

On this particular day Kit was sadder than normal. He'd been scolded by Mr Hope for answering back an American tourist who'd told him to speak the Queen's English. His cheeks were still burning red as he tucked into his ham sandwich.

'Who's he to tell me off?' he spat. 'Fucking queer. Should be shot.'

'What do you mean queer?'

'Hope, he's a pervert, just like your buddy.'

'Do you mean Bertie? He ain't a pervert.'

'Don't tell me you don't know Lizzie. He likes men. I reckon he only hangs around with you to give the impression of being normal.'

'Does it really matter what Bertie does in his private life? And you've no proof Mr Hope is like it too.'

'That's where you're wrong. He was caught in bed with a young lad a couple of years ago. Celia, the head chambermaid told me. He only got away with it cos his uncle's the owner of the hotel. Fucking nonce, he should be hung.'

'London's full of people like it Kit, you've just got to get used to it.'

'Well maybe I don't wanna. Maybe I just want to go back 'ome where people are normal.'

'Like Uncle George was normal with me you mean?' she snarled. Kit retreated.

'I'm sorry Liz, I'm just so fed up. Why don't you come back with me? Maybe we could get the old sod arrested.'

‘And who’d believe me over him? No one. I want to stay in London Kit. I belong here now.’

‘Well don’t think you’ve got any future with that Bertie. The likes of him are too busy hanging around public bogs.’

That afternoon when she finished work, Lizzie left the building and was shocked to find Pete’s Ford parked across the road. He was sat in it, still dressed in his uniform and Lizzie wondered if he’d come here for Kit. She was even more astounded when he spotted her and climbed out of the car.

‘Hello Lizzie,’ he said, trying to smile; adjusting his trousers over his fat gut. ‘Want a lift?’

‘I’m fine thanks, I’ll get the bus.’

‘Don’t be silly, climb in. We need to chat.’

Lizzie reluctantly got into the car and not wanting to give him the wrong idea, sat as far away from him as she possibly could,. The car smelt of him – musty and old, and she suddenly became conscious of the fact her skirt was riding up over her knees and showing her stockings and that her huge breasts were pushing out the blouse she wore. How did he see her? Like some sort of little tart asking for it?

He leaned over, putting his hand behind her seat.

‘Now the lad’s talking about going back to Liverpool. Are you thinking of doing the same?’

‘No. I want to stay in London.’

‘That’s what I wanted to hear. I was thinking, maybe you could have Kit’s room, free of charge. In return for some....favours.’

‘What sort of favours?’

His fat calloused hand ran up her leg towards her thigh. An image of Uncle George doing the same thing filled her mind and she had never hated herself more.

‘Kit let it slip that you had to get away from Liverpool cos you’d been in the family way. Now, by my reckoning, that makes you a woman of the world, you know what I’m saying?’

‘I’m not like that,’ she panicked, shrinking even further back into the car. Pete moved his hand from her thigh to her face, stroking it gently, his fingers moving down over her neck, heading towards her chest.

‘Come on Lizzie,’ he urged. ‘Let’s say once a week. In return you get a room and you can come and go as you please.’

He could have been offering Buckingham Palace and it wouldn’t have been enough for Lizzie to submit to his demands. He was repulsive and disgusting, just like Uncle George, and she didn’t have to be a victim again. She slapped his hand away.

‘Don’t touch me you dirty old man. I’m moving out.’

‘Oh yeah? And where do you reckon you’ll go? Any landlord will see you for the little tart you are.’

‘Yeah, well I’ll have to take that chance won’t I?’

She fiddled with the lock, trying to get out of the car. Pete seemed resigned to his fate and gripped the steering wheel.

‘Don’t think you’re coming back to my house,’ he said calmly. ‘Go home and collect your things. I want you out of my house tonight.’

Lizzie got out of the car and whilst she was glad to be away from this horrid man and his attention, she could only shake with fear at the knowledge she was now homeless. She still had some of Uncle George’s money left but she was only fifteen, it would be difficult to rent a room on her own. She had no choice but to stay at the hotel for a while. The staff quarters were cheap and clean and at least she would have the company of other young people.

Before she could reach Mr Hope and ask him if she could move in, she was met by Bertie. He was leaving the bar, clutching his leather bag in which he kept his music. He looked so old fashioned in his striped blazer and Oxford bags but right at that moment, Lizzie could have kissed him. It was so nice to see a friendly face.

‘And what’s the matter with you Miss Gallagher?’ he asked.

‘That old pervert Pete has just tried it on with me. I wouldn’t do it so he’s kicked me out. I’m hoping Mr Hope has got a spare room for me.’

Bertie’s expressive brow furrowed.

‘Why on earth would you want to live in squalor here when you could live in deepest Soho, my dear dear child of the North?’

‘Soho? With you?’

‘Of course!’ he exclaimed. ‘We can room together and look for a little flat to share. How does that sound to you?’

‘Fantastic. I’ll pay you rent.’

‘You’ll do no such thing. Now I think we should go and pick up your belongings and take you back to your new luxury digs before heading into town to the Pussycat Club. Then we can get terribly drunk and tell each other outrageous stories.’

And drunk was exactly what they got. The Pussycat Club was a notorious dive in the middle of Gerrard Street, sandwiched between a shop selling saucy magazines and a greengrocer. Couples of all persuasions were allowed to mix freely and where once she would have been outraged, Lizzie thought nothing of seeing women kissing women and men kissing men, and up on stage men dressed as garish women would sing bawdy songs. A few of the patrons persuaded Bertie to get up and do a turn and he sang *Mad About the Boy* by Noel Coward - the lyrics sounding awfully daring coming from a man. Afterwards he and Lizzie took over a booth and drank horrendous pink cocktails which fizzed on her tongue and made her feel giddy, and loosened her tongue.

‘I think there must be something wrong with me,’ she slurred to Bertie who was busy studying a pert blond boy on the other side of the dance floor. ‘Why is it that dirty old bastard could never take his hands off me, and yet Kit never so much as touched me?’

‘Did you want him to?’ Bertie asked.

‘No of course not, he’s just a friend. But I just feel so *ugly*.’

‘I’m not even going to dignify that comment with a response.’

‘I just hope she doesn’t turn out ugly like me,’ she slurred. The conscious part of her brain suddenly realised what she said and she sat up, hoping Bertie hadn’t been listening.

‘Who?’ he asked.

‘No one. Forget I spoke. Get me another drink.’

Bertie did as he was told and shortly afterwards they stumbled out of the club and went home. Stripping down to their underwear, they got into the big double bed with the noisy springs, and lay spooning, Bertie held Lizzie tightly, and it felt nice to be physically close to a man - especially one that wasn’t going to try and molest her.

She lay enjoying the silence, thinking to herself how grateful she was to God for bringing Bertie into her life. He was the best friend a girl could have, like he was the male half of her. Just like Yin and Yang – she remembered a Chinese girl called Anna Ling at school talking about it. Bertie was Yin to Lizzie’s Yang.

‘I thought we were going to tell each other stories,’ he said sleepily into the back of her neck.

‘I don’t know any stories,’ she replied.

‘Okay, looks like I’ll have to provide the entertainment then. I’ve been thinking of going into writing. I’ll tell you one of my stories.’

‘Okay, but I might fall asleep, I’m pretty tired.’

‘Well this is a story about a girl. A very beautiful girl who has been good all her life. Not the sort of girl who gets into trouble. She has a boyfriend who adores her, but he’s a rather old-fashioned boy you might say. The girl meets a boy who promises her the world, and unlike her stuffy, chaste boyfriend, this one actually shows her how he feels. Unfortunately once the deed is done, the cad reveals himself to be nothing but a rotten liar who has really got a wife or some woman at home waiting for him. Our beautiful heroine realises her mistakes and decides to stay with the first boyfriend. However, she then discovers she is in the family way and is suddenly faced with an awful dilemma. She can’t persuade her boyfriend that he is the father because it takes all his

courage to even kiss her on the cheek let alone anything else. The poor lamb is devastated, and when baby is born, she is forced to give her away.'

Lizzie was glad they were in the dark and she had her back to him, otherwise he would have seen her blushes. She wondered how Bertie could be so astute. To work all that out when she hadn't given away any clues, except for her slip up this evening.

'But of course, her hometown holds too many memories for her and when her boyfriend, who has forgiven her infidelity, asks her if she would like to go to London, she accepts. They come down together and stay with his aunt and uncle and hope to start a new life. However the uncle is a terrible leech and said girl runs off and lives with her queer best friend.'

Lizzie was rendered speechless. How did he know she'd had a baby? He certainly hadn't spoken to Kit because the basic facts were wrong. She was mortified that someone could have guessed. Would that mean other people would find it so easy as well?

'W-Why are you saying this?' she uttered.

He squeezed her a bit tighter.

'Because I'm a clever old queen who picks things up. Am I right?'

'Sort of.'

'Do you want to tell me what happened?'

'There wasn't a boyfriend. Kit and I have only ever been friends. I can promise that. And her father, well...' She wasn't sure if she could say any more. Her throat was constricting, her mouth going dry. Bertie was broadminded, but what would he think of her?

'My uncle is her father.'

'Your uncle?'

'Aye. I was always Uncle George's favourite. When I was little I loved it. He used to take me out in his van and let me sit on his lap while he was driving. I think me mam, sorry, my mother, was just glad to see the back of me. Then when I got to about twelve or thirteen and started, you know, developing, he changed. Whenever we were on our own he'd find reasons to touch me.



Once he asked me to show him my tits because he wanted to see they were growing okay. I told him I couldn't do that - me mam hadn't even seen them. But he told me that mam didn't have the time to do all that and he was only concerned. So I did it and I felt so dirty afterwards.'

'Why didn't you tell your mother?'

'She wouldn't have believed me. George was her favourite brother. I just kept quiet and hoped he wouldn't do it again. Then one day last summer he asked me if I wanted to go for a drive out to North Wales. He told me we'd be picking aunt Nora up on the way there, so I agreed to go. But we went driving past aunt Nora's house and he didn't take me as far as North Wales. He pulled up on a bombsite by the Albert Dock and he forced himself on me. It was horrible Bertie, horrible. Afterwards he drove me home and told me if I said anything to anyone he'd kill me. I didn't even tell Kit. That was until I was late and I realised what had happened. I wanted to get rid of it but I couldn't afford an abortion. All I could afford was a trip to Kitty Lewis' on Dragon Lane, but she'd butchered more girls than helped them. So I told me mam. She didn't even ask who the father was; everyone just presumed it was Kit. I told him the truth then and made him promise never to tell a soul, and he didn't. Me mam arranged for me to go and stay at a convent in Southport for unmarried mothers. I wouldn't send a dog to live there. I had Mary Ann on the twenty ninth of April and I had to keep her with me for six weeks. Then they took her away from me and I had to go back to Liverpool. Me brother met me at the station and told me that mam had told everyone round our way that I'd been electrocuted and killed while I was working away. Cos she said that, I could never go home. Our Jimmy gave me fifty quid that Uncle George had given him to pass to me and I came to London with Kit.'

'What a terrible story,' Bertie winced. 'You poor thing. So you don't know where your baby is?'

'No, she's been adopted now.'

'Do you love her? Would you want to see her again? Considering her conception.'

'It wasn't her fault Bertie. She's just an innocent baby. When she was born I could somehow forget who her auld fella was and just love her for being my baby. She was so beautiful Bertie, like a little dolly. When Jimmy give me the money, I went back to the home to see if they'd let me take her, but they reckoned I signed her away and can never get her back.'

‘You poor angel. Maybe one day you’ll see her again. You never know.’

‘I want to be rich Bertie. I want to be so important they won’t be able to stop me seeing her. I’m a nobody now, but if I’m a somebody they won’t shut doors in me face and me mam’ll have to apologise for telling everybody I’m dead.’

## **Chapter 4**

### **September 1957**

It was half past eleven and things were only just starting to hot up in the Pussycat Club. Bertha May was about to take the stage and wow the crowd with her Marilyn Monroe routine. In her blonde wig and fancy gold gown, she looked the part, but Lizzie laughed when she thought back to rehearsals and Bertha had been in her previous carnation of Walter Jackson, a builder from Bow who hid his secret drag life from his workmates; who would no doubt kill him if they knew.

Lizzie now supplemented her income by working at the club two nights a week. She and Bertie were renting a rather luxurious flat in Pimlico and it was so expensive, her wages from the Carlton simply weren’t enough to cover it. When one of the barmaids left the Pussycat Club, Bertie had used all his charm and influence to get his little friend a job. This new role required a change of image and under Bertie’s guidance Lizzie had visited a hairdresser on Bond Street and had her waist length golden hair cut to the shoulder and every night she went to bed in curlers so it would roll properly. Dorothy Kent, the model who lived in the flat upstairs had shown her how to put make-up on properly, making the most of her beautiful blue eyes and luscious lips. Dorothy also donated a couple of her unwanted dresses, which Lizzie had to shorten to make them fit her properly. In anywhere other than the Pussycat Club, she would have had men drooling over her gorgeous looks and ample bust; but here she was just another girl helping out. Clint, her cute, twenty-two year old male colleague got far more attention than she ever did.

Bertie was propped at the bar waiting for Rudy, the MC to make his introduction. Bertie always accompanied Bertha May on piano and dreamt of the day someone would spot him and give him his big break. Not that that was likely to happen in a poky club in Soho mainly frequented by

closet homosexuals and transvestites. And even those influential men who did come in would never admit to it.

‘I see we have new members here tonight,’ Bertie said, looking in the direction of a group of men in the corner of the club. ‘Rumour has it they’re here to see Mr Spiteri.’

‘The owner? Why?’

‘Heavens above knows dear,’ he replied, then noticed Rudy mount the tiny stage, and gulped down his drink. ‘Here we go. Stardom awaits.’

He left the bar and weaved his way through the crowd towards the piano at the side of the stage. The overweight and heavily made up Rudy looked ridiculous, squeezed into his tux, his fat flabby jowls spilling over his shirt collar. Apparently he had once been big in the music halls, but got blacklisted when he was caught having an affair with a fourteen year old trapeze artist.

‘Ladies, gentlemen and well, whatever you are. Tonight we have the most beautiful lady in the whole of Soho here to sing for you. Will you put your hands together for Miss Bertha May, accompanied by Mr Johnny Duvall?’

Applause broke out and Bertha minced onto the stage, tonight clad in a silver halter neck, her wig white and perfectly styled, her make-up outrageous. She started singing ‘*I want to be loved by you*’, her breathy singing voice an exact imitation of Marilyn. In another world Walter Jackson would have become a major singing star.

Someone got up from the group of guests and walked towards the bar. He was a young man, tall, dark and handsome, but that was hardly unusual. Lizzie was shocked at just how good looking the majority of homosexual men were. He reached the counter and she was rendered quite speechless by his beauty. His face was finely chiselled and everything in perfect proportion. But like a little boy he had the most mischievous light blue eyes and a faint scar running down his left cheek. He leaned onto the bar, pulling a comical expression.

‘Now tell me that you’re a real woman,’ he said in a brash cockney voice. ‘If not, I think my heart’ll break.’

‘Yes I’m a real woman,’ Lizzie laughed, suddenly realising she’d replied to him in her newly polished accent. It was almost as if she didn’t want him to meet the real Lizzie Gallagher.

‘Well thank Heavens for that,’ he said. ‘Can I have another bottle of champagne please darlin’?’

‘Certainly.’

She walked out into the cold store round the back of the bar and as she did, she could feel his eyes on her backside. For once, male attention didn’t make her feel uncomfortable or dirty. He was no more than thirty and ever so good looking, it didn’t feel like an insult. She returned to the bar to find him waiting for her with that smirk on his cheeky face. She wondered if she should charge him for the drink. If he were a friend of Mr Spiteri it would seem rude.

‘So you working here in between modelling assignments?’ he asked.

Lizzie giggled girlishly, laying the champagne bottle on the counter.

‘I’m not a model,’ she replied. ‘I work in a hotel.’

‘You’re not a model?!’ he exclaimed. ‘That’s what you get for working with all these fairies, they don’t appreciate a beautiful woman when they see one.’ He stuck out his hand. ‘Bobby Duff.’

She shook it, his fingers were rough and calloused and this excited Lizzie.

‘Lizzie Gallagher.’

‘Hello Lizzie,’ he said, those naughty blue eyes wandering down to her cleavage and back up again. ‘Why don’t you come over and join me for a drink?’

‘I’m working.’

‘What time do you finish?’

‘Three.’

‘Okay, well I’ll wait for you. I’m friends with Mr Spiteri, he won’t mind me staying after hours, we can have a drink then.’

He took the champagne and returned to his table. In his wake, Lizzie felt herself blushing. It was usually only middle-aged, married men that chatted her up, she'd never approached by someone as handsome and flash as Bobby. But the thought of having a boyfriend scared her, especially if they wanted...she wondered if it would be as horrible as it was with Uncle George.

Clint sidled up to her, polishing a glass.

'You wanna watch that one,' he said.

'You know him?'

'I know of him, he's part of Ray Spark's gang. They want to buy the club off Spiteri. If he don't agree they'll end up making his life a misery.'

'Bobby's a gangster?!' Lizzie gasped and to her bewilderment, this made him all the more attractive. Perhaps it was the familiarity – most of the lads in her family had had some brush with the law.

'Yes, and you're a little lamb, so be careful. I don't want to see you going to the slaughter.'

The evening wore on and some of the others went onto Club Paris in Bayswater. Bertie asked Lizzie if she wanted to join them but she opted out, not telling him about Bobby. Bertie was awfully protective of her and would have dished out all sorts of warnings. But Lizzie yearned to live a little, have some fun and if that meant mixing with dangerous people, so be it. Nothing that could happen to her, no matter how bad, would compare to the pain of losing Mary Ann.

Gradually the club emptied and Clint left the bar to start clearing up the glasses. A couple of Bobby's gang were left behind, and Lizzie hoped there wouldn't be any trouble. Just lately a lot of Maltese clubs had been smashed up. East End gangs like Ray Sparks' wanted to take them over and would persuade the owner to agree by taking a cricket bat to the optics and duffing up the staff.

Bobby got up and sauntered over to Lizzie, looking like some sort of film star with his gorgeous looks, his tie loosened, a cigarette hanging from one side of his mouth.

'Hello gorgeous,' he said, squinting the smoke out of his eyes. 'How you doing?'

‘I’m okay, a little tired. I’ve been working all day.’

He reached over the bar, taking her hand in his, running his thumb over her tiny, childlike knuckles.

‘Why don’t you come and have a rest then? Come and sit with me.’

Lizzie felt a little guilty leaving Clint in the lurch and called over to him.

‘Clint is it okay if I have a break?’

‘Don’t mind me dear,’ he shrugged. ‘Who am I to stand in the path of true love?’

Lizzie giggled and so did Bobby. He led her out from the bar and over to a booth in the corner, away from the other gang members that were still there. All the time Lizzie thought about what she was going to tell him about herself. He was bound to ask. Did she want him to know about the real Lizzie Gallagher, or would it be easier to pretend to be someone else? Someone from one of Bertie’s short stories maybe? She knew exactly which one she would choose.

Bobby had two glasses of champagne waiting for them and once he’d lit her cigarette, he passed one of them to her. She hoped she didn’t look too rough or tired after being at work all day.

‘So, Lizzie,’ he practically purred. ‘You were going to tell me why you’re not a top model.’

‘No one’s ever asked me to be a model,’ she replied. ‘I’ve only been in London since June.’

‘So where did you grow up?’

‘Cheshire. My parents died when I was seven and I was brought up by my aunt.’ Suddenly she had become Sunny de Vere, the heroine of a story written by Bertie. But in that story Sunny became a slave to a lesbian nun who takes her in when her aunt dies. She didn’t have to go that far. ‘My mother was a model and my father was a racing driver but I have so few memories of them.’

‘That’s sad. So you thought you’d come down to the Smoke to make your fortune?’

‘Something like that. I work at the Carlton Hotel at the moment but I’d quite like to work in a nightclub full time.’

‘Why don’t you think about modelling? I’ve got loads of contacts. I could make you famous.’

‘I don’t know if I want to be famous. I’m just an ordinary girl.’

‘No way honey. You are one hundred percent dynamite. So much so I think I must take you to dinner tomorrow night.’

‘Are you serious?’ she gasped.

‘Yeah. That’s if you ain’t got some big boyfriend waiting for you.’

‘No I haven’t got a boyfriend. The only man in my life is Bertie.’

‘Bertie?’

‘You know him as Johnny Duvall. We share a flat.’

‘But he’s a fairy yeah?’

‘Yes, he’s a homosexual.’

‘So I ain’t gonna be treading on no-one’s toes?’

‘No, no-one.’

‘Good, well I think I should be the one to show you the bright lights of London Lizzie.’

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Lizzie was looking for a new persona, someone she could model herself on and she found her muse in her upstairs neighbour. Dorothy Kent really *had* been born in the North of England to middle-class parents, she’d attended a boarding school in Yorkshire and spoke like a proper lady. She’d shunned finishing school and had come to London to become a fashion model. Now at thirty-two she was nearing the end of her career and was working for a fashion designer in the Golden Mile in the hope of learning to become one herself. Lizzie thought she was the most beautiful woman she had ever met in her life. She had a head full of blonde bubble curls, a figure like Marilyn Monroe and the fashion sense of Princess Margaret. Lizzie studied the way she spoke, the way she smoked a cigarette. Everything about her was how Lizzie wanted to be, and

when she returned from shopping in Warwick Way the next morning and bumped into Dorothy en route from the hairdressers, she knew this was the time to strike.

‘Dorothy could I ask your advice about something?’ she gasped, rushing up the steps to open the front door for the older woman.

‘Of course darling, come up for coffee.’

Unlike Bertie and Lizzie, who rented their flat from a horrid little Polish man called Mr Apanowicz; Dorothy owned hers. It had been a twenty-first birthday present from her father and was furnished with the finest antiques, painting and posters of Dorothy from her various campaigns. Studying the adverts for Weights cigarettes and expensive perfumes, Lizzie thought of Bobby’s promises of making her a model and wondered if she could ever live a life as glamorous as Dorothy’s.

Before coming to London Lizzie had never even tasted coffee, now she was quite the connoisseur. Bertie lived on it and she’d very quickly learned how to make a cup in a matter of minutes. If Bertie was spending the day at the piano, composing some new songs or sitting at his desk coming up with one of his stories, he needed a constant supply of caffeine to keep his brain active. Today she had the luxury of having a cup made for her by Dorothy, who afterwards joined her upon the sofa, Lizzie discreetly watched as she sat down and tucked her legs to one side. Feeling she could trust Dorothy, she told her all about Bobby and confessed she’d never been on a date with a boy before and had no idea of what to do or what would be expected of her.

Dorothy put down her coffee cup and turned to face the anxious Lizzie.

‘The best advice I can give you darling is remember to keep it at your pace. Don’t let him pressurise you into doing anything you don’t want to do.’

‘What should I wear? I don’t want to give him the wrong impression.’

‘Umm,’ Dorothy mused. ‘You don’t want to look too virginal because that might rouse him more, and if you dress like a slut he’ll think you are one. I think I have just the thing. Stay there.’



She left the room and Lizzie tried hard to contain her excitement. Dorothy always wore the most wonderful clothes and Lizzie knew whatever she lent her would be divine. She returned with a woollen suit in forest green with a black belt and a gold brooch on the collar. It was very conservative, but at the same time would show off Lizzie's curves to full effect.

'Try that darling,' Dorothy said, passing it to her. 'I bought this in Rome last year. A complete impulse buy, didn't even try it on. Wish I had, it comes to above my knee.'

'It's lovely,' Lizzie gushed. 'I don't know what I'd do without you.'

Dorothy smiled, reaching out and stroking her face, like a mother would.

'It's a pleasure. I rather hoped that by the time I reached the grand old age I am now, I'd have a little girl to dress up, but alas that hasn't happened. So it's nice to have you as my protégé.'

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Bobby arrived dead on eight o'clock, but Lizzie was still adjusting her suit and fiddling with her hair and went into a panic. Bertie took it as an opportunity to go to the window and look down onto the street.

'He's on the doorstep,' he said. 'What a dish. You lucky thing.'

'Hands off,' she laughed. 'How do I look?'

Bertie turned and looked at her, clasping his hands and smiling proudly.

'Like a slut trying to get into a Women's Institute meeting. Divine. Go on, go and spend his gelt.'

Lizzie opened the door and Bobby's eyes lit up on seeing her.

'Beautiful,' he gasped. 'Simply beautiful. Follow me madam.'

He drove them into town to Romero's, an Italian restaurant off Jermyn Street. It looked like the sort of place where they used proper knives and forks, and Lizzie was glad that Bertie had given

her a lesson in table etiquette. Bobby was far from posh, but she'd fooled him into believing her new identity, and a person with such a pedigree would know how to use cutlery.

They were greeted by the maitre d', who seemed to know Bobby and led them to a table in the far corner. A candle stood in the middle, burning brightly, illuminating the glasses that stood around it. The maitre d' held out Lizzie's chair for her to sit down, and Bobby sat opposite her, looking up and asking the waiter for a bottle of their finest champagne.

'I s'pose you get taken to places like this all the time?' he asked, reaching for his cigarettes.

'No I don't actually,' she replied coyly. 'I've never been on a date before.'

He stopped lighting his cigarette and looked at her, and as the candlelight flickered in his eyes, she noticed flecks of green in them, aquamarine like the ocean. He really was quite beautiful.

'How old are you?' he asked.

'Sixteen.'

'Fucking hell,' he gasped. 'I had you down for about twenty one,' he shook his head. 'You could get a man into trouble.'

'Don't be silly. I'm just an ordinary girl. Anyway, you can't be that much older than me?'

'I'm nearly twenty eight. How does your aunt feel about you living down here? Mixing with the likes of me?'

'She knows I won't do anything silly,' Lizzie lied, talking about someone who didn't even exist. 'And she wants me to be happy.'

For an East End lad, Bobby knew a lot about fine Italian cuisine. He recommended the veal and baby vegetables for Lizzie and he chose the spaghetti bolognese for himself. Lizzie had never tasted such rich food and tried hard not to make a show of her appreciation, as this would appear strange. She urged Bobby to talk about himself. Because while the conversation focused upon him, she could refrain from lying, something she wasn't particularly comfortable with. She discovered he was one of six children from a big Irish family in Bethnal Green. He painted a picture of squalor, as if he was telling her something she didn't know about. To him she was a

spoilt only child; little did he know was that she came from exactly the same background. When it came to explaining just what he did for Ray Sparks, he was a little more evasive. But his reticence excited Lizzie. He was dangerous and mysterious, and she hoped he didn't find her dull.

'So are you interested in doing modelling then?' he asked at the end of the meal, sipping his Napoleon brandy.

'I think it might be fun, yes. How do I go about it?'

'I've got a contact, Victor Putnam. He works for a studio in Soho. I reckon he could get some lovely shots of you. He knows all the modelling agencies. I reckon you'll be on the books of one of 'em by the end of the year.

'You'd really do that for me Bobby?' she swooned.

He reached out and took her hand in his, bringing it to his mouth and kissing it.

'I'd do anything for you Lizzie,' he replied earnestly. 'You enchant me.'

He drove her home and during the short journey, Lizzie fretted about the goodnight kiss. No one would believe her, but she had never kissed a boy before. Having Uncle George's lips squashed against hers while he took his pleasure could hardly be compared to smooching someone she actually fancied. It was hard to tell if Bobby would want more than a kiss, and if he did, he would be sorely disappointed as Lizzie wasn't that sort of girl. Despite having been raped and given birth a child, she felt like a virgin and totally out of her depth.

They pulled up outside the house and Bobby turned off the engine, putting his arm around the back of her seat and leaning in close.

'I've had a lovely evening darling,' he said. 'Can I see you again?'

'Yes, that would be fantastic, thank you.'

He laughed, reaching out and running his knuckle along the side of her face.

'You're such a lady. I've never gone out with someone so posh. I'd better be on my best behaviour and just give you a kiss on the cheek.'

Lizzie giggled and turned her face, feeling his lips brush against her skin, the roughness of his stubble tickling her cheek. It was awfully exciting to be courted by someone so handsome and young.

‘I’ll be in touch,’ he said. ‘You can bet on that.’

He stayed and watched while Lizzie mounted the steps to the front door, making sure she got in safely. As she went in, she gave a little wave and he waved back, then drove off. Right at that moment, Lizzie was the happiest girl in the world, and for the first time ever, she was convinced she was in love.

## **Chapter 5**

The following day Lizzie found it impossible to concentrate on her work. Bertie was busy at the piano, crooning a set of his own compositions to a group of bored Swedish tourists, whilst at the same time, throwing flirtatious glances at Dino, the handsome Italian barman who had started that week. Lizzie couldn’t quite make out if Dino felt the same way because he kept moaning to her in his thick Sicilian accent about the fucking queer and his stupid songs, but every time he went near Bertie to pick up glasses, he would smile at him and wink. Lizzie thought it best to leave them to it.

When a young man in a smart black suit entered the lounge carrying a bouquet of the most beautiful flowers, Lizzie thought nothing of it, assuming they were probably for one of the guests. But to her surprise he by-passed all of the elderly regulars and headed straight in her direction.

‘Are you Lizzie?’ he asked, his voice deep, cockney and earnest.

‘Yes,’ she uttered. ‘Are they for me?’

‘Yeah, they’re from Bobby. He says he’ll pick you up at six o’clock tonight.’

Almost embarrassed to be in possession of such a splendid bunch of roses and carnations, the young man handed them over to her quickly and retreated. He was obviously not a professional florist, but rather one of Ray Spark’s lower ranked henchmen, given the task of running Bobby’s

errands. No one had ever given Lizzie flowers before and she wondered what to do with them. Bertie was straining over the top of his piano trying to see what was happening, while Lizzie stood there like a spare part, the water from the flowers dripping down her wrist. Dino took charge, weaving his way through the tables and coming round to the other side of the bar.

‘You do not have a vase in this shit hole?’ he asked. ‘You want to kill flowers, you doing it right way.’

He marched off to the area behind the bar to get a vase. Lizzie looked over at Bertie and he smiled, raising his thumb. Not just for her, but for himself too. No straight man would ever worry about putting flowers in water. For him it was a sign. Dino was gay too.

Lizzie had no idea where Bobby was taking her that night and didn’t know what to wear. She didn’t feel she could bother Dorothy again and so had to use something she already had. The money Uncle George had given her was gone and she couldn’t afford fancy clothes on her barmaid’s wages and was scared Bobby would discover she was really quite poor. She opted for a light blue, halter-neck dress she’d bought when she and Bertie had gone to Brighton the previous month. It was hardly suitable for September and she only hoped the long, black gloves and black shoes she wore with it would give a more autumnal appearance.

She was finishing getting ready when the phone in the hall began to ring. She knew it must be Bertie; hardly anyone had their number.

‘Darling are you looking divine?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she pouted. ‘I’ve had to wear the light blue halter-neck but it’s too summery.’

‘Go into my closet. At the back you’ll find a green velvet stole. Have that. I used to go out with this dreadful drag queen called Martin. It was his prized possession, given to him by a randy GI in the war. I stole it when he did the dirty on me. You have it my love.’

‘Thanks Bertie. Where are you now?’

‘I’m taking Dino to the Ritz! I know the head chef. We’ll get a fantastic three course meal for half the price, and hopefully I’ll get to see the colour of Dino’s bedroom!’

‘You’re terrible,’ Lizzie laughed. ‘Have fun.’

‘And you, you naughty girl. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.’

‘Well that doesn’t leave much does it?’

Tonight it wasn’t Bobby who came to meet Lizzie, but the young heavy who’d delivered the flowers. He made little conversation as he drove her through town, and she felt too nervous to ask him where they were going. They ended up in Heddon Street, off Regent Street, outside a club called the Casablanca. The boy opened the door for her and told her that Bobby was waiting inside. When told the doorman she was with Mr Duff and was waved through, she shuddered with admiration for her new beau and the power he obviously wielded in certain circles.

Down the stairs and into the club, she discovered it was half empty, and those who were there seemed to be stuffy looking businessmen enjoying an after-work drink. The lighting was dull and a gramophone record was playing a Frank Sinatra song. Lizzie spotted Bobby immediately; he was seated at the bar opposite a short, stout middle-aged man, squeezed into a badly fitted suit. They were drinking scotch out of finely cut crystal glasses and for the first time, she noticed the diamond encrusted ring on Bobby’s little finger. The delicacy of it highlighted the bigness and roughness of his hands, and she shivered slightly, although she wasn’t sure why.

He stood up on spotting her and as she joined them, kissed her on the cheek.

‘Lizzie this is Victor Putnam,’ he announced. ‘Vic, this is Lizzie Gallagher.’

‘Enchanted,’ the elder man said in his gruff, East End voice. He took Lizzie’s gloved hand and brought it to his lips, kissing it.

‘So do you think you can make her a star?’ Bobby asked.

‘I’m surprised no one has already,’ Victor replied. He pulled away and looked Lizzie up and down, like he was mentally measuring her. But she didn’t feel threatened by this, it was Victor’s job to judge.

‘How tall are you darling?’

‘Five foot three.’

‘Um, a bit short for fashion modelling, but such a beautiful face. Those eyes. The biggest blue eyes I’ve ever seen on someone over the age of ten. Like a child and yet at the same time a woman. Oh yes Elizabeth, we could do so many things with you.’

Victor left soon afterwards, informing Bobby he would be in touch with regard to setting up Lizzie’s first shoot. She was so excited she could barely contain herself and felt the most enormous gratitude to Bobby for doing all this for her. Lizzie concluded that she must have meant a lot to him to do so much, and it turned her head to have someone so handsome and powerful in love with her. They found a booth and Bobby ordered scampi in a basket for both of them, but Lizzie was so excited she couldn’t even think about food. She was going to be a model. Little Lizzie Gallagher from Dingle Street was going to be on the cover of magazines.

‘You know the other night I didn’t even want to go to The Pussycat Club,’ Bobby said, wrapping his arm around her shoulder and pulling her tightly to him. ‘You’re not stupid, you know Ray’s after getting the club from Spiteri and he sent us along to suss it out. I wanted to go and see a boxing match at the Hackney Empire instead, but I forced meself. And you know what? It was the best decision I ever made. You know why?’

‘No.’

He came closer, stroking the side of her face.

‘Because I met you. Does that sound soppy?’

‘No,’ she whispered. ‘It’s the most romantic thing anyone has ever said to me.’

Instinctively, she shut her eyes, knowing what was going to happen. She felt his lips meet hers, kissing her tentatively at first, then gently becoming more forceful, as he gripped the back of her neck and opened his mouth. Lizzie automatically did the same thing and before she knew anything, Bobby was French kissing her there in the middle of the nightclub, not caring who saw. She loved him so much and was so given to the intimacy of it that she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him ferociously in return.

He eased her away, his face flushed, his mouth stained with her lipstick.

‘I think I’m falling in love with you,’ he said.

‘Me too,’ she sighed. ‘No-one’s ever kissed me like that before.’

He reached up, brushing away a lock of hair that had fallen onto her forehead.

‘I suppose I’ll have to go home soon,’ he said sadly. ‘I wish I could be with you forever. Never leave you,’ he laughed, shaking his head. ‘Honestly, if the boys could hear me talking like this.’

‘Why can’t we stay here?’ she asked.

He smiled in an uncomfortable way, like he was about to say something she wouldn’t want to hear.

‘The Maltese pretty much know everywhere I go Lizzie. Sooner or later they’ll spot Lenny outside in the car and realise I’m here and come in and start trouble.’

‘That’s dreadful. Isn’t there anywhere else we can go?’

He shrugged his shoulders.

‘They’re crawling all over this part of town.’

‘Well come home with me. Bertie will probably be out until late. Don’t go home Bobby. I couldn’t bear to be parted from you.’

‘Are you sure? People won’t talk will they? You bringing me home?’

‘Let them talk, I don’t care. They probably think I’m some sort of scarlet woman anyway, living with Bertie. Bringing you home will give me even more of a reputation.’

Lenny drove them back to Pimlico and Bobby instructed him to wait. Even in her naivety she realised he must have been pretty high up in Ray Spark’s gang to warrant his own driver. And here he was, in love with her. She didn’t care that he was a gangster, it was enough that a man cared deeply for her.

They went into the flat and Bobby looked quite impressed with the high ceilings and antique furniture.

‘Class,’ he said, staring up at the chandelier Mr Apanowicz’s mother had smuggled out of her Warsaw mansion in 1938, just before the Nazi’s invaded. The landlord informed Bertie and



Lizzie that if it so much as got a chip in it, he would tie them to a tree and set fire to them both. Lizzie thought he was joking, but Bertie wasn't quite so sure.

'Would you like a drink?' she asked, taking off her gloves.

'I'm alright darling,' he said, sitting down on one of the sofas, holding out his hand. 'Come and sit beside me.'

She did as she was told, feeling a little more nervous. Kissing in the club had been one thing. But now they were alone, he could demand anything of her.

He turned to face her, undoing the clip that kept her hair rolled up at the back. She didn't like her hair falling about her face. It made her feel like her old self. The one she wanted to keep hidden.

'Will you still love me when you're a famous model?' he asked, his fingers gently untangling the knots before moving down to her neck, stroking it lightly. The feeling was exquisite and Lizzie knew she shouldn't be letting him do this, but it was too nice to stop.

'I'll love you forever,' she whispered. 'I think I've loved you from the moment I saw you.'

'That makes two of us then,' he said, his mouth now taking the place of his fingers, kissing her neck, making her sigh with pleasure. His lips moved to her ear.

'I s'pose you think I'm terrible doing this?' he said.

'No. But, do you think we should?'

'You do love me don't you?'

'You know I do.'

He pulled away and looked at her, the earnest expression upon his face making her want to cry. If she rejected him now she would wound him forever. And it wasn't exactly as though he would be taking her virginity away. That went at the hands of Uncle George. But with Bobby it would be making love. Something she had never done before.

'Will you take care of me?' she asked.

'Of course I will darling,' he smiled. 'You're my precious girl.'

Making love wasn't quite what Lizzie expected it to be. In fact, when the act was underway, it wasn't much different to what had happened with Uncle George. Indeed Bobby, being younger and stronger felt heavier and once in the throes of his own passion, seemed to have little regard for her comfort. None of this mattered however. He loved her and he was only doing it because he couldn't resist her any longer. He'd confessed this whilst undressing her en route to the bedroom. It puzzled her at the way men became hypnotised by her magnificent breasts when she could remember them aching and full of milk for Mary Ann. But to Bobby they were there to be worshipped and adored.

To her relief, he pulled away from her before it was over and although the sticky mess was quite horrible on her stomach, it was better than it being inside her and making her pregnant again. When he fell onto his back and into a deep, snoring sleep, she stole away to the bathroom and washed herself. She stared into the mirror, wondering if she looked different now she had done it properly. All she saw was a sixteen year old with messy hair and an angelic face smeared with messy make-up and messy hair. But she felt good about herself. For those few moments, just through being desirable, she could have gotten Bobby to do whatever she wanted and that felt fantastic. Was that being a woman? Did this mean he would want to marry her? The thought of being a model was good, but the prospect of becoming Mrs Lizzie Duff was even more enticing. After having Mary Ann, she'd convinced herself that no man would ever want her, and to be marrying someone as handsome and powerful as Bobby was beyond her wildest dreams.

She returned to the bedroom and was rather shocked to find him sitting on the edge of the bed, already in his shorts, pulling up his socks.

'Where are you going?' she asked.

He glanced round and smiled sadly.

'Some of us don't have the luxury of living in our own place. If I don't go home, my old lady will give me the Spanish Inquisition.'

'You're a grown man Bobby, your mother can't do anything.'

'You don't know my mum.'

Lizzie made herself a cup of tea while Bobby finished dressing. She felt just a little disappointed. She'd had romantic visions of them spending the night together, but instead she faced an empty bed. Bobby was suited and booted when he found her in the kitchen. She remained sitting at the table, unable to respond to him when he came up behind her and kissed her on the cheek.

'I'll ring you tomorrow doll,' he said. 'Thanks for everything.'

'You're welcome,' she replied meekly, feeling just a little used.

## **Chapter 6**

Lizzie's disillusionment with Bobby soon evaporated when he called her the following evening to tell her she was going to Victor Putnam's studio on Sunday for her first ever photo shoot. Like a child she squealed down the phone, excited and grateful to him. When he asked if he could pop round on Saturday she readily agreed. She didn't care that they weren't going out anywhere and would probably end up in bed again. He had proven his love for her by arranging this, and she would do anything for him.

On leaving the flat for the Pussycat Club, she bumped into Dorothy, who was heavily made up and wearing her best mink coat. When she went out like that, it meant she was going to meet her gentleman friend. All Lizzie knew was that he was actually a Member of Parliament and married, but she thought it awfully rude to ask for any more details.

'I saw a young man leaving here last night,' Dorothy chuckled, but as they reached the front door, her expression became more earnest. She stopped Lizzie, turning her by the shoulders to face her.

'Are you being careful aren't you darling?' she asked.

'Yes,' Lizzie blushed. 'Well, Bobby says he's taking care of things.'

'Oh baby never trust a man when he says that. You have to take care of yourself. Get yourself to my doctor, hang on,' like some sort of efficient secretary, Dorothy kept a pen and a piece of paper in her bag. She scribbled something and passed it to Lizzie. 'Doctor Manson in Harley

Street. Get yourself fitted up with a Dutch cap. The last thing you want to do is be saddled with a baby.'

Lizzie took Dorothy's advice and the next day went to Harley Street to see Doctor Manson. The last doctor to examine her in such an intimate way had been the one employed by Our Lady's to help deliver the babies, and he had been brutal and treated her like a piece of meat. Doctor Manson showed her nothing but respect and she'd come away with the strange piece of rubber that would stop her having another accident. In her mind however, she decided that this was a temporary measure. Once she and Bobby were married, she would return to her Catholic upbringing and use no contraception. Then they could have lots of babies. Brothers and sisters for Mary Ann, a family for when they were reunited once more.

Just like the first night, Bobby left straight after they made love. Lizzie thought it ridiculous, a man of twenty-seven being frightened of his mother and rushing home to appease her. Their Stanley had stopped worrying about Ma Gallagher's reaction to him staying out all night years ago. Alone in her bed, naked and cold, Lizzie thought about home. It was half past twelve. Most of her brothers and sisters and cousins would be hitting the various nightclubs around town. The lasses to pick up men, hoping to find a husband, and the lads looking for a girl to fondle down an alley, or if that didn't look like happening, another man to fight.

Lizzie loved London and Bertie and Bobby and her new life. But sometimes all she wanted was to go home. Just for a visit. Just the once. Kit had returned to Liverpool and wrote to her occasionally. He still knew of the Gallaghers and told her that their Maureen had got married at St Matthews and all the auld biddies went into raptures, gossiping about her big fat belly poking out of her white dress. Lizzie both smiled and cried at the thought, wishing she could have been there. Then again, Uncle George would have been invited, and she would have wanted to blurt out to the entire congregation what a disgusting creature he was.

She quelled her sadness by thinking of tomorrow and her trip to Victor's studio in Soho. It wasn't that far from the Pussycat Club and even though Bertie offered to accompany her, she turned him down, feeling she was safe with Victor. After all, even if he was a dirty old man, it was hardly something she wasn't used to dealing with.

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Dorothy advised her to attend the shoot without any make-up or fancy hair-do, then the photographer could work from a blank canvas and that was what Lizzie did. Victor's studio was in a little basement in Greek Street, nestled between a pub and a sex shop but this didn't put her off; that was the nature of Soho. It was so eclectic that a brothel and a convent could stand cheek by jowl. The door was open and she entered to find Vince in the first room, which was pitched black, except for a red luminous light shining from above. He was picking up a photograph from one tray of water and putting it into another. He looked at Lizzie and smiled.

'Ah the beautiful Elizabeth,' he said. 'Go into the studio and I'll be with you in a second.'

The studio was at the back of the basement. It was a huge, empty room with big, professional lights standing by the white backdrop. A camera was already set upon a tri-pod and by this was two tatty armchairs, upon which Lizzie took a seat. The place wasn't quite as glamorous as she had envisaged but then again, she'd never been to a photographic studio before and had no idea what one looked like.

Victor emerged from the dark room, wiping his hands on a piece of cloth. He squinted as he looked at her, studying her like an art form.

'Quite extraordinary,' he said with a shake of the head. 'Without make-up you look about twelve. And yet such a womanly figure.'

'Will that stop me modelling?'

'Oh no no, quite the opposite,' he replied whilst sitting opposite her. He leaned forward with a serious expression upon his face, and she wondered what he was going to ask of her.

'Actually Lizzie, I am going to put something to you. But please feel free to turn it down. If you do, we can just go ahead with shooting your portfolio. But I have a contract with Eden's, have you heard of them?'

'No.'

'Well they produce more, how can I put it? *Contemporary* undergarments for young ladies. Every year I shoot their catalogue, but this year Ellie, the model I usually use has dropped out.

I'm scared that if I don't do it, I'll lose the contract. I was wondering if you'd like to do it. I'll pay you ten pounds for your time.'

'Have I got to take my clothes off?' she shuddered.

'Yes, but you'll be wearing lovely lingerie. Look, let me go and get you some to show you.'

He scuttled out of the studio and into a side room and she could hear him throwing boxes about. She thought about earning ten pounds. That would buy some seriously nice outfits for her dates with Bobby, and it wasn't as though Victor was asking her to appear naked.

Victor reappeared carrying a pastel blue baby doll nightie with a matching feather boa trim. There was nothing obscene about it at all, and she figured she might as well do something with the fabulous body childbirth had given her.

'If it's too risqué we won't do it,' Victor said sheepishly. 'I don't want to compromise you.'

'No it's fine,' she replied. 'How do you want me to do my hair and make up?'

She didn't like using the make up pallet Victor kept in his studio. Somehow the thought of lots of other girls using it beforehand made her skin itch. But she had no choice as he instructed her to make herself look vampy, with lots of kohl around her eyes and false eyelashes. She chose a bright red lipstick like the one Dorothy wore, but Victor asked her to wipe it off and told her to opt for a cream pink. Once on, she could barely see her lips, until Victor did a trick with Vaseline and made them glossy and glossy. He told her that she needed to wear her hair up, but not too tidily, so she pulled it up into a topknot, letting a few tentative golden strands fall down. Instead of letting her wear her own brown, suede high heel shoes, he gave her a pair of black, patent mules, which were size 6 and too big for her. As she posed, she had to position her feet in such a way that gaps down the back couldn't be seen.

By early evening Lizzie had had enough. Victor must have taken about two hundred pictures of her wearing the baby doll, a black all-in-one corset, which squeezed in her waist and over-emphasised her hips. There were bras and pants and all sorts of things Lizzie hadn't even worn before. But she took comfort in that when she had gone into the kitchen area to change Victor had remained the gentleman, and didn't even try to get a peek. She was glad when she could

wash the make-up off her face and tie her hair in a ponytail, slipping back into her turtleneck and ski-pants. Victor was dismantling the camera and stopped her when she went to walk past him.

‘Aren’t you forgetting something?’ he asked. Her blood ran cold, wondering what his demand was going to be now.

‘What’s that?’

From his pocket he withdrew a wad of money and passed it to her.

‘You earned that Lizzie; you were very good for an amateur. You’ll go far.’

‘I’ve never really thought about being a model before,’ she confessed. ‘But I’ll only do it until Bobby and I marry.’

Victor stopped what he was doing and looked at her. To her horror he appeared to be on the verge of bursting out laughing and this made her blush, feeling like a stupid schoolgirl for blabbing about her deepest desires.

‘Is that what he told you?’ he asked.

‘No....but...I just thought it was a natural progression. We get on very well.’

‘Taken you to bed has he?’

She blushed deeper.

‘That’s none of your business.’

Victor left his camera equipment and came to her, sitting her down on one of the tatty armchairs. He sat opposite, his expression was one of concern and this made her feel nervous.

‘What he failed to tell you is that he’s already got a wife and two kids.’

‘Y-You’re lying.’

‘I wish I was darling. But his old lady used to be one of my models, Pearl Atkins. They’ve got a two year old and a five year old.’

Lizzie was speechless. This couldn't possibly be true. Bobby was always out with the boys and why would he say all that about loving her if he didn't want to be with her?

Victor leaned forward, examining her more closely.

'Lizzie, you're very young. It's none of my business but I would put money on Bobby being your first bloke. It's a tough lesson to learn but men will say anything to get you into bed. Even tell you that they love you. Be sure of that before you do something you might regret.'

'I feel so stupid.'

'Don't darling. You're young and you were taken in, and if I were you I'd tell him where to get off. From what I've seen today you've got potential as a model and I'd concentrate on that.'

Lizzie splashed out on a taxi home. It was easier to cry in a cab than face people on the Underground asking if she was okay. The pain she felt was almost as intense as when she'd handed over Mary Ann. Just like everyone before him, Bobby must have thought her some sort of idiot who would fall for his lies. He had no idea how difficult it was for her to trust a man after Uncle George. She just hoped the Dutch cap had worked the night before, because if she was pregnant this time, she had no choice but to go and see one of the local butchers. She couldn't face the thought of putting another baby up for adoption.

She got home to find Bertie at the kitchen table, his long face a mirror of her own. She said nothing, too tearful to speak and instead put the kettle on in that bizarre British belief that a cup of tea will make everything better. She wondered why Bertie looked so sad but didn't have to wait long to find out.

'I've been a complete fool,' he stated. 'A complete and utter fool.'

'Why's that?' she sniffed.

'That lothario Dino. It turns out that his little *wife* is coming over from Sicily next month doesn't it? What's more, there's a bambino on the way. The worst possible queer. The one who hides behind a woman.'



Lizzie gave a strangled laugh but at the same time cried. The irony was too much for her to bear. Both she and Bertie had been duped by rotten cads. He sensed her distress and turned around, furrowing his brow in concern.

‘Oh my God Lizzie you’re crying. Please don’t tell me the photographer was a rotten leech.’

‘No, he was fine. But he did inform me that like your Dino, Bobby has a wife and two children as well.’

‘The absolute bastard. What are you going to do?’

‘Finish with him. I’m not prepared to be the other woman for anyone. I feel such a fool.’

Bertie got up from the table and came over to her, hugging her tightly. She sobbed into his chest and for a split second wished he was her mother. The irony being her mother would never comfort her like this. In sixteen years she didn’t remember one hug from Ma Gallagher. Right now she felt like the most unlovable person in the world. The only one who seemed to care for her was her wonderful Bertie.

Bobby arrived at around ten that night, his excuse being that he was on his way to a club, but Lizzie was convinced it was the only time he could get away from his wife. She let him into the flat and tried not to look at him. He was so good looking, it would only serve to remind her why she was so crazy about him in the first place, and it might tempt her into forgiving him.

He sat on the sofa and like the perfect hostess Lizzie poured him a glass of Bertie’s favourite scotch. Bertie had taught her that no matter how hostile one felt towards a guest, manners were always vital.

‘How did the shoot go darling? Victor treat you right?’

‘Victor was the perfect gentleman,’ she replied, sitting opposite him, still trying to avoid eye contact. ‘He took some photos for a lingerie catalogue.’

He grinned.

‘I’m not sure I want other men to see my girl in her smalls.’

‘But I’m not your girl am I?’ she cried, battling back the tears. ‘I’m your other woman.’

His face darkened.

‘Who have you been talking to?’

‘Victor told me. Why did you lie Bobby? Why did you do the things you done? You knew I loved you.’

‘And I love you,’ he pleaded. ‘Pearl means nothing to me. I only stay with her cos of the kids. As soon as they’re grown up I’ll leave her.’

‘They’re two and five. I can’t wait about fifteen years. We’re finished.’

‘You’re not serious.’

‘I’m not prepared to be a mistress Bobby. I’d like you to leave.’

‘You wouldn’t be my mistress Lizzie. You’d be my number one girl. All the fellas in the gang know about you.’

‘But you could never marry me. Never give me children. That’s what I want Bobby. Now just go.’

‘You ungrateful little cow,’ he spat. ‘After all I’ve done for you. I didn’t have to introduce you to Victor.’

‘And I didn’t ask you to. It was your idea. I’m grateful but that’s it. I don’t want to see you anymore.’

He got up and walked towards her, his face expressionless. She hoped he wouldn’t kiss her or hug her or try to make love to her, as she didn’t know how long her resolve would last. He stood over her, and looked down at her with hatred in his eyes.

‘Well this should stop your modelling career for a few weeks.’

The blow came so quickly it took a moment for Lizzie to realise that he’d hit her across the face. Soon the pain erupted in her nose and cheek and before she could react, he’d stormed out of the room and out of the flat. All she could do was grip her face and wince in pain, wondering what on earth she should do.

Bertie rushed in; that gossip hungry look on his face soon turning to one of immense alarm.

‘What has he done?!’ he cried. ‘Has he hit you?’

She nodded.

‘You need to get to hospital. He may have broken your nose.’

‘No, I can’t because they might involve the police and I’m frightened what he would do if I mentioned his name. I just want to forget I ever met him. I’ve just got to realise I’ll never meet a man who’ll love me.’

## **Chapter 7**

### **December 1957**

It was Christmas Eve in the Pussycat Club and Lizzie couldn’t believe the contrast to the last December 24<sup>th</sup> she’d spent. Back in 1956 she’d been five months pregnant and her mother had dragged her to Midnight Mass, wrapped up in one of fat, old Aunt Liza’s coats to hide the bump. It was that night Mary Ann had kicked her for the first time and Lizzie remembered the feeling of wonderment as this happened, then the sorrow of not being able to share it with anyone.

This Christmas her world had changed beyond all recognition. The following day she and Bertie were cooking dinner for all the waifs and strays they knew from the club who had either been disowned by their families, or distanced themselves voluntarily. But tonight it was the party to end all parties. The Spiteri family had successfully warded off the advances of Ray Sparks’ gang and Mario Spiteri had come along to celebrate his victory. His guest of honour was Lyn Beckford, his latest trophy girlfriend. Lizzie was aware of the buxom blonde from the papers. She’d had an affair with Reg Chisholm, the presenter of a Sunday night religious programme on the BBC, and it had caused outrage, especially considering he was married with three children. Her notoriety had attracted Mario Spiteri and he’d taken her under his wing. He was even allowing her to sing at the club tonight. The queens all loved her. She was big and brassy and cheap looking, squeezed into a tight, red dress with a silver, feather boa round her shoulders.

Her performance wasn't far off from the bump and grind the drag acts specialised in, but she carried it off well and Lizzie couldn't help admire her, wishing she had some of her chutzpah.

Afterwards, Madam Lucy, one of the regular 'girls' took to the stage and Lyn returned to the fold of Mario Spiteri and his mob. When Lizzie had a spare five minutes from serving people, she would watch the older girl and envy her vivaciousness and confidence. Terrible things had been written about her in the press - she had been called a whore and a home wrecker, but she didn't care. She was a scarlet woman and proud of it. Lizzie was mortified when Lyn caught her staring and got up from her seat, her walk a little wobbly from so much champagne. She swaggered over to the bar, laying down her glass.

'I know you,' she said, and Lizzie was astounded to hear her accent was cut glass middle England. Was it affected like her own, or was she really a good girl gone bad? 'I've seen you before.'

'I don't think so,' Lizzie blushed. 'I just work here.'

Lyn stood back, proudly running her hands over her magnificent curves.

'All of this is upholstered by Eden darling. I have their catalogue. I would never forget such a pretty face.'

'You saw my catalogue?!'

'Yes,' Lyn smiled. 'You stood out. I remember saying to my agent that I found it almost obscene. How you look like a child but have the body of a woman. He was *very* interested.'

'You're kidding! Interested in me doing modelling?'

'Manny does many things. Modelling, films. I'll introduce you if you like...'

'Lizzie. Lizzie Gallagher.'

'I'll introduce you Lizzie Gallagher. Give me your phone number.'

'Are you serious?'

'Yes. You seem very sweet. I'm going to take you under my wing.'

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Lizzie woke up on Boxing Day with her first ever hangover. The previous day had been so hectic that once their guests had left she and Bertie had sought comfort in three bottles of gin. The company of Bertha May, Madam Lucy, a couple of lesbians and a man called Dennis whom no one seemed to know but was dressed like Doris Day, was quite draining. Just before midnight the Motley crew had left for Maxines, a drag club in town and invited Bertie and Lizzie to come too, but the alcohol had made Bertie morose about Dino and all his other failed loves, and when he started to cry they all promptly left. Lizzie dried his tears and sat with him, and they drank so much that she wasn't quite sure where she was or what she was doing.

It was the telephone that woke her up. The persistent ringing seemed to come from the depths of her mind rather than the hall. She tried to ignore it by putting her pillow over her ears but it stopped only to start again and Bertie was no doubt fast asleep with his night visor and ear plugs and wouldn't hear it if Russia dropped the bomb. In the end, Lizzie had no choice but to give in and get up, dragging her aching body along to the hall, to the table where the telephone stood.

'Hello,' she snapped.

'Can I speak to Miss Gallagher?' a curt sounding male voice asked.

'Speaking,' she winced.

'Manny Blue. I represent Lyn Beckford. She gave me your number.'

Through the fog of her mind, Lizzie had some recollection of a conversation with Lyn Beckford, but what was said? She had no idea.

'I was wondering if you'd like to come in and see me.'

'Yes that would be very nice,' she said, unable to feel excited. All she felt was nauseous. Any moment now she was going to be sick.

'Okay, it's thirty six Wardour Street. Come tomorrow, nine o'clock.'

'Yes yes.'

‘Did you get that? Nine o’clock tomorrow.’

‘Thirty six Wardour Street. Yes I got it, thank you very much Mr Blue.’

‘No, thank you. I think you’re going to make me a lot of money.’

She uttered some sort of grunt of gratitude before putting the phone down and running to the toilet where she was sick like there was no tomorrow.

After a long sleep, followed by a bath - a luxury to which Lizzie was still becoming accustomed, given that for her first fifteen years she’d had to take herself along to the municipal baths in Tobacco Road to have a decent wash. She could finally sit and take stock of what was happening to her. An agent wanted to represent her. She had never dreamt of becoming a model, or famous or anything like that, and suddenly her life had taken this strange turn. When she told Bertie, he squealed with excitement and spun her round the room. He then advised an early night with cucumber on her eyes so she looked bright and perky the next morning. Lizzie did as she was advised. She was venturing into the unknown here and needed all the help she could get.

Despite being in Wardour Street, Manny’s office was not exactly salubrious. The entrance hall was dusty and dark, and for a moment Lizzie hoped he wasn’t some sort of interloper who had got her here under false pretences. At the top of the stairs was a glass door with a sign saying ‘Manny Blue - Theatrical Agent’ and that made her feel a little more relaxed. She pushed the door open and was even more impressed to see he had a receptionist, a pretty girl with ginger hair pulled high into a bun. She was typing a letter and was concentrating so hard she jumped out of her skin on spotting Lizzie.

‘You made me jump,’ she panted, clutching her chest. ‘Can I help you?’

‘Sorry. I’m here to see Manny. I’m Elizabeth Gallagher.’

‘Okay, take a seat. I’ll let him know you’re here.’

None of the seats matched and most of the posters on the wall seemed to be advertising acts that were famous before the start of the war. Maybe this wasn’t such a big break after all.

The girl returned from the side office into which she had gone and smiled brightly at Lizzie.

‘He’ll see you now Ms Gallagher.’

Lizzie had envisaged Manny Blue as a little, middle aged, balding Jewish man and he lived up to her expectations. He welcomed her in with a shrug and pointed to the seat opposite his desk.

‘You look different to in the calendar,’ he said, sounding almost disappointed with her true appearance, disheartening her. ‘You look like a child.’

‘Well I am only sixteen,’ she replied.

‘Don’t go around broadcasting that.’

Lizzie got a sinking feeling about the whole thing and wondered if she should just leave right now. He was clearly not pleased with what he saw.

He began scribbling things down on a piece of paper.

‘How tall are you?’

‘5’3.’

‘Weight.’

‘Er, about eight stone I think.’

‘Measurements.’

‘32D-22-34.’

He looked at her head, furrowing his brow.

‘Is that your natural colour?’

‘Yes.’

‘Umm. I think you should go blonder.’

He stopped writing and put his pen down, leaning onto the desk, looking intently at her.

‘I think you’re one of the most beautiful and classiest girls I’ve ever had in here,’ he suddenly declared, raising Lizzie’s spirits, surprising her with such a compliment; she’d been under the illusion he’d hated her on sight.

‘Thank you,’ she uttered.

‘Where are you from?’

‘Cheshire.’

‘And what part of Liverpool is that?’ he asked. At first this question puzzled her. Surely a man of his experience would know that Cheshire is not part of Liverpool. Then it gradually sank in and she realised that somehow he had seen through her accent. That cut-glass voice she had spent so long cultivating.

‘H-How did you know?’

‘I used to be an actor, worked with this fella called Stanley Evans once, he thought he was the next Larry Olivier and he spoke like he was a member of the royal family or something, but there was a lilt to his accent, just the same as yours. The phrasing. One day all this relatives from Bootle turned up at the theatre, like a bunch of gypsies they were. It all made sense then. And your accent’s the same. I’ve got an ear for these things.’

‘I’ve worked very hard to get rid of it. I thought it had worked. I’ve only been down here for six months.’

He nodded in agreement.

‘And you’ve done very well. But I’m going to pay for you to have proper lessons. A good friend of mine, Barbara Holdsworth, she’ll do it in no time. I’ll also book you into my hairdresser to have your hair coloured. I don’t think we’ll go platinum, that’s been done to death. We’ll have you as a honey blonde, it’s classier. Then, next week I want you to audition for a film.’

‘A film!’ Lizzie exclaimed. ‘A film!’



‘Don’t get too excited. Lyn’s already got a part in it but I want you to audition too. It’s a thriller about a doctor who goes around murdering showgirls. I want you to audition for the part of Mimi; she’s a young showgirl who he kills. There’s no dialogue as such, but a scream. I think they’re paying about fifty quid.’

‘Fifty pounds! I’ve never earned money like that before.’

‘Well if you stick with me and do as you’re told you could be earning a lot more than that. But let’s get rid of that Scouse accent first. And your name. I don’t like Gallagher, far too common.’

‘But it’s my name.’

‘I know dear but we’re going to change it. I’ve already decided you’re going to be known as Elizabeth Maine.’

‘Elizabeth Maine?’

‘Um. We’re selling you on the fact you’re classy and Maine is a commanding surname don’t you think?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘I do. We’re not changing it by deed poll, officially you’re still Gallagher, but for the sake of your acting career you’re Elizabeth Maine.’

‘Wow, I never expected to come in here and become another person.’

‘This is showbiz Lizzie. However good looking you are, you’re not going to get by with the surname Gallagher, and sounding like a navvy trying to talk like the Queen.’

## **Chapter 8**

Bertie drove Lizzie to Alpine Studios in his new car. It was a vintage Bugatti given to him by Pierre, his latest rich lover. He’d been a guest at the hotel who’d taken a shine to the young pianist in the bar and for the past two months had wooed and indulged him. Pierre was the owner of several bars in Paris and openly homosexual. His Gallic ways embarrassed Bertie. He would

pinch his bottom in public and try to kiss him and Bertie was terrified of being arrested. Still, it was a small price to pay for all the wonderful presents Pierre afforded him.

Lizzie may have been a polished version of her old self with glossy golden hair and a new cut-glass accent, but inside she felt no different. It heartened her that Lyn would be on the set of 'Nightstalker' with her, but Lyn was more confident and liked people watching her and being the centre of attention. Lizzie was still shy and convinced she was going to make a complete idiot of herself, even though Barney Wilton the Casting Director had given her the job on the spot just on the strength of her looks.

'Darling, Marilyn Monroe has built an entire career on not being able to act,' Bertie declared. 'No one's expecting you to be Anna bloody Neagle. Stop looking like a rabbit caught in the headlights.'

'But I'm earning a hundred pounds for this,' she replied. 'What if I fall over or something?'

Bertie laughed, shaking his head.

'You're a classic, you really are.'

Alpine Studios was a big complex in Hertfordshire. On arrival Lizzie was convinced the security guard at the entrance was going to claim he'd never heard of her and turn her away. Bertie drove up alongside his cabin and stuck his head out.

'Elizabeth Maine,' he said in that commanding way only he had. 'She's due on the set of Nightstalker.'

The elderly security guard looked at his sheet and waved them through.

'Studio C.'

They drove on and Lizzie gasped with excitement on realising this was really happening and she was going to be in a film. As they drove around, looking for Studio C, she spotted big, wooden film sets – fake trees and houses, Victorian coaches piled up on the back of big, open-backed lorries. Everywhere she looked there seemed to be cables and lights and bits of camera equipment lying around.

Lizzie realised they were at Studio C when she spotted Lyn standing outside a big hangar dressed in a tarty looking floral wrap and fishnet stockings. On spotting Bertie's car, she threw down her cigarette and started jumping up and down waving, her huge bosoms seeming to have a life of their own!

'If ever there was anyone born to play a whore it was Lyn Beckford,' Bertie said quietly.

They pulled up and got out of the car, Lyn rushed over to them, tottering on her stilettos.

'Darlings,' she cooed. 'Oh Lizzie you look absolutely lovely. Let's go and meet Colin.'

Lizzie took her to mean Colin Paxton, the Director and the thought of this terrified her. She turned to Bertie, hoping he'd push her back into the car and spirit her home. Instead he gripped her little shoulders and smiled proudly at her.

'Break a leg Lizzie darling,' he said. 'And wish me luck too.'

'Good luck Bertie,' she said. Today he was auditioning for the producers of a new West End musical who were looking for a young co-writer on some of the songs. It was such a big day for both of them. 'If we both do well, we'll have the party to end all parties.'

Bertie left and Lyn led Lizzie into the hangar. It looked like some sort of grotto – dimly lit with hardboard partitions set up and even more cables scattered around the place. Noises seemed to come from every direction and as Lyn took her through the maze of corridors, Lizzie caught glimpses of the set – reproductions of Soho streets and a seedy looking living room. She then led her out of the other side of the hangar to an area where there stood several large caravans. Outside of one stood a tall young man who was eating a sandwich and reading what Lizzie presumed to be a script. He looked up, spotted the two girls and smiled.

'Max meet Lizzie,' Lyn fizzed. 'Lizzie this is Max Bowers, he's the Assistant Director.'

Max surveyed Lizzie with twinkling, intelligent blue eyes and gave her an enigmatic smile that lit up his chiselled face. Lizzie blushed under his scrutiny although she wasn't quite sure why - she was used to men looking at her. Lyn took her hand and led her up the couple of steps into the caravan. Lizzie was mortified to find the room filled with smoke and people and noise, and it was all so overwhelming. There were girls dressed like Lyn and young men in suits with thick

make up on their faces and other men in shirt sleeves whom she took to be crew. One man appeared from the throng, a handsome, older man with silver hair and a rugged, tanned face.

‘Hello Lyn,’ he said. ‘Who’s this?’

‘Elizabeth Maine, she’s playing Mimi.’

‘Hello Elizabeth,’ he said, holding out his hand for her to shake. ‘Colin Paxton. Come and meet everyone.’

In a whirl Lizzie was introduced to camera assistants and make-up assistants, and Merrick, her leading man whom she recognised from one of Bertie’s parties; she was sure at the time had been accompanied by a handsome young Turkish boy. But she kept it to herself and just smiled sweetly, wondering how this effete young man was going to stab her to death convincingly on celluloid.

Max re-joined them and headed straight for Lizzie the moment Lyn flitted over to someone else.

‘So is this your first film Lizzie?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she replied, still blushing. ‘I’m really nervous.’

‘Oh you don’t need to be, everyone is really nice. This is my first film as Assistant Director but I seem to be doing okay.’

Lizzie couldn’t think of anything else to say to him, just stare up into his beautiful face. He wasn’t ruggedly good looking like Bobby or swarthy like some sort of film star, but his face had character, his nose a little too long, his brow a little too lofty. He was tall and skinny and his voice quiet and he didn’t try to act flash like most boys she met, but he entranced her.

Suddenly aware that she hadn’t spoken in ages, she blushed and was so grateful to Lyn when she bounded back, accompanied by an older woman with dyed ginger hair and a pair of glasses hanging on a chain around her neck.

‘Lizzie this is Stella Gould the make up artist.’

‘Oh she’s a beauty,’ Stella gushed. ‘Such a shame we’ve got to make her up to look like a tart.’

Two hours later, Stella had undone all Manny's hard work in making Lizzie into a lady. Her golden hair had been scraped off her face, covered with a net and then topped with a platinum wig. Her beautiful refined face was made up with scarlet lipstick, blue eye shadow and a beauty spot painted just above her lip. The film was being made in Technicolor and Colin wanted everything exaggerated. Her outfit was a red basque and a skintight black satin skirt, fishnet tights and black stilettos. Her role involved her walking around a set made up to look like a nightclub, sitting on the laps of various extras, while Merrick's character – Ron, tried to chat up another showgirl played by Janet Rogers, a TV actress. When she doesn't respond, he turns his attentions to Mimi, following her out of the club and murdering her in an alley. Lizzie was astounded to discover how long it took to film a five-minute sequence. Either the lighting was wrong or one of the actors forgot their lines. By lunchtime the scene still hadn't been finished and it pleased Lizzie that none of the disasters had been caused by her.

There was another caravan set out like a dining room, where people were eating lunch provided by the caterers standing outside dishing out sandwiches and cups of soup. Lyn had been instructed by Manny to diet and just had black coffee, but Lizzie was ravenous and wolfed down a ham sandwich and an apple. They went up into the caravan and Lizzie was mortified to discover the only seats available were opposite Max, who was nursing a cup of chicken soup.

'Hello Max darling,' Lyn cooed, sitting down. 'How's things going?'

'Fine,' he replied in that clipped voice of his. 'It's in the can.'

'Where were you filming?' Lizzie asked, blushing because she'd given away that she'd noticed he wasn't on her set.

'Just round the corner from here. It was an exterior shot of the murderer's mother when she discovers what her son has done. I've never directed a scene before, it was pretty exciting.'

'Well I think we should all celebrate,' Lyn declared. 'And I have just the thing. Mario has tickets to a boxing match at Hackney Town Hall on Saturday. Why don't you all come along?'

'I can't Lyn,' Max replied ruefully. 'I've been summoned by Ma and Pa for the weekend.'

'How exciting,' Lyn fizzed turning to Lizzie. 'Do you know what Max is? He's a Viscount.'

‘Lyn,’ he groaned, obviously embarrassed by this.

‘His father is the Earl of Tynedale and they live in a castle in Northumberland.’

‘Lyn I’m sure Lizzie isn’t interested.’

Lizzie was intrigued. She had never knowingly met a member of the aristocracy before, and Max certainly wasn’t how she imagined one to be.

‘How come you work in films?’ she asked.

‘Well I have absolutely no interest in running the family estate,’ he replied modestly. ‘I leave that to my younger brother.’

Although she hadn’t said a word to a soul about it, Lizzie felt embarrassed at her attraction to Max. As if someone like him would even consider a nobody like her. With her new image she was getting delusions of grandeur she didn’t particularly like.

‘Well that’s a shame,’ Lyn sighed. ‘You’ll come to the match though won’t you Lizzie? And bring Bertie.’

‘Is Bertie your boyfriend?’ Max asked, trying to sound nonchalant. ‘Bertie!’ exclaimed Lyn before Lizzie could even open her mouth. ‘Oh God no. Bertie’s the biggest fairy going. He’ll love to see all those half-naked young men pummelling each other.’

‘And you Lizzie?’ asked Max. ‘Will you like to see it too?’

‘I suppose so. It’s somewhere I haven’t been before.’

By six o’clock that evening the scene in the nightclub was in the can and Lizzie was given the news that she would be filming her death scene the following day. Colin decided to wrap up and everyone retreated to their caravans to change back into their normal clothes. Lizzie shared a caravan with Lyn and the other showgirls, and it was quite chaotic and the squealing and shouting reminded Lizzie of the Convent, when one of the girls received a letter or a present and the others would gather around excitedly. Lyn was out with Mario that night and was changing into an equally revealing outfit – a skin tight, black satin strapless dress that didn’t really flatter

her generous figure. Lizzie was just glad to be able to wipe off the layers of thick, theatrical make up and take off that horrid wig.

‘You know Max likes you don’t you?’ Lyn asked, applying yet another layer of mascara.

‘Don’t be silly,’ Lizzie blushed. ‘We’ve hardly spoken.’

‘Have you not seen the way he looks at you?! And when I mentioned Bertie he jumped in and asked if he was your boyfriend. Darling you have just struck gold.’

‘What do you mean?’

Lyn turned to face her, her expression incredulous.

‘He’s a millionaire. One day he’ll be an Earl and you could be his Lady.’

‘Oh Lyn you’re being ridiculous, he barely knows I exist.’

‘Rubbish. Anyway, Mario will be picking me up soon. Fancy a lift into town?’

‘That would be fantastic. I can’t wait to see how Bertie’s done.’

They left the caravan and headed towards Mario who was waiting in his car just outside the gates. Suddenly a car pulled up beside them; a racy little MG with the hood up. Max stuck his head out, smiling at both of them.

‘Can I give either of you ladies a lift back to London?’ he asked.

‘Lizzie will go with you,’ Lyn barked, giving Lizzie a little nudge forward. ‘Mario’s picking me up.’

Lizzie went to refuse but then thought better of it, not wishing to appear rude. She smiled a thank you to Max, kissed Lyn on the cheek goodbye and went round to the driver’s seat. The car was small and cramped and Lizzie felt squashed, wondering how on earth someone as tall as Max managed to fit in it.

‘Where would you like me to drop you?’ he asked.

‘Oh wherever you’re going will be fine. I can get the underground.’

‘No, I’m driving you home. Where do you live?’

‘Pimlico.’

‘Pimlico it is then. I live in Chelsea, so we’re practically neighbours.’

‘Thank you. I can’t believe you’re working on films when you’re a member of the aristocracy. Have you met the Queen?’

‘No,’ he smiled. ‘I have met Prince Philip though. He was shooting on my father’s estate a few years ago.’

‘Shooting animals?’ she frowned.

He looked at her and smiled at her naivety.

‘Birds. Anyway, enough about me. What did you do before you became an actress?’

Lizzie faced a dilemma. There was something about him that made her want to tell the truth, but she knew he would probably kick her out of the car or something if she did. Maybe it was time to leave Lizzie Gallagher of Dingle Street behind and start believing in her own story. The more she said it, the easier it became.

‘I was living in Cheshire with my aunt up until last summer,’ she said. ‘Then I moved down to London. I’m working in a hotel at the moment and a couple of evenings a week in a club in Soho.’

‘But you want to be a film star?’

‘Not really. I’ve just sort of stumbled into it through modelling. But I have to say I’ve really enjoyed today and I do think I’d like to do it again.’

‘At the risk of sounding a complete and utter snob, I think you’re too classy to be playing showgirls and hookers. You should fix yourself up with some proper acting lessons. Get some decent parts.’

‘I couldn’t afford that,’ she replied. ‘And even then I’d probably be rubbish.’

‘For someone so beautiful you don’t think much of yourself do you?’



Lizzie couldn't answer. She was blushing so deeply it felt as though the skin on her face was going to melt. She'd been complimented on her looks more times than she could remember, but coming from Max, it somehow meant everything to her.

'I'm just shy,' she managed to utter. 'Like I said, I've only been in London a few months.'

'And did you work back in Cheshire?'

'I was at school.'

He took his eyes off the road and looked at her in shock.

'How old are you?'

'I'll be seventeen in July.'

'I thought you were about twenty. Good God, you're eight years younger than me.'

'It's okay, everybody I meet thinks I'm older.'

'If I'd have been your aunt I wouldn't have let you out of my sight.'

'She knows I'm sensible.'

'I'm twenty-five and my mother's still convinced I'm going to become sort of drug addled opium fiend because I live in London and work in films.'

'Have you always done that?'

'No. I've got a degree from Cambridge. My father wanted me to go into the family business – animal husbandry. I used to belong to the photographic club at university and got far more pleasure from doing that. So when I left, I came to London, got a job in a photographic studio, made contacts and gradually moved into film. Up until now I've been a camera assistant but I met Colin through my flatmate and he offered me the job. I could hardly refuse the shot at AD. Although it's hardly the sort of film I want to make.'

'What sorts of films do you want to make then?'

‘Films about real people. You know when I first came to London I stayed in digs in Islington. The street where I lived was full of working-class people, the sort who are never portrayed in film. But their lives were far more interesting than the rubbish studios churn out. Girls were having babies out of wedlock; people had extra-marital affairs and were hardly discreet about it. Old women who’d served time in prison for black-marketeering during the war. Fascinating stuff.’

Lizzie remained silent. Max was describing the world from which she came but what could she say? Max took her silence for disapproval.

‘I suppose films like that seem abhorrent to you?’ he asked.

‘No, it’s just that when people go to the pictures they don’t want to see their own lives.’

‘Well we’re just going to have to change people’s perceptions aren’t we?’

Before they knew it they were back in Pimlico and Lizzie wondered where the time had gone. Max stopped the car and looked up at the house in which she lived.

‘Nice place,’ he said.

‘Expensive place. The money from this film will come in very handy for paying the rent.’

He smiled at her, nodding confidently.

‘I think there will be plenty more films Lizzie.’

‘You’re too kind,’ she laughed. ‘See you tomorrow.’

‘Yes, it’s been a pleasure.’

‘Thanks,’ she whispered.

There was another of those awkward silences and Lizzie dragged herself from the car, almost forgetting her manners before bending down and sticking her head back through the window.

‘Thank you for the lift.’

‘You’re welcome.’

As soon as she got in and heard the wireless on, she realised Bertie was home. He rushed from the living room holding out his arms, an excited expression on his face.

‘Who was that? Who was that?’ he squealed. ‘Who was that in the MG?’

‘The Assistant Director, he lives in Chelsea and he gave me a lift.’

‘Young? Handsome? Single?’

‘Yes, all three. But also very posh and connected and way out of my league. Anyway, how did you get on?’

‘I got it!’ he exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air. ‘I got it. I will be helping write the songs for ‘Not a Penny Less’. Goodbye the Carlton!’

‘I’ll miss you,’ Lizzie said sadly.

‘Rubbish. Darling you’re going to be a big movie star. You’ll be leaving there soon too. We must celebrate.’

‘Lyn’s already organised that. A boxing match on Saturday night. Do you fancy it?’

‘Boxing? Watching two brawny, unintelligent men beat each other up? Making themselves all bloody and filthy and sweaty?’

‘Yes. Don’t you fancy it?’

‘Are you kidding? Darling make sure that slutty friend of yours gets me a ringside seat!’

By the end of filming the next day, Lizzie had acquired the nickname ‘One Take’. Colin was highly impressed with her acting, which consisted of walking along a set made to look like a rain filled alley, down which Ron follows her, chases her then grabs her. She screams, tries to fight him off before he pins her down and stabs her. All the emphasis is on the shadows on the wall, making it seem even creepier. Lizzie couldn’t believe she was being paid fifty pounds to do something that came so easily to her. All she had left to do was a close up shot that afternoon and she was done. Her time on ‘Nightstalker’ was over.

She had lunch in the caravan; Lyn wasn't filming that day so initially she ate alone. That was until the door opened and Max walked in. He sat opposite her and suddenly Lizzie lost her appetite.

'You were fantastic,' he smiled. 'Everyone on set was impressed.'

'I hardly had to do anything,' she replied bashfully.

'Stop putting yourself down. Anyway, I've got something for you.'

He fished in the back pocket of his trousers and got out a piece of paper, passing it to her.

'A friend of mine, Hilary Costello. She runs a school for impoverished actors. They meet every Tuesday evening in a church hall in Bloomsbury.'

'T-Thank you,' she stammered. 'You didn't have to.'

'You've got potential Lizzie and I don't want you to spend your life playing showgirls. All Hilary asks for is a shilling a week to go towards the upkeep of the hall. She used to be a stage actress before the war so she knows what she's talking about.'

'I'm so grateful, thank you.'

Brian Meade, the Lighting Director – a big, burly rugby playing man, who had the most tactless personality Lizzie had ever encountered, suddenly interrupted them. He squeezed in beside Max, nudging him.

'All ready for the weekend my good man?' he asked.

Max just smiled meekly and visibly shrank away.

'I thought you were going to your parents for the weekend,' Lizzie asked.

'He is,' Brian boomed, laughing. 'Trust you not to tell any of the pretty girls you old cad. He's having his engagement party.'

Lizzie's heart dropped and her body suffered a painful blow as if someone had stuck their fist into her stomach. She felt the colour drain from her face and she began to shake as if about to cry.

‘Engaged?’ she uttered.

‘Yes,’ Max replied quietly. ‘Fiona. Her father’s a friend of my father. We’ve known each other since childhood.’

‘I’ve seen a photo Lizzie,’ Brian laughed. ‘She looks like she should be running in the Grand National. But her father does own half of the North East.’

‘You’re not marrying her for her money are you?’ Lizzie asked, unable to believe Max would do something like this.

‘No of course not. Like I said, we go back a long way.’

Brian looked at Lizzie, making sure his eyes wandered down to her cleavage first.

‘Aren’t you glad you’re not an inbred member of the establishment Lizzie?’ he asked. ‘At least you can marry whoever you like.’

## **Chapter 9**

Lizzie wasn’t sure what one wore to a boxing match and so opted for the green halter neck dress Bertie had bought her for Christmas. It had taken a lot of persuasion to get her to go. She’d spent most of the week moping after finding out about Max being engaged. Bertie and Lyn managed to talk her round, Lyn promising to take her to the party at Mario’s new club afterwards. It was called Mimi’s and Lyn felt this auspicious for Lizzie given the name of the character she had just played. She assured her the party would be filled with handsome men and they would all fall madly in love with her. Somehow Lizzie could not become enthusiastic at the prospect of this. Her experience with men to date was pretty disastrous and she was considering giving them up forever.

Bertie was almost frothing at the mouth with excitement as they drove over to Hackney – an area of London Lizzie had never seen before. She was quite shocked at the squalor that greeted her. It reminded her of Toxteth and for a fleeting moment she got that familiar feeling of homesickness.

The Hackney Empire stood out like a shining beacon amongst all the depression. Posters hung outside advertising the main event; the British Heavyweight contest between someone called Clawhand Connor and the equally ridiculous Digger O'Malley. Glamorous looking women adorned in stolen furs and diamonds, accompanied men who looked like Bobby and all the other spivs she knew. And she spotted a few famous faces, obviously keen to mix with the hoi polloi.

There was a reception for VIPs in a small room near to the main foyer and seeing as Mario had invested a lot of money in this match, he and his guests were allowed in. A photographer and journalist were circling, trying to get some gossip and practically wet themselves when Lyn walked in, looking as slutty and sensational as ever in a tight, white dress, her blonde hair scraped off her face and huge diamond earrings practically hanging to her shoulders.

'Lyn is it true you've just made your film debut?' the journalist asked, his notepad poised for whatever sound bite she had to offer.

'Yes darling,' she smiled, posing for the camera. 'I play a singer in Nightstalker and this is one of my co-stars.'

To Lizzie's horror, her friend grasped her shoulders and pulled her forwards, stooping down and pressing her face closer.

'And what's your name?' the reporter asked.

'Er, Elizabeth Maine,' she replied, trying not to blink when the flashlight went off in her face.

'Isn't she adorable?' cooed Lyn. 'She's going to be the biggest actress in the world, I promise you.'

Lizzie could have killed Lyn for doing this to her. She wasn't like her, desperate for the limelight. She wasn't even sure she wanted to be famous. She liked acting but would rather stay in the background. It came as a huge relief when they finished their champagne and made their way to the main arena. Mario had ringside seats and Bertie was wetting himself at the thought of being so close to the men. The atmosphere was smoky and loud, the women screeching and the men bantering, trying to prove how tough they were.

The first bout was between two local boys, one of whom was Mario's nephew Greg. They entered the ring as fresh-faced, eager young men, but by the time they finished, their faces resembled pieces of meat – their noses splattered with blood, their eyes puffy. There was something so primeval about it all; goading them on, making them hit each other. Lizzie found it distasteful but knew she couldn't express this. Her stomach turned even more at the next bout. This time it was two men at the end of their careers. And the sorry sight of two old war-horses, stumbling about trading blows against their flabby, out of condition bodies was upsetting for Lizzie.

'Isn't this fantastic?' Bertie gasped. 'We should come here more often.'

'I don't think so,' Lizzie winced. 'You can hear their bones crunching.'

Bertie laid his hand upon her knee.

'My dear girl, watching two men beat each other is as old as the day is long. Our ancestors did it in Roman times. These men are just modern gladiators. They're like racehorses, they know no different.'

During the break between that bout and main event, one of Mario's cronies came over with a bottle of champagne. Lizzie kept her distance as she didn't like to mix with these gangster types - they were too dangerous. Bobby's slap was still fresh in her mind and she wondered if Mario laid into Lyn when she stepped out of line.

She suddenly caught Bertie looking up at the ring, his mouth open, and she wondered who he was looking at. She followed his gaze and realised what had made him so speechless. A beautiful man stood in the ring being spoken to by a man whom she presumed to be his trainer. He was one of the boxers for the main event; a huge brawler with arms like tree trunks and the fiercest expression on his face. With his pale skin, dark hair, and mean blue eyes, he reminded Lizzie of the lads back home. She had never seen anyone quite so gorgeous – and neither had Bertie.

'I think I'm in love,' he uttered. 'Vada that.'

'I know, he's a dish isn't he?' she fizzed. 'But I think he'd eat you alive.'

'Ooh is that a promise?' Bertie shivered.

The commentator got into the ring and announced the fight. Ten rounds to crown the British Heavyweight Champion. The handsome fighter was Digger O'Malley and he was defending his title. Lizzie wasn't disappointed that his corner was situated close to her seat. Like some sort of actor he worked the crowd as he warmed up, hopping up and down, punching the air. He looked down at the audience and on spotting her, gave her a big, theatrical wink. Lizzie gave a little squeal of excitement and grasped Bertie's arm.

'Did you see that?' she asked.

'I did,' he pouted playfully. 'I'm positively green with envy.'

Lizzie chastised herself for being so excited at Digger's attention, but she couldn't deny this made her more interested in the fight. She and Bertie were cheering Digger on, much to the dismay of Lyn and Mario; Mario had financial interests in Clawhand Connor and wanted him to win. In Round Three the powerful and brutal Digger knocked his opponent out with a left hook no-one saw coming, and Mario started to swear in Maltese, his cronies rushing to him, mopping his brow and appeasing him. Lizzie was disappointed that she didn't get any more winks as Digger retreated to his corner, surrounded by his trainers and flunkies. He barely looked scarred but his nose was rather battered - probably from a previous bout. He captivated Lizzie but in a different way to how she felt about Max. She imagined Digger making love to her, pawing at her with those big, rough hands. He was probably married and had kids or some gorgeous girlfriend, but that didn't worry her somehow. He looked like fun.

'Darling you're drooling,' Bertie said, distracting her from her staring. 'Come on, Mario and Lyn are leaving for Mimi's.'

Mimi's was as far removed from the Pussycat Club as possible. It was an upmarket bar in Rathbone Place, frequented by the rich and famous, who liked the thought of patronising a bar that was owned by gangsters. It was bedecked in gold and glass and on the stage was a proper female singer, not some tackily made up drag queen. Tonight was invitation only and everyone there was either a gangster, showgirl or boxer. Lizzie hoped Bertie didn't get drunk and try fondling one of these macho men, as he would be asking for a punch – or worse.

Lizzie didn't follow her own caution and proceeded to get very drunk on champagne. It was the only drink that didn't make her maudlin and think of Mary Ann and risk talking about her to



complete strangers. Champagne seemed to bring out a bubbly side to her personality, it gave her the confidence to talk to people and laugh at their jokes and enjoy being beautiful and the centre of attention. She clapped rather too loudly when the MC got on stage to make an announcement, but those in her group thought her charming. She was still ever so young.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ the MC began. ‘I hope you’re enjoying your evening courtesy of our kind host. Put your hands together for Mr Mario Spiteri.’

A spotlight shone on their booth, primarily on Mario, and he raised his hand graciously as everyone clapped. The light then returned to the stage and the MC.

‘Now would you like to put your hands together for the star of the evening, the British Heavyweight Champion? Mr Digger O’Malley.’

Everyone except Mario clapped as Digger walked onto the stage; this time suited with the big, gold embossed belt around his waist. He raised his big paws in the air and lapped up the attention from the crowd. Lizzie did her best to get him to look at her by jumping up and down slightly, but in the darkened club she was probably difficult to see.

The singer returned to the stage and couples began to dance. Lizzie couldn’t help but feel a little left out; she knew Bertie would oblige but it wasn’t the same as having a real boyfriend or husband to whirl her around the dance floor. Like some sort of fairytale princess, her wishes were granted when a big hand appeared in front of her face.

‘Can I have this dance?’

For a moment Lizzie froze; the accent was so familiar, it reminded her of home. She looked up to find Digger smiling down at her, asking her to dance. Coming back to reality, she smiled and accepted his invitation, standing up and letting him lead her to the dance floor. He was at least a foot taller than her and she felt dwarfed by him. Looking at him closely, she could see he was a lot older than her too, probably older than Bertie. But he was so stunning it took her breath away. There was a kindness, a vulnerability behind those sapphire blue eyes that contrasted his battered face.

‘You’re very beautiful,’ he smiled, slipping his hand around her waist and starting to dance. She knew that accent anywhere – he was from North Liverpool – Walton; West Derby; Bootle. She couldn’t help but warm to him.

‘You’re from Liverpool,’ she stated.

‘How did you know that?’ he smiled.

‘I’m good with accents. I’m from Cheshire. Whereabouts in Liverpool are you from?’

‘Orrell Park.’ He squeezed her a little tighter and a shiver ran down her spine. ‘Cheshire eh? A posh girl. What’s yer name?’

‘Lizzie Gallagher. My stage name is Elizabeth Maine.’

‘Stage name? You an actress?’

‘I’ve done one film but it was a very small part.’

‘Well I bet when they see you over in America they’ll want you to go over there and become a big movie star.’

She laughed.

‘You’re too kind. Why do they call you Digger?’

‘When I was a little lad I was always diggin’ meself out of trouble. Besides, it’s better than me real name.’

‘And what’s that?’

He smiled coyly and Lizzie could swear she saw the hint of a blush. Her heart melted.

‘I can’t tell you that, it’s too embarassin’.’

‘Go on.’

‘Okay, it’s Walter.’

‘Walter!’ she laughed. ‘You don’t look much like a Walter.’

‘Good, and it can stay that way.’

‘Do you live in Liverpool?’ she asked.

‘No, I moved down to London a few months ago. I’m staying with me trainer in his house in Twickenham. I’ll be getting me own place soon though but not till after me next fight.’

‘When’s that?’

‘July the first.’

‘My birthday,’ she squealed. ‘Will it be here in London?’

‘No Lizzie,’ he laughed. ‘Me next fight is for World Champion in New York.’

‘New York! You’re going to America?’

‘I sure am. I can’t wait.’

The song they were dancing to finished and Lizzie hoped he wouldn’t want to part. She enjoyed being held by him, breathing in his musky male scent and feeling him in control. No-one had ever made her feel so protected before.

‘I would ask you to come and sit with us,’ she said. ‘But Mario was backing Clawhand Connor.’

‘That’s okay,’ he replied. ‘I don’t want to stay here for long anyway, I’ve got to be at the gym by six tomorrow morning.’

‘You must be very fit,’ she purred. Sober she wouldn’t have dreamt of letting her lusty feelings for him spill out like this, but tanked up on champagne, she couldn’t control it.

She felt one of his hands clasp her backside, pulling her to him.

‘Do you fancy going somewhere else?’ he asked.

‘I live in Pimlico,’ she uttered. ‘It’s not far from here.’

‘Pimlico it is then,’ he smiled.

Feeling drunker by the moment, Lizzie stumbled over to the booth to find Mario had disappeared, leaving Lyn and Bertie to chat. The part of her brain that knew she was doing wrong prevented her from telling the truth, and she knew she had to make something up fast.

‘Digger and I are going off to have something to eat,’ she slurred. ‘I’ll get a cab home Bertie.’

‘Lizzie be careful, you’ve only just met him,’ her friend warned. It seemed he had guessed what she was really up to.

‘Oh shut up you tart, you’re only jealous,’ she laughed and for a moment her Scouse accent came to the fore and this frightened her more than anything.

They caught a cab back to Pimlico and gave the driver quite a show. He tried hard not to watch in the rear view mirror as they kissed passionately on the back seat. There was nothing gentle about Digger, it was like being mauled by a big, randy bear, but for the first time ever Lizzie enjoyed it. Maybe it was because he was so physically attractive or perhaps she felt relaxed with him because they had a shared history, even though he was unaware of it. He knew Liverpool and he knew the places she’d gone to as a child; the language; the customs. His mam could probably knock up a great big pan of Scouse, just the same as hers could.

As they entered the flat, Digger became like a wild animal, growling and holding onto her like she was his prey. Lizzie was giggling so loudly she was frightened of waking up the neighbours. There were none of the nerves that had stopped her enjoying being with Bobby, and she shivered with excitement when Digger pressed her up against the wall as soon as they got in.

‘Oh my God Lizzie,’ he moaned. ‘I ain’t had a woman in six weeks. I never thought the next time would be with someone like you.’

He scooped her into his arms and ran with her into her bedroom, throwing her onto her bed and kneeling over her, whipping of the tie that was restricting his big neck.

‘I am going to give you a night to remember queen,’ he half smiled, half hissed and for just a moment Lizzie was terrified of him and this excited her all the more.

He finally let her go at three a.m. Unlike Bobby who fell asleep afterwards – satisfied with himself; Digger was like some sort of machine, ready to go again. Lizzie couldn’t get enough of

him and she couldn't begin to express her gratitude to him for making sex enjoyable for the first time in her life. He seemed to erase all memories of Uncle George's brutality or Bobby's betrayal. Everything was light-hearted and fun and even though he left her feeling bruised and sore, she felt happier than she had in a very long time. She hoped Digger was going to stay around.

'I'm gonna have about two and a half hours sleep,' he yawned, looking at his watch. 'I've gotta get over to Mile End by six.'

Lizzie sighed and snuggled close to him, running her hand across his broad, damp chest.

'Don't go. Stay with me.'

He laughed and kissed the top of her head.

'Do you want me to lose me bout in New York?'

'No, but one morning won't make any difference.'

'It'll make all the difference. Now go to sleep and let me plan where I'm gonna take you tomorrow night.'

## **Chapter 10**

Lizzie was awoken by the sensation of something thudding on the pillow beside her head. She opened her eyes to find Bertie standing over her, an angry and expectant look upon his face. She turned to see what it was he had thrown at her and was horrified to discover it was the box in which she kept her Dutch cap, and that it had been in the bathroom all night long.

'What do you think you're doing?' he asked. 'Do you want another baby?'

'But I...I.'

'I ran into Digger. He was leaving as I was getting in. Lizzie how could you be so stupid?'

'I was drunk,' she whined. 'Don't lecture me Bertie.'

He sat on the bed beside her, stroking her hair off her face like a concerned father.

‘Are you seeing the brute again?’

‘He’s taking me to dinner tonight. I really like him Bertie.’

‘Well let’s hope he’s not made you pregnant. That’ll be a sure fire way of frightening him off.’

Lizzie was terrified she had made another mistake. There was nothing she wanted more than another baby – but when she was married, not with someone she’d only just met. She sat up in bed and gripped her throbbing head while Bertie went off to make some black coffee. She moved and her bruised thighs reminded her of the night before. She longed to see Digger again, she just hoped in the cold light of day he didn’t think her some sort of tart for sleeping with him so easily. It would never have happened had she been sober.

Bertie and Pierre went out for the day, leaving Lizzie alone to nurse her wounds. She repaired her hangover with tomato juice and raw egg (Bertie swore by it) and spent her time worrying that she was pregnant and would never see Digger again. Her fears were allayed when the doorbell rang at just gone six o’clock. She looked out of the window to find him standing on the pavement, a big black car parked in the middle of the road. Her heart swelled with joy on seeing him but she panicked when she realised she was only wearing a plain, green dress and had her hair pulled into a ponytail. What would he think of her looking so ordinary? She dithered about, wondering if she should get changed, but he rang the bell again and she had no choice but to go to him.

Opening the door, she saw he was dressed in a black tuxedo and she felt even more under-dressed.

‘I didn’t think you would turn up,’ she said, smoothing her hair.

‘What made you think that?’ he frowned. ‘Come on la, hurry up. I’ve a table booked at Shepard’s.’

‘I can’t go to Shepard’s looking like this,’ she yelped. ‘I’m a mess.’

‘You look beautiful to me but I know what you ladies are like.’ He looked at his watch. ‘You’ve got five minutes. Go on.’

Lizzie ran back into the flat in a complete fluster, convinced she would need at least an hour to change and make herself acceptable for somewhere like Shepard's. It was *the* top restaurant in Park Lane, the sort of place she and Bertie would joke about, dreaming of the day they could afford to eat there. Here she was, about to go there with nothing to wear. The only thing she could find was a red satin dress given to her by Lyn; it fitted her perfectly, if not a little too long. She slipped on black suede high heels and untied her hair, running a brush through it, knowing she had no time to curl it; just fixing it up on one side with a slide that had a black flower attached. A bit of mascara and some red lipstick and she was ready to go. She still felt a complete mess but she hoped it was good enough for Digger.

Digger gasped on seeing her.

'I'll be the envy of every man in the place,' he said.

'Will I do?' she whispered, smoothing down the dress. 'I always feel so scruffy.'

Digger had borrowed his trainer's car to take them to the restaurant and it impressed Lizzie that he had gone to so much trouble for her. He looked strange in a tux - she much preferred him naked. But now sober, she had no intention of going to bed with him again until they knew each other better. Let him know she wasn't some sort of slut.

'Last night,' she said tentatively. 'You know I only did it because I was drunk.'

He looked at her and frowned.

'What? You don't fancy me now then?'

'Course I do. I like you a lot, but I'm not in the habit of sleeping with men I've only just met.'

'Glad to hear it,' she smiled slyly. 'You did enjoy it though?'

She laughed and blushed.

'You know I did. But I don't want you thinking I'm some sort of tart.'

'I would never think that of you Lizzie. You're the classiest bird I've ever known.'

They arrived at Shepard's and a concierge in bright red livery came forward to welcome them. Digger looked a bit uncomfortable with this and though Lizzie was hardly used to it, did her best to appear nonchalant.

'I've got a table for two booked,' Digger announced, trying to soften his Scouse accent.

'Would you like someone to park your car sir?' the concierge asked.

'Er yeah. Yes, that would be good, thank you.'

The concierge clicked his fingers at a young man who was waiting in the lobby who took Digger's keys and got into the car. The concierge then led them into the dark restaurant. It was almost silent; people seemed to be speaking in whispers, the only sound coming from the clinking of glasses or cutlery on china. Lizzie felt a little overwhelmed – everyone seemed so much older and sophisticated and she hoped neither she nor Digger made an embarrassment of themselves.

Digger leaned in close as they were led to their tables.

'You don't think that get will nick me car do you?'

'Oh Digger,' she laughed. 'It's his job. You're not back in Liverpool now.'

Their table was in a corner next to a water feature. Lizzie had to stifle a giggle when Digger shook hands with the concierge as he sat down. His naivety reminded her of herself when she first came to London.

'Thank you for bringing me here,' she said. 'Bertie and I have always dreamt of being able to afford it.'

'You mean you haven't had rich fellas queuing up to bring you here?'

'No. I've only had one boyfriend and that didn't last long. I found out he was married.'

'Ah,' was all he said and Lizzie's heart sank. Not again.

'Not you too,' she groaned.



‘Divorced. Me wife and kid are back home in Liverpool. Sheila thought I was gonna become rich overnight when I turned professional, and when it didn’t happen she ran off with a fella who owns a chain of launderettes in Warrington.’

‘Last night I remember you saying you hadn’t had...’ she lowered her voice. ‘Sex in six weeks. Does that mean you were seeing someone?’

‘Women throw themselves at me all the time Lizzie. It don’t mean a thing. If I had a nice girl on me arm I wouldn’t look at anybody else.’

Their conversation was halted by the waiter asking what they would like to drink. Digger ordered champagne and Lizzie did nothing to deter him, even though she was determined not to get drunk that night. When the time came for them to order their food Digger bluffed his ignorance of fancy menus by insisting Lizzie – as the lady – choose first. She herself had hardly heard of half the things on the menu but she stuck to safe choices, like soup for starters and the rack of lamb for their main course.

When the waiter left, Digger took a deep breath and swigged hard on his champagne.

‘Glad that’s over. This is going to take some getting used to. My idea of eating out is a fry up in old Percy’s caff in Clayton Square.’

‘And his wife used to always give you cups of tea and forget to charge you,’ Lizzie blurted out, immediately regretting it.

Digger furrowed his brow.

‘How come you know that?’

‘I had an aunt in Liverpool. I used to visit her every summer.’

‘If me mates back home on the Docks could see me in here, in this fancy restaurant with a beautiful lass from Cheshire, they’d think I’d forgotten where I come from.’

‘Is that what you did back home? Work on the Docks?’

‘Aye, after I came out the Navy.’

‘I don’t even know how old you are.’

‘I’ll be thirty three in August.’

‘You’re more than twice my age!’ she gasped.

‘Why? ‘Ow old are you?’

‘Sixteen, Seventeen in July.’

He sucked in his cheeks and shook his head.

‘Sixteen and a body like that. Should be illegal.’

Lizzie wished he wouldn’t talk like that, there was something dirty about it. But instead of making her feel bad, she felt all tingly and wanted to take him home. She was glad when the food came and they started eating and the conversation got round to other things, like her life so far (the fictional account), her friends and all their adventures. Digger seemed to enjoy hearing how the other half lived, although the irony of it all was that he probably had more money than Lizzie, Bertie and Lyn all put together. He was also grateful to Lizzie for showing him how to use the cutlery and what order it went in. She found this appealing – underneath the bravado, he was vulnerable and lonely down here in London, and Lizzie knew exactly what that felt like.

He drove her home and for the entire journey she did battle with herself. The devil on her shoulder told her to invite him back up into the flat, the angel on the other shoulder reminded her that she had a reputation to keep and the neighbours would talk if she kept taking young men into her house.

Digger stopped the car and turned to look at Lizzie, stroking the side of her face.

‘I’ve had a lovely evening,’ he said.

‘Me too. I would love to invite you in, but Bertie will....’

He halted her speech by putting his fingers to her lips.

‘You’re not inviting me in cos you’re a lady. I’m not gonna take you to bed Lizzie. I want to prove to you that I’m serious. You’re the sort of girl I’ve been looking for all me life.’

## Chapter 11

**May 1958**

Lizzie had been attending Hilary Costello's acting classes for six weeks now, and it had turned her life around. Thanks to Max Bowers, she realised she truly wanted to act and that she was gifted with the ability to do so. The first night she attended she'd dressed in her usual 'dolly bird' clothes and had discovered the other girls there were clad in polo necks, ski pants or plain skirts. The men were either bookish young actors or else older men who had day jobs and attended the classes because Hilary welcomed plays written by them. At the end of that first class Hilary took her to one side and advised her to dress down next time, as otherwise no-one would ever take her seriously.

After each lesson Hilary would take them to the local pub for a discussion about what they had learnt that night. Lizzie would use this time to eavesdrop on Hilary's conversation, to try and see if she said anything about Max. It was hard to believe this colourful, Bohemian, elderly woman was friends with a Viscount, but in the short time she'd known him, Lizzie had come to realise Max wasn't conventional anyway.

Whenever Lizzie did this, she would come away feeling guilty. She was Digger's girlfriend and yet was interested in another man. Digger was so kind to her. Always picking her up from the pub and taking her to dinner at a local restaurant, then they would either go back to her place or book into a hotel as man and wife. Lizzie always made sure she was careful; she really didn't want a baby now. She enjoyed acting and saw it as a way of making something of herself – a way of getting Mary Ann back. *She* was the only baby she wanted.

Tonight they were reading from a play written by Simeon Hanson, the oldest member of the group. He was a dour Mancunian who worked as a teacher during the day but had aspirations of becoming a playwright. During break times he would hold court; giving lectures about the virtues of Communism and Socialism and things Lizzie knew very little about. He thought her a spoilt Cheshire girl and when casting for his play 'Our Lady of Grafton Street', he deliberately chose her to play the sweetheart of the young man who goes to storm the GPO building and gets killed fighting for the cause. She had astounded him with her very convincing Dublin accent. She

couldn't reveal that she was merely mimicking her Nanna Shea from Parnell Square, who now lived two doors down from the Gallaghers in Dingle Street. She had witnessed the very events this play charted and Lizzie based the character of Sinead on how she'd imagined her grandmother as a young girl.

Afterwards, as usual, they headed for the pub, Lizzie walking arm in arm with Sophia, another of the young aspiring actresses. Hilary was out in front with a couple of the older members, talking with great animation, arms flailing wildly. Lizzie jumped out of her skin when she felt a tap on her shoulder. She gasped and turned around to find Simeon standing there, a hesitant expression on his leathered face.

'Lizzie could I have a word?' he asked, gesturing to Sophia to walk on.

'I'll just catch Hilary up,' the girl uttered and she ran off. Lizzie was intrigued as to what Simeon might want with her; no doubt he wanted to criticise her for what she had done to his character.

'I was quite astonished at your performance tonight Lizzie,' he said. 'You shocked me. I was wondering if you would like to go on tour with it.'

'On tour?' she gasped. 'What do you mean?'

'A few repertory theatres – six in fact – are staging it in August this year. I was wondering if you would like to play Sinead.'

Lizzie had to stop and look up at him, causing him to stop too.

'Act you mean? Proper acting?'

'Yes,' he couldn't help but smile. 'Proper acting. The wages would be minimal and the digs appalling but it would give you a taste of the theatre. I think you've got the makings of a great actress.'

'Wow! I'll have to check with my agent but that sounds fantastic. Thank you.'

Lizzie was still on Cloud Nine as she made her way by taxi over to Baileys in Holborn. Manny had a special announcement to make and had invited Lizzie, Digger, Bertie and Lyn along to the restaurant to witness it. Lizzie wondered if tonight was the right time to ask if it was okay to act

in the play. She guessed Manny wouldn't be very pleased, he wanted her cast as dolly birds and tarts, not in serious roles. She hoped he wouldn't put a dampener on it.

She arrived at the restaurant to find her friends deep in conversation. Bertie and Digger got on like a house on fire, which she found amazing given the difference in their backgrounds. She wondered if Digger realised Bertie got a thrill being in the company of a handsome, battered man who used his fists to make a living. Lyn was her usual self; pretending to be deep in conversation with Manny but at the same time looking round the restaurant, trying to find someone more interesting to talk to.

It was she who noticed Lizzie first and jumped up and down in her seat, pointing. Lizzie walked hastily to the table, not wishing to draw attention to herself and before she could sit down, Digger stood up and kissed her cheek.

'You look very pleased with yourself,' he commented as she sat down. 'Good class?'

'Fantastic,' she replied quietly. 'I'll tell you more later.'

There wasn't much in the way of food being ordered, but champagne was flowing like there was no tomorrow. Manny was as gregarious and loud as ever, puffing on huge cigars and boasting about his achievements.

Finally he settled down and explained why tonight was so special. Lizzie hoped he wasn't retiring. Not now everything was going so well and she needed representation.

He lifted his champagne glass and pointed it in the direction of Lyn who shivered excitedly.

'I've brought you here tonight to celebrate this wonderful young lady who's going to make me lots and lots of money. For,' he paused. 'She has just been awarded her first leading role in a film!'

Everyone let out a gasp and cheered for Lyn while she pretended to be coy.

'That's wonderful,' Lizzie enthused; glad her friend was having some success too. 'What film is it?'

‘She Who Dare Not Speak,’ Manny interrupted. ‘It’s a thriller about a waitress who kills her lover in self-defence and has to plead this in court. Proper acting. No tits out or cheesy smiles. Proper acting, she’s even going to have to grow her roots out for the prison scenes. Filming starts in September.’

This was followed by more cheering and people raising their glasses to Lyn. Ever the actress she pretended to be embarrassed by the attention but Lizzie could see by the hunger in her eyes how much she loved it. Manny then pointed his glass at Lizzie, looking at her with more affection than he had ever shown before.

‘And now I just have to find something for you cherub.’

‘Er I’ve already found something,’ she said nervously.

‘And what’s that?’

‘Simeon Hanson, he goes to my theatre school. He’s written a play about the Troubles in Ireland and he wants me to play one of the main parts. It’s a rep tour starting in August.’

Manny’s face returned to its usual scowl, as he folded his arms across his chest.

‘Rep?’ he practically spat.

‘What’s rep?’ Digger asked.

‘Rep is Repertory Theatre,’ Bertie explained. ‘It consists of touring around small, scabby theatres, staying in God awful bed and breakfasts and playing to about six people. But I think it’s absolutely wonderful for our girl. She’s going to be a proper actress.’

‘She can’t be a proper actress looking like that,’ Manny huffed. ‘She’s all tits and arse.’

‘Thanks,’ she snapped. ‘Are you saying I can’t do it?’

‘Who am I to stop you?’ he shrugged. ‘But I still want my twenty percent. Even if you make two shillings a night, I want my twenty percent.’

Manny went home soon after this, and Lyn and Bertie went off to The Zanzibar to dance the night away. Digger had to train in the morning and Lizzie still had a job in the hotel to hang onto,

so they declined the offer to join them. They decided to walk back to Pimlico; Digger was going to stay the night and Lizzie just hoped no-one would notice him going into the flat.

Her elation at getting her first proper role had been dampened by Manny's reaction and this made her quiet. Digger put his arm around her, squeezing her tightly.

'Don't worry about that auld get queen,' he reassured. 'He's just jealous cos you got something off your own back.'

'I just wanted him to be pleased with me.'

'It don't matter what he thinks of you. I'm proud of you. Does that count?'

'You know it does,' she smiled.

'I'll miss you though, when you're off touring round the country. You won't start copping off with other fellas will you?'

'You don't even have to ask that.'

'Well perhaps I should make the most of you before you go away. Perhaps we should spend some time together. How about in New York?'

She stopped dead in the middle of the street and looked up at him, searching his face to see if he was serious.

'Are you joking?' she asked.

'No. I'm taking you to New York for your birthday. Alright, the match is on the actual day, but we can do something together afterwards.'

'B-But New York? I've never been on a plane or anything.'

'Well now's your chance. You'll need to get a passport but that won't take long. I want to show my girl off to those Yankee blokes, let them see what a beauty the Heavyweight Champion of the World has got.'

## **Chapter 12**

## **New York – July 1958**

Lizzie lay back in a contented glow; unable to believe she had just made love to the Heavyweight Champion of the World. Digger had been off-limits for six weeks prior to the bout, but he had more than made up for it since they'd arrived back at the hotel. He now lay sleeping like a baby, his face still puffy from the blows his opponent – James Sharp – had rained down on him. Lizzie had never seen anyone as terrifying as the huge, fierce black man who'd bounded into the ring, and at that moment she'd convinced herself Digger was going to die. Her fears were unfounded; he fought with the grace of a ballet dancer and felled the mighty Sharp in four rounds. Madison Square Garden had erupted into madness and suddenly Digger was the most famous man in America. He picked up a purse of fifty thousand dollars and Lizzie knew he would have a hero's welcome awaiting him back home in England.

Fortunately for her he had only remained at the party thrown in his honour for half an hour. He'd cited tiredness, but most of the men folk there were perfectly aware why he wanted to retreat to his hotel with his beautiful young girlfriend. Manny had insisted they stayed in separate rooms so as not to arouse suspicion – it was important Lizzie maintained her reputation, but luckily their rooms were adjacent and tonight, even though they had entered separate doors, privately they could come together.

For the first time since losing Mary Ann, Lizzie felt truly happy. She was seventeen and a day; about to act in her first serious role and to top it all, she was here in New York with a gorgeous, sexy, rich man who was mad about her. Digger's love meant everything to her. There was nothing sordid nor seedy about him; he was divorced and free to be with her. New York had been quite an experience for her; she spent the first four days alone and recovering from the after-effects of the dreadful flight. She'd been too ill to spend the money Digger had given her to go and treat herself while he trained. But she had recovered in time for tonight and that's what mattered.

The only shadow on her happy horizon was Mary Ann. She should have been sharing her success with her daughter. She imagined her a beautiful one year old with golden curls and big blue eyes. Lizzie prayed she'd gone to a nice family in the Wirral or New Brighton or somewhere pleasant where she'd have a garden and a dog and all the things a special little girl



should have. But it didn't stop her thinking of her every moment of the day; wondering what she was doing. Wishing she could hold her once more and tell her she loved her and would never forget her.

To her chagrin, she started to cry and was mortified when Digger opened his eyes and looked at her. Puzzled, he pulled himself up on his elbow and ran his thumb across her wet cheek.

'Why y' crying?' he asked.

'I'm just so happy,' she replied. 'This trip to New York is the best thing that's ever happened to me.'

Digger put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her to him, cuddling her close.

'I'm gonna give you anything you want from now on. I'm gonna build you a big house in the country and you can have all the clothes in the world and I'll even get you a car.'

'I can't drive,' she giggled.

'I'll pay for you to have lessons. What I'm trying to say Lizzie is that I want to spend the rest of my life with you and I would be the happiest man in the world if you'd be my wife.'

Lizzie sat up sharply, yanking herself out of his arms.

'Are you having me on?' she asked.

'No,' he smiled. 'I've been planning on asking you all along, I was just waiting to win the bout. So, how about it?'

'Of course!' she squealed. 'I'd love to.'

She suddenly realised something. She was under twenty-one. She would need the permission of her parents to get married, and her mother wanted nothing to do with her.

'What's the matter?' Digger frowned.

'I don't think my aunt will agree to it,' she replied, keeping up the pretence. 'And she's off travelling around the world. I wouldn't even know where to find her.'

‘There’s ways round things like that,’ he said wisely. ‘Don’t worry your pretty little head. You could always appoint someone like Manny as your guardian and he can sign the papers. Anyway, we don’t have to get married this minute. I rushed into marriage the first time. This time I want to have a proper engagement.’

A press conference was held later that morning, in the reception of the hotel and Lizzie watched on proudly as Digger sat at the top table with his entourage, as well as James Sharp and his manager. Journalists from all around the world were gathered to ask him questions about his victory, and Digger, as usual, was witty and self-deprecating. He’d begged Lizzie to let him announce the engagement but she insisted on keeping quiet. She didn’t want her friends back home finding out through reading it in a newspaper. They were leaving for England in two days anyway so there was no rush.

After the press conference and a meeting with his trainer, Digger dedicated the afternoon to buying Lizzie her ring. He took her shopping on Fifth Avenue and was bemused as everywhere they walked, friendly New Yorkers would stop and shake his hand and congratulate him on his win. It suddenly sank in that her fiancé was famous and that would mean she would instantly have her name in the papers, and the people back in Liverpool would start asking her mother questions about her. Well that would serve Ma Gallagher right for spreading those cruel lies.

‘You know if anyone asks who you are, I’m going to introduce you as Elizabeth Maine. Get you some publicity too.’

It was as though Digger had been reading her thoughts.

‘You don’t have to do that for me Digger.’

‘I do. You’re going to be my wife and I’m not old fashioned and expect you to be stuck at home washing dishes and having babies. I want you to be successful too,’ he smiled. ‘Although a baby would be nice.’

Lizzie wondered if she should tell him about Mary Ann – it seemed immoral to be marrying this man and yet still pretending to be someone she wasn’t. But she thought better of it. She loved him desperately and wanted so much to be his wife and he wouldn’t want her if he discovered their whole relationship was built around a lie.

He told her to choose any ring she wanted and after much deliberation she plumped for a solitaire with a pink, tinted diamond. It cost nearly a thousand dollars and she felt awful for spending so much of Digger's money. The assistant – a timid girl of around Lizzie's age, recognised him and went off to get the manager. Digger panicked, automatically assuming she was going to accuse him of something dodgy. This made Lizzie smile inwardly, remembering the stigma of always being labelled a thief if you were a Scouser. The manager, a tall, pompous looking middle aged came out and surveyed the young couple. His icy expression suddenly breaking out into the most insincere smile Lizzie had ever seen.

'Mr O'Malley,' he gushed, clasping his hands together, dollar signs in his eyes. 'May I congratulate you on your victory last night, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for patronising Arden and Sons. How can I help you and your lovely lady?'

'Er we'd like to buy an engagement ring please mate,' Digger replied.

'An engagement ring!' the manager exclaimed. 'Why, we should give you champagne.' He looked down at his assistant. 'Melody, go along to Sarsons and get a bottle of their finest champagne.'

The girl scurried out like a timid mouse while the manager, who introduced himself as Donald, went off to get the tray upon which the ring lay. Lizzie tried it on and it was a perfect fit. Never before had her tiny, pale hands worn something so expensive. The stone shone in the sunlight, reflecting dozens of different shades of pink. It was the most beautiful ring she had ever seen.

'I'll take it,' she said.

Digger smiled and went to get out his wallet but Donald stopped him.

'Please, have it on the house. My only request is when you and the lovely....'

'Elizabeth.'

'Elizabeth are doing interviews, you mention her ring is from Arden and Sons, Fifth Avenue. Do you think you could do that?'

'Of course la,' Digger chuckled. 'Ta very much.'

Little Melody came scuttling back into the shop clutching a bottle of champagne. Donald snatched it from her, extending it to the couple.

‘Take this with our congratulations,’ he smiled. ‘And may you have many happy years together.’

They left the shop and both burst out laughing, taking it in turns to impersonate the irritating Donald and his insincerity.

‘I think we should take this champagne back to the hotel, take all our clothes off, get into bed and drink it,’ Digger declared.

‘Sounds good to me Mr O’Malley,’ giggled Lizzie, holding on tightly to his arm.

‘Glad to hear it future Mrs O’Malley,’ he replied. ‘Cos we’ve got some serious celebrating to do.’

They went back to the hotel and as they entered the lobby – still in high spirits, one of the finely made up receptionists stopped them.

‘Miss Gallagher?’ she called out. ‘Could I have your attention please?’

Lizzie was convinced they were going to tell her off for bringing champagne into the hotel. They probably had the same policy as the Carlton; guests couldn’t bring liquor into the place.

The girl brandished a piece of paper at her.

‘This came for you about an hour ago,’ she said. ‘And there was also a telephone call,’ she retrieved another piece of paper from under the desk and pushed them at Lizzie. Stunned, she thanked the girl and followed Digger into the lift. The first piece of paper was a telegram – something she’d never received in her life. It was from Manny and read;

LIZZIE GET YOUR BACKSIDE HOME NOW. TERRIBLE THING HAPPENED TO LYN. NEED YOU IN LONDON. CALL ME. MANNY.

Lizzie’s blood ran cold. Had Lyn had an accident? Why else would he need her to come home? The second piece of paper was a telephone message from Bertie, which read;

*Can you call Mr Bertie Preston ASAP? It is urgent.*

Lizzie rushed into the hotel room and rung through to reception asking them to call England. A disappointed Digger sat at the end of the bed nursing the bottle of champagne, knowing he wasn't going to get his wicked way with her now her friends needed her.

After going through several exchanges, she was finally connected to her home phone. She hoped and prayed Bertie was in; after all, it was late in the evening back in England.

'6760,' it sounded as though he was on the moon.

'Bertie it's me,' she shouted.

'Darling! Congratulate that brute for me.'

'I will. What's so urgent?'

'It's Lyn. The most awful story has come out about her. Turns out her father was a Nazi.'

'A Nazi?' Lizzie was convinced the crackly line was distorting his words.

'Yes. She's not an English rose at all. Her name's really Leni Becker and she's German. She's gone into hiding and everything.'

'I don't understand.'

'Just come home.'

'We're leaving in a couple of days. Guess what! Digger and I are getting married.'

There was a piercing squeal down the phone, then it went dead. The line had broken up. Hearing of her friends back home made Lizzie realise that however much she liked New York, she couldn't wait to return to England.

They flew back into London Airport and Gerry, Digger's trainer was there to meet them. Digger insisted Lizzie stayed with them in Twickenham that night because the flight home had made her feel as unwell as the outward one had done. In no state to argue, she went back to the semi-detached house where a bed was made up for her in the box room. The following morning Gerry's wife made her a big breakfast that she could barely touch. *The Daily Mirror* was lying

folded on the kitchen table, and when Lizzie caught sight of a photo of Lyn, she picked it up to have a look. There was a large picture of her friend in a scarf and dark glasses, shielding herself from the press, and a smaller one of her in her normal scantily clad pose. The headline read ‘*Glamour Girl is Secret Nazi Daughter*’. Lizzie still couldn’t believe Lyn was German - she seemed so English. The article was very damning.

*Glamour girl Lyn Beckford has been exposed as the daughter of a Nazi soldier. Lyn 23 has always claimed to be an English rose but we can reveal that her father was Hans Becker, a general in Hitler’s SS, and her real name is Leni Becker. Lyn had an affair with family favourite Reg Chisholm and has since attempted to carve out an acting career, to limited success. This latest sensation is likely to end those aspirations as she was today in hiding. Her father fled Germany in 1938 when Lyn was three, but by then he had participated in many Nazi atrocities within the Jewish Ghettos. Lyn’s agent Manny Blue – a Jew – issued a statement yesterday saying that he had severed all ties with Ms Beckford.*

‘Poor Lyn,’ Lizzie sighed. ‘It’s not her fault what her father done.’

‘I still don’t think you should be associated with her,’ said Digger, taking the paper from her. ‘You don’t want to be seen with a German.’

‘But she isn’t German. She was a little girl when she came to England.’

He reached out and took her hand, his expression a little exasperated, like a father trying to placate an irritating and questioning child.

‘Lizzie you know Liverpool, you’ve seen the damage those bastards did to the City. They’re evil fuckers and if you ask me it’s born into ‘em. Look, she had no qualms about copping off with poor old Reg Chisholm did she?’

‘It’s hardly the same as murdering loads of Jewish people is it?’

‘Even so. I don’t want you seeing her anymore.’

Lizzie remained quiet but inside she was seething. She did not see what right Digger had to tell her whom she could and couldn’t see. She and Lyn had been friends for some time now and with

no family around, she realised how important friends were. But she had chosen to make Digger her husband and as soon as they were married he would have a say in what she did. But she had no intention of dropping Lyn, even if it meant they had to meet in secret.

She got home later that day to find Bertie working on some songs at the piano he'd bought. Lizzie then got a shock when she discovered Lyn sitting on the sofa, sucking hard on a cigarette and clutching a big glass of whisky.

'Lyn I'm so sorry,' she gushed, rushing to her side.

'Did you get photographed as you came in?'

'I didn't notice.'

'Well they were hanging around earlier on. They know I'm here.'

Bertie left his piano and came to join them on the sofa, reaching out and taking hold of Lizzie's left hand.

'Let me see. Let me see.'

The engagement ring. Lizzie had almost forgotten about it. Lyn had become her bigger priority.

'Oh darling it's beautiful,' he cooed. 'He *did* give you a big one.'

Lizzie laughed at the innuendo and pulled her hand away. Digger was a sore subject at that present time.

'We'll talk about it later,' she said. 'I'm more worried about Lyn.'

'Don't worry about me,' she smiled bravely. 'I'll weather the storm.'

'I can't believe they're blaming you for what your father done. How did they find out about you?'

'I don't know. I can only presume one of my father's enemies is here in England and they spotted me in the paper or something. But I'm just so angry. My father was a hero. He hated what the Nazi's were doing and that's why he left and came to England. He had to pretend to be

Austrian and when I went to school he registered me as Lyn Beckford so no one would know I was German. I don't even consider myself German.'

'You've got to let the papers know this,' Lizzie urged. 'We've got to help you.'

'No one's going to want to help me Lizzie,' she sighed. 'I'm finished.'

Tenacious as ever, Lizzie refused to give up on her dear friend and could only think of one person who might be able to help - Simeon. He knew loads of journalists, writers and poets. Fortunately for her they were due to meet in a pub the next day to discuss rehearsals for the play, which was opening in Oxford on July 27<sup>th</sup>. In typical Simeon fashion, he chose a run down pub in Ladbroke Grove. It was filled with young black men talking in their own patois and the few white patrons segregated themselves in a corner, playing dominoes and throwing dirty looks at their new neighbours. When Lizzie walked in, every head in the room turned and in her modesty, she thought it was because they recognised her from her pictures with Digger. Not merely because she was a beautiful young woman.

Simeon sat in a corner by himself nursing a pint of Guinness and unlike any other man she'd ever known, made no offer to buy her a drink. She had to get her own gin and tonic and rather than feel insulted, it rather impressed her that he was treating her as an equal.

'Congratulations on your partner's success,' he said as she sat down beside him.

'Fiancé,' she corrected, showing him the ring. He expressed little interest and carried on with his drink.

'Rehearsals start tomorrow at Langley Hall in Gower Street. I want you there for nine o'clock. Will you be able to do that?'

'Of course I will. I'm really looking forward to it.'

'And don't expect any preferential treatment just because you're marrying the Heavyweight Champion of the world. Boxing is a cruel sport and I don't want to hear about it.'

'I see,' she replied, feeling chastised, wondering if this dour man ever got excited or happy about anything. She asked herself why she was even considering asking him this favour.



‘Simeon would you consider doing something for me?’ she approached.

‘Umm?’

‘A very good friend of mine, she’s a budding actress and she’s run into a spot of bother. It turns out her father is a German, and...’

‘Oh not that dreadful Lyn Beckford creature,’ he winced. ‘I’ve had the misfortune of reading about her.’

‘But she’s not dreadful. Okay, what she did with Reg Chisholm was wrong, but this has got nothing to do with her. It’s about what her dad did twenty years ago. Should she be punished for that?’

‘What do you expect me to do about it?’

‘You know a lot of journalists. I was wondering if one of them could do an interview with Lyn, let her tell her side of the story.’

He laughed in response, his spluttering causing the foam on his drink to fly out everywhere, just narrowly missing Lizzie. She felt indignant at his contempt and was close to telling him where he could stick his play.

‘I don’t appreciate being laughed at,’ she pouted. ‘I only wanted to help my friend.’

‘I can just see my comrades in the Communist Party welcoming me after helping a Nazi. Are you mad Lizzie?’

‘But *she* isn’t a Nazi. She’s just an innocent girl whose father did something terrible. But he fled Germany before the real horror started; he hated what Hitler was doing. Surely he should be commended for doing that. I thought you believed in helping the underdog. The press are writing horrendous things about her that aren’t even true and if this carries on she’s going to end up either doing something silly to herself or else spending her life in exile for something she hasn’t even done.’

‘Okay okay,’ he sighed. ‘An old girlfriend works for the News of the World. I’ll see what I can do. I’m not promising anything.’

‘Thank you Simeon,’ she squealed, throwing her arms around his neck. ‘It’s the biggest favour you could do me.’

Lizzie returned home feeling pretty bucked with herself, wanting to share her accomplishments with Bertie. She was a little shocked to discover the tiny flat was packed to the rafters. Bertie was sitting at the piano, Lyn by the window, still wearing her scarf and dark glasses, puffing away on a cigarette. Manny and Digger sat on the sofa like a pair of statues. The atmosphere was dreadful and Lizzie wished she’d stayed in the pub with Simeon.

‘Where have you been?’ Digger barked.

‘I met with Simeon. We were discussing rehearsals.’

‘I had a reception at Hackney Town Hall and you missed it. How stupid did I look? Sitting there without me bride-to-be.’

‘I forgot, I’m sorry. But I’ve fantastic news.’ She looked to Lyn. ‘Simeon’s friend works on the *News of the World* and he’s going to ask her if she could do a piece on you. Telling your side of the story.’

Before Lyn could reply, Digger shot up, his face reddening with rage.

‘I thought I told you not to bother with her anymore.’

‘You don’t own me Digger. Lyn’s my friend.’

‘Digger’s right,’ Manny chipped in. ‘I don’t know what she’s doing here.’

‘Because *I* invited her!’ Bertie retorted. ‘She’s my guest and she can stay here for as long as she needs.’

‘Well I don’t want the girl photographed with her, not now.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Lizzie asked.

He looked up at her, that mean glint never leaving his eyes.

‘She’s lost the part in ‘She Who Dare Not Speak’. I want you to go for it.’

‘Me! I’m too young to play a part like that.’

‘You come across as older than seventeen. You’d be better than her anyway. You’ve got a vulnerability about you.’

‘Will you stop talking about me as if I’m not here?’ Lyn spat.

‘I can’t do it,’ Lizzie protested. ‘That would be stealing a role from under my friend’s nose.’

‘You’re not stealing it because it’s not hers anymore,’ Manny snapped.

‘Do it Lizzie,’ Lyn urged. ‘If you don’t, Diana Dors will.’

‘But if we clear your name...’

‘Do you think I’d want to work for that horrid little man again?’ she asked, shooting venom at Manny. ‘Please darling, take it for me. You’re beautiful and talented. You deserve to be a star.’

Lizzie looked at Bertie.

‘What do you think?’

‘I think you should take it sweetheart. And as soon as you make enough money, find another agent.’

Manny got up from his seat, sticking his hands in his pockets and shuffling towards the door.

‘I don’t have to take this,’ he grouched. ‘Come to my office on the thirteenth. The casting director will be there.’

He walked out and the atmosphere lightened. Digger took hold of Lizzie’s hand and led her outside, shutting the living room door behind him.

‘Why didn’t you ask me what I thought?’ he hissed.

‘I thought you’d support me whatever I chose,’ she answered, feeling just a little scared of him. She was seeing a different side to him more and more these days, and it was one she didn’t like. Despite his money and success, deep down he was no different from all those dockers from

Dingle Street who would come home from the pub on a Sunday and knock six bells out of their wife just because their roast dinner had gone cold.

‘Well in future don’t assume anything. Now get your glad rags on, we’ve got an interview with The Daily Mirror at the Dorchester this evening.’

## **Chapter 13**

**August 1958**

Lizzie couldn’t think of anywhere she would rather be - stretched out on a blanket on the pebbled beach at Brighton, resplendent in a red bikini with the sun beating down on her. She couldn’t believe she was being paid to be here. This was her second and last night in Brighton and her very last night of touring with ‘Our Lady of Grafton Street’. The play had been a phenomenal success in every town they had visited, and the reviews in the papers had been so complementary there were whispers about it transferring to the West End. Lizzie hoped that if it did happen, Simeon would consider her for the part. She would have finished filming ‘She Who Dare Not Speak’ by then and could dedicate herself to it.

In the six weeks she’d been away from home, Lizzie had changed. Most of the Company she was touring with were much older and experienced than her and taught her things she’d had no prior knowledge of. They were a political bunch and she found out about the Soviet Union and Cuba, and when they included her in conversations and debates, she realised she got far more of a buzz from this than being just a dolly bird on Digger’s arm.

But for now she was concentrating on her tan, soaking up the rays with Annette Seaton, the actress who played her older sister. She was a curvy brunette of twenty-four and the two of them were receiving a lot of male attention - especially the teenage Teddy Boys who’d come to the fun fair. Lizzie laughed to herself when she thought about their reaction if they discovered she was engaged to the Heavyweight Champion of the World!

When they heard the heavy crunch of footsteps on the pebbles they assumed it was one of the boys running to speak to them, and Lizzie was bracing herself to give them short shrift. She

opened her eyes and raised her head, surprised to see that it was Kenneth, the young stage manager from the theatre. His face red and sweaty, it looked as if he had been running for ages.

‘What is it?’ she asked.

‘The theatre,’ he puffed. ‘I’ve been looking for you everywhere. It’s the theatre.’

‘What about it?’ snapped Annette.

‘It’s burnt down.’

‘What?’ both girls exclaimed at once.

‘It’s burnt down. Come, now.’

The girls threw on their clothes and followed the fraught young man all along the sea front to the Fortune Theatre. The acrid smell of smoke hit their noses before they saw anything, and when they did finally reach the road, they found a crowd of people gathered to watch the firemen hosing down the once majestic building. It was now a blackened shell with wisps of smoke still emerging from what used to be the roof. Simeon was standing on the other side of the road with a couple of the other cast members. Lizzie joined them, laying her hand upon Simeon’s shoulder.

‘What happened?’ she asked.

‘I got a phone call from the manager this morning,’ he said. ‘We came straight down. They think one of the cleaners dropped a cigarette or something. I can’t believe it. Our final night here.’

‘What’s going to happen?’ asked Annette.

Simeon sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

‘I guess we’re going home early.’

With heavy hearts, everyone returned to the boarding house to collect their things and go home. It was too late to find an alternative venue for the final performance, so the whole tour was now over. Lizzie felt bereaved in some ways and although she was looking forward to going home and seeing Bertie and Digger and her other friends, she knew she would miss the buzz of

performing on stage every night; taking a bow; hearing the applause of the audience. It all made her realise she was born to act. After all, it was what she did every day.

She took the train back to London with Annette. When she got off at Victoria there was no one to greet her because no one knew she was coming back early. It didn't take long for a man to offer to carry her case and walk her to the taxi rank. It seemed somehow strange to be back in London. She wondered if she should take the cab over to Hackney where no doubt Digger was training. But she couldn't be bothered. She'd rather go home and catch up with Bertie.

In the cab on the short journey back to Pimlico, Lizzie wondered what she was going to do with her spare month before she started filming. She'd left the Carlton so couldn't go to work. Maybe they'd let her do a few shifts down at the Pussycat Club or she could help Lyn move into her new flat. The interview with the *News of the World* had had surprising results. Not only had the British public come round to Lyn, understanding that her father had turned his back on the past and his crimes and that none of it was anything to do with her; they had also been impressed with her wit and common sense and on the back of this she'd been offered a column in *Women's Life* magazine as an agony aunt. Her dreams of acting fame looked to have bore no fruit, but journalism was beckoning instead. With her column came a tidy wage – enough for her to rent a flat in West Kensington. She'd split up with Mario and could come and go as she pleased, and in some ways Lizzie envied her.

She arrived home and was surprised to find Digger's Rolls Royce parked outside the house. She wondered what he was doing there when he thought she wasn't due home until the next day. He and Bertie got on very well and she could only presume he was keeping her friend company for a while – Bertie always did need an audience.

She deliberately banged her case up the stairs, hoping one of them would hear her struggle and come out and help. This did not happen however and by the time she got to the top, sweat was pouring down her face, her mascara running into her eyes. Entering the flat she was expecting to hear chatter, but instead was met with silence and she wondered if they'd gone to the pub. She dragged the case along to her room, deciding she would unpack later.

Noticing Bertie's door ajar, she was alerted – Bertie had a thing about making sure all doors were shut when he went out. She pushed it open and at that moment all time and motion ceased.

She swayed a little, convinced she was seeing things and everything that had happened today was a dream, and in a minute she'd wake up and discover she was still on Brighton Beach. That couldn't be her beloved Bertie in bed, naked, asleep and wrapped up in the arms of an equally naked Digger – her fiancé, their clothes strewn around the room as if ripped off in the heat of passion. It was seeing this that made the tortured cry come from her mouth and she collapsed to her knees. Both men woke on hearing this and all she heard was Bertie shriek her name

Digger got out of bed and rushed to her, trying to comfort her as she curled into a ball, sobbing. She flinched away from him, disgusted.

‘Lizzie it's not what you think,’ he pleaded. ‘Please don't be angry with me.’

She couldn't reply. The pain in her heart was so great it felt as though she was being strangled by her own body. What puzzled her more was that the pain wasn't caused by Digger cheating on her with another man. It was because it was had been with her wonderful Bertie who she loved so much.

‘Lizzie talk to me,’ Digger whined. ‘Please, it didn't mean anything.’

She managed to turn and look at him, seeing his pathetic bashed up face through the mist of her tears. She had never hated someone so much in her life. Not even Uncle George.

‘Get out,’ she hissed like an animal about to attack. ‘Get out and never come back.’

He did as he was told, scrambling around the room gathering his clothes, before scurrying out to get changed in the living room. Lizzie managed to pull herself together, standing up and wiping her eyes on her blouse, smearing mascara all over it. She looked and found Bertie sitting on the bed, his head in his hands, sobbing. A part of her would always love him, and hated to see him cry. She wanted to rush to him and hug him, but that was outweighed by the crushing disappointment she felt.

She walked to side of the bed and he looked up at her, eyes filled with sadness and self-loathing. How could he feel sorry for himself when he had ruined her life? Calmly and collectedly, she swung her hand round and slapped him hard across the cheek. He howled and gripped it, but did not protest, for he knew he deserved it.

‘Why did you do that to me Bertie?’ she cried. ‘Why him?’

‘I’m so ashamed,’ he said, looking down and shaking his head. ‘I hate myself so much. I let him seduce me.’

‘*He seduced you?*’

He raised his head, looking at her again, reaching out and gripping her arm, begging for mercy.

‘I swear, all the time you’ve been together he would make suggestions to me when we were alone but I shrugged it off. But it was the other night. I was lonely. Pierre’s in Paris, Digger turned up with some whiskey and got me drunk. I’m so sorry Lizzie.’

‘That was the other night. What’s he doing here today?’

‘He came back for more and I couldn’t say no. He’s very good at what he does.’

‘B-But he likes women,’ she frowned.

‘He likes both. He’s a greedy bastard.’

‘And why didn’t you tell me about him making passes at you before?’

‘Because I knew how much he meant to you. I just figured as long as I shrugged it off he’d eventually stop doing it.’

‘I can’t live with you anymore,’ she declared, more to herself than Bertie.

‘Lizzie no,’ he begged. ‘Stay with me. It’ll never happen again, I promise.’

‘No you’re right, it won’t happen again because I never want to see you again. I hate you.’

She turned and left him sobbing on the bed. She took her case and dragged it through the flat. Digger emerged from the living room, doing up his shirt.

‘Lizzie come here,’ he said.

She tried to ignore him, but with brute strength, he pulled her into the room, shutting the door behind him. He manoeuvred her over to the sofa and sat her down, sitting beside her. She



couldn't look at him; to look at him would remind her how much she wanted him. How she knew what Bertie meant when he said Digger was good at what he did.

'Lizzie I thought you were coming home tomorrow. I never wanted you to know about this side of me.'

'Are you queer?' she asked.

'No, I like men and women. If you hadn't been there that night at the match, I'd have probably cracked onto Bertie, he's gorgeous. But it's you I want to marry and spend the rest of my life with.'

'And you can promise that you'll never go near another man?'

'I swear.'

'Well that's too bad because I don't care any more. You've already broken my heart by seducing my best friend. You can't take anything else from me.'

She got up, twisting off the ring and throwing it at him.

'And you can have that back. Give it to your next lover.'

Digger realised he had lost a fight for the first time in his life and gave up arguing. He finished dressing and offered to carry Lizzie's case downstairs, which she allowed him to do. He then asked if he could give her a lift anywhere but she refused as she didn't want him to know where she was going. He drove off and Lizzie waited for a cab. One soon pulled up and as it did, she heard Bertie's window pull open. She looked round to find him hanging out, still naked and crying.

'Lizzie come back,' he pleaded. 'We can talk about it.'

She didn't respond. Just climbed into the taxi.

'Where to love?' asked the driver.

'West Kensington please,' she replied.

## Chapter 14

Lizzie was having the strangest dream. She was fifteen once again and back in Liverpool in the damp little room she shared with their Maureen. She was pregnant with Mary Ann and could feel her kicking, and kept running her hand over her stomach to stop her doing it. When she awoke, she was convinced she was back home and felt the most enormous relief to discover herself in her cosy bedroom in Lyn's flat, with its big window, yellow wallpaper and antique furniture. But her comfort didn't last long; the most horrendous wave of nausea hit her and she just made it to the toilet in the tiny bathroom, before being violently sick. It seemed to go on forever, draining her. Once finished, she collapsed against the bath, sobbing. She cried because this was the fourth morning it had happened and she knew exactly what it meant. She had been through this once before. She and Digger may have been history but he'd left her with a lasting legacy.

Lyn appeared in the bathroom door, swamped in her floral dressing gown, enjoying her first cigarette of the day.

'You're pregnant aren't you?' she asked flatly.

Lizzie nodded and started to sob again. Lyn rushed to her, helping her to her feet and leading her back into her bedroom, sitting her upon the bed, stroking her hair from her face.

'Is it Digger's?' she asked.

'Of course it is,' Lizzie cried. 'I haven't been with anyone else since him.'

'What are you going to do now?'

'I don't know.'

'Well you've got three choices. You get rid of it, you tell Digger and get him to marry you after all, or you have it adopted.'

The last option made Lizzie's blood run cold. Having one child out there was bad enough, she couldn't cope with two.

'I can't have a baby, I'm starting a film in two weeks time.'

'If you married Digger you wouldn't need to work.'

‘I can’t spend my life with a man who I don’t love and can’t trust.’

‘So that leaves you with one choice then.’

Lizzie hated the thought of an abortion. She was Roman Catholic and saw it as nothing short of murder. Mary Ann had once been like whatever it was in her stomach and had grown to be a beautiful baby, and it seemed evil to snuff this one out before it even had the chance to become a human being. But she didn’t see what choice she had left.

‘Darling it won’t kill you, believe me. I’m an expert. My first time I was younger than you, just fifteen. I got knocked up by this cockney bastard who was doing his National Service in the local barracks in my village. I had to go and see this old woman who lived on the outskirts and I won’t lie, it was fucking awful. God knows what she flushed my fanny out with but for a week afterwards I could only piss standing up. But the second time, Reg paid for it. I went to see this wonderful doctor in Wigmore Street. I had a proper anaesthetic and stayed in the hospital overnight and felt absolutely fine afterwards.’

‘You didn’t feel guilty? About killing a baby?’

‘Now you’ve got to stop thinking like that. I thought like that after the first one. I ended up going doolally and locked myself in my room for a month. My parents thought they were going to have to put me in an asylum. The second one I just thought of it as a late period – an inconvenience. I still wept afterwards but I got over it.’

‘I’ll go to Hell.’

‘Darling you’ve had sex with two men out of wedlock, you used to live with a Sodomite; you’re best friends with me and I’m a total slut according to the papers. I think that downward ticket has already been booked!’

Lyn accompanied her to the clinic in Wigmore Street. It was a private practice and the brass nameplate outside just read ‘Dr D J Halliday’. However fancy it was, Lizzie couldn’t help but feel it was no different to old Kitty Lewis. She asked God why she’d got pregnant twice in such a short space of time. It wasn’t fair.

Dr Halliday was a fat, jolly, personable man, which surprised Lizzie given the nature of his work. He certainly didn't look like a murderer. Lyn waited outside while he examined Lizzie thoroughly. He estimated her to be between nine and twelve weeks pregnant. He could also tell that she had previously given birth.

'What happened to your other child?' he asked as he washed his hands and Lizzie got dressed.

'She was adopted out,' she replied quietly. 'But please don't tell Lyn. No one knows.'

'Whatever is said in here is confidential Miss Gallagher,' he said. 'It has to be in the nature of *my* work.'

They returned to the desk and he looked across at the broken young woman before him, smiling compassionately.

'Miss Gallagher.'

'Lizzie.'

'Lizzie. I can only imagine what you're feeling, and most of the women who pass through here are in pretty much the same state as you. But you're doing the kindest thing. You already have one child you have no contact with. Children are precious gifts that should be wanted, and believe me, one day you'll have another child. When the time's right. When you're married.'

'No one's going to want to marry me now,' she sniffed. 'I'm soiled goods.'

'Nonsense. You're a beautiful young woman who's made a couple of mistakes. You're human.'

'So when can this be done?'

'As soon as you want. It's a straightforward procedure. You'll have a general anaesthetic followed by a dilate and curettage. For an extra fee we can keep you in overnight and by the next morning you'll be right as rain. Just a heavy period for a few days, then everything will be back to normal.'

'How much will it cost?'

‘For the procedure alone, forty pounds. For the overnight stay, twenty-five pounds. In total sixty five pounds.’

Panic shot through Lizzie. She didn’t have that sort of money, and she suddenly she realised she had no option but to visit the local butcher and put her life in their hands.

‘I also ask that you sign a form, so that in the rare event something might go wrong, you don’t reveal the name of this clinic to any doctor. As you can understand, the service I provide is actually against the law and so I could be struck off, then girls like yourself would be forced to attend back street practices.’

‘I think I’m going to have to do that anyway,’ she uttered. ‘I can’t afford sixty five pounds.’

‘What about the father? Could he pay?’

She shook her head.

‘I don’t speak to him any more. What am I going to do?’

‘I would love to be able to offer you the service for free, but I have a living to make.’

‘I understand that. Thank you for your time anyway.’

Lizzie left the surgery, and the look of despair on her face was so obvious that Lyn knew straight away things hadn’t gone well. She threw down her magazine and rushed to her friend’s side.

‘What did he say?’ she asked.

‘It’s going to cost me sixty five pounds. I haven’t got that sort of money Lyn, I’m going to have to go somewhere that only charges a few guineas.’

‘You’ll do no such thing,’ Lyn shushed. ‘I still have some money left over from the story with the News of the World. I’ll help you out.’

‘I’ll pay you back as soon as I can. I promise.’

‘I know you will sweetheart. Now just go back in there and book your appointment. Let’s just get the thing out of you.’

The abortion was happening at the end of that week and every second until then seemed like an eternity to Lizzie. She spent all her days sitting on her bed, crying. Crying for Mary Ann, crying for the unborn baby she was about to kill, crying about her lost friendship with Bertie and crying because she wanted to know why she was so unlovable. Every man she met cheated on her, or lied to her or belonged to someone else. A part of her wished that she would never wake up from the anaesthetic on Friday, and she could die along with her baby. For a fleeting moment, she contemplated ending it all anyway. It seemed she had little to live for; not even eighteen and yet with a daughter somewhere out there, and another baby about to be flushed down the toilet. Death would be a welcome release.

She got as far as taking Lyn's tranquillisers out of the bathroom cabinet, and sat on the edge of the bath for ages, staring at them. She wondered who would miss her if she died. Not her family, to them she died years ago. Lyn? She had plenty of other friends. But there was no one else. Except Mary Ann, and she didn't even know her birth mother existed. But one day she might want to find out the truth, and Lizzie couldn't bear the thought of her daughter discovering her mother had killed herself because she couldn't face rectifying a stupid mistake she'd made. She put the tablets back into the cabinet and returned to her room. The tears continued to flow, but her heart started to harden. The pregnancy had to end. She didn't love Digger and she didn't want a part of him growing inside her. She hadn't loved Uncle George but Mary Ann was different. She was something beautiful born out of such horror.

This was the worst time in Lizzie's short life, and her Catholic guilt made her question what she had done to deserve such punishment. She expected nothing to ever go right in her life again. Abortion was the gravest sin and from now on she would have to give herself over to misery. She decided there and then that she would never smile again.

## **Chapter 15**

### **London – December 1958**

It was the wrap party for 'She Who Dare Not Speak' and everyone was in high spirits. It helped that Christmas was just six days away and the mince pies, mulled wine and champagne had put people in a good mood. The guest of honour was of course Lizzie, who had wowed the whole

ensemble with her professionalism and acting ability. She was a seventeen year old playing a woman of twenty-five, who commits murder and endures a lengthy court case to protest her innocence. People were already talking about awards and the like, but Lizzie just shrugged it off. She didn't want to appear ungrateful, but she was just looking forward to January, when she opened at the Shaftesbury Theatre for a twelve-week run of 'Our Lady of Grafton Street'. Simeon had had to fight tooth and nail to get a play that was sympathetic to the Republican cause, onto the West End stage. It went right to the top and in the end, Harold MacMillan, the Prime Minister, gave his permission for it to go ahead. It felt great for Lizzie to be in such a high profile production, and she couldn't wait to get started.

Everyone here did their best to talk to Lizzie, but she remained distracted, not knowing where Tony had got to. Tony Haigh played the boyfriend she murdered and they had hit it off straight away. He was her most high profile boyfriend yet. His father was Lord Edgar Haigh, one of the most influential actors of the twentieth century. His mother was Moira Hamilton, a screen goddess from the 1930s and his brother Mark was an up and coming actor in Hollywood. It seemed the whole family were talented, and sometimes the thought of being associated with them terrified Lizzie.

She was still looking out for him when Peggy Attenbury, the actress who played her mother, cornered her. The large battleaxe was a nightmare to work with, and Lizzie looked forward to the day when she wouldn't have to see her again.

'So what are you doing for Christmas?' the older woman asked, attempting to appear friendly, but all the time Lizzie was expecting some sort of sting to come.

'I'll probably lock myself in my flat with a big bottle of wine and the scripts for my play so I can learn my lines.'

'Oh yes, I forgot you were treading the boards. So hard to imagine a pretty little thing like you in a *serious* play. How did you ever manage to get the part?'

'By opening my legs of course,' Lizzie retorted, straight faced. 'Just how I've got everything in my life.'

Peggy's fat, wrinkled face paled and she struggled for something to say, which gave Lizzie a feeling of great satisfaction. Suddenly there was a gasp around the room and Lizzie looked to the door to find her boyfriend entering; his face painted ghostly white, his lips blue, dark circles around his eyes. He had made himself look like the corpse he played and Lizzie burst out laughing. It was his sense of humour that had attracted her in the first place. It also helped that he was tall, dark and handsome in that very upper class British way, but the fact that he made her laugh was what Lizzie liked best.

Everyone was in stitches at the sight of his outfit and Lizzie clapped as he joined her and kissed her on the cheek.

'You're mad,' she giggled.

'Well I'll be remembered most for playing a corpse,' he laughed in his deep, theatrical voice. 'I thought I might as well live up to the part.'

Peggy Attenbury cackled. Lizzie had forgotten she was even there.

'The corpse and the dolly bird. How amusing.'

She walked off and Lizzie and Tony just looked at each other, not even bothering to comment on this elderly woman, bitter and at the end of her career.

Tony gripped Lizzie by the shoulders and manoeuvred her over to a quieter side of the room as he stepped into the shadows, his make up looked even more eerie.

'Darling I wanted to talk to you,' he said eagerly. 'What are you doing for Christmas?'

'Rehearsing for the play I suppose. Lyn is spending it with her latest boyfriend.'

'Well my mother insists you spend it with us at the house in Chelsea.'

Lizzie froze with fear. She had not met one member of Tony's family and the thought of doing so made her feel faint.

'They'll love you darling,' he insisted. 'You'll get the attic room which is absolutely divine and you'll be fed and watered until you go pop. What do you say?'



‘W-Well yes I suppose,’ Lizzie uttered. ‘Thank you. Tell your mother I accept.’

Lizzie went to bed that night but couldn’t sleep. A dull pain gripped her lower stomach. It was like a period pain but she wasn’t due on for two weeks. Her cycle had returned to normal almost immediately after the abortion although they had become more painful. But this pain was out of the blue and it bothered her. She tried to take her mind off of it by thinking about Christmas. Wondering how little Lizzie Gallagher had suddenly turned into Elizabeth Maine, actress and special guest of theatrical royalty. It was so strange she almost laughed.

Her relationship with Tony was completely different to the one she’d had with Digger. That one had been based on sex and ended horribly. She couldn’t risk it again so she became a born again virgin. She’d lied to Tony and told him she didn’t believe in sex before marriage and instead of this putting him off, it made him see her as a proper lady and he treated her better than any man before had. But she hoped that meeting the parents wasn’t a way of introducing the subject of marriage. She liked Tony a lot but she wasn’t sure if she loved him enough to want to spend the rest of her life with him.

She thought back to the previous Christmas; spending it with Bertie and their misfit friends and the fun and laughter they’d enjoyed. She missed him so much and often thought about contacting him, but she never quite could. It was still so hard to forgive him for allowing Digger to seduce him. She knew how persuasive her former fiancé could be but Bertie should have remained loyal and true and said no. How could she trust him with any other boyfriend?

Christmas Eve soon came and Lizzie awoke with the urgent need to be sick. If it weren’t for the fact that she hadn’t had sex since the abortion, she’d think she was pregnant again. She couldn’t keep food down, her body temperature kept changing and the previous night, whilst eating dinner with Lyn, she’d developed the most terrible shivers. Lyn was positive she was coming down with flu, but Lizzie wasn’t sure. She didn’t have a cough or a cold. All she had was a shooting pain in her right hip.

Tony came to pick her up and laughed on seeing the size of the suitcase she’d packed just to spend three days with his parents. Lizzie didn’t reveal to him that she was terrified of wearing the wrong thing, so had packed practically every outfit she owned. She’d also had her hair freshly bleached; her eyebrows plucked, and had eaten so little she’d dropped half a stone. As

she sat in Tony's car, she found it hard to breathe, not through nerves, more like because it felt as though someone was sitting on her chest. She remained silent, not wanting to worry Tony, but she made a decision to go and see her GP once she was back home.

The Haigh house was off Kings Road and looked like a country mansion. Set back in its own grounds with big, iron gates keeping the public out, it brought home how successful they were. Edgar Haigh's story mirrored her own in more ways than Lizzie could ever reveal. The son of a Newcastle miner, he ran away to London at thirteen to escape being sent to work in the local pit and had been discovered whilst working as an usher at the Palladium by Frederick Moreton – the great actor of the age, and given a scholarship for RADA. He went on to become a contemporary of Olivier and now, because he was a Lord, everyone assumed he was upper class.

Edgar was the first one to greet them when they pulled up in the drive. The door opened and a small, brown dog emerged, behind him walked an unassuming elderly man who was the winner of four Oscars and who the Queen called 'The Greatest Actor of the Twentieth Century'.

'Hello Pa,' Tony smiled as they got out of the car. 'Pa this is Elizabeth Maine. Lizzie, this is my father.'

Lizzie froze in horror. This man was a Lord. Did she curtsy or bow or something? She took a chance on shaking his hand, nodding her head slightly.

'Pleased to meet you Lord Haigh,' she said quietly.

'Oh call me Ed!' he laughed. 'Lovely to meet you Lizzie. Come on in.'

The house was like a beautiful palace in the middle of Central London. It was decorated with opulent fabrics and ornaments collected on travels around the world. Edgar's Oscars were on a shelf in an alcove in the drawing room, and seeing them there, shining and gold, was a strange experience for Lizzie. Even stranger was when Moira Hamilton emerged from the kitchen at the back of the house. Ma Gallagher loved the films this woman had made. In every one she played the sultry foreigner. This was due to her red hair, cold blue eyes and the sort of angular bone structure usually seen on a man. Lizzie got swept up in the sort of characters she played and felt slightly scared of her.

'Darling,' she gushed in her deep, raspy voice, holding her arms out to Tony.

‘Hello mummy,’ he replied, embracing her. He then introduced Lizzie. Moira’s thin, bony hands gave a remarkably strong shake.

‘Darling you’re as white as a sheet,’ she declared. ‘Are you okay?’

‘I’m fine thank you,’ Lizzie answered quietly. ‘Just a little tired.’

‘Well why don’t you go and have a lie down? I’ve put you and Tony in the blue room.’

‘Er mummy, Lizzie and I are staying in separate rooms,’ Tony said. ‘Can she have the attic room?’

Moira raised one of those perfectly sized eyebrows, while Edgar picked up the little dog and headed into the drawing room.

‘Go and make your young lady a drink,’ he said. ‘Your mother’s right, she does look tired.’

The kitchen was the size of the flat Lizzie used to share with Bertie and had every modern appliance known to man, the likes of which Lizzie had only ever seen in American films. Tony pulled out a chair for her at a big, light wood table and she sat down.

‘Tea or coffee?’ he asked.

‘Tea please,’ she replied, although she felt so unwell, all she truly wanted was a couple of painkillers and a lie down. But she remained silent and let Tony put a light under the kettle on the hob.

‘Mummy didn’t mean to make assumptions,’ he said quietly. ‘She’s rather modern and believes that couples should sleep together if they want to. I know you don’t agree.’

‘I’m not some sort of prude,’ she protested. ‘It’s just not for me.’

He finished lighting the gas and came to join her, sitting opposite her and grasping her hands.

‘I know that darling and I think it’s wonderful, although there are nights it drives me crazy. I kiss you goodnight and you leave me wanting so much more. Didn’t that brute of a boxer feel the same?’

Lizzie blushed and looked down, always ashamed when Tony mentioned Digger. Ashamed because of all that had happened and yet he had no idea.

‘Yes,’ she lied. ‘That was why we split up. He wasn’t prepared to wait.’

‘Well it was his loss,’ he smiled, leaning forward and kissing her on the nose. ‘I think you’re worth waiting for.’

Later in the day they settled down to a late lunch and as expected of an actor, Edgar held court, enthralling Lizzie with his stories of working with all the Hollywood greats. She listened in awe about the people she’d only ever seen in movies or posters on her wall. Edgar Haigh was like the father she’d always dreamt of - big, jolly and not at all pretentious. Moira she found slightly different. Throughout the meal she sat next to Lizzie and spent most of her time examining the young girl out the corner of her eye. Lizzie realised that her boyfriend’s mother hadn’t particularly been acting when portraying rather offbeat, scary women.

It wasn’t just Moira’s attention that was stopping Lizzie from eating; it was because she felt so sick that her mind was swimming. The room kept changing colour and she was aware she was shaking as she held her knife and fork.

‘Are you alright young Elizabeth?’ Edgar enquired. ‘You look awfully pale.’

‘I think I might be coming down with flu,’ she replied. ‘Would you mind if I had a lie down?’

‘Of course not. Tony, show her up to the attic room.’

The room was small and cosy, with yellow wallpaper and matching curtains - the type of bedroom Lizzie used to dream of when she was a small girl. A French Empire bed had been made up for her with lace covers and at the washstand items such as soap and bath salts had been left. Tony helped her off with her shoes and she got into bed, the room swimming as if she were really drunk. She looked at him through tear-filled eyes.

‘I’m so sorry,’ she winced. ‘If I have the flu I’ll go home.’

‘You’ll do no such thing,’ he replied, tucking her in. ‘You’ll stay here until you’re better. You’re part of the family now.’

Lizzie slept for a few hours and when she woke, was so thirsty her throat felt as if it had been cut. She desperately needed water and got out of bed, regretting it immediately as her legs gave way. The pain in her lower stomach was now so gripping it felt as though something was going to burst. She went downstairs, one at a time and sighed inwardly on finding Moira in the kitchen, standing at the open back door, smoking a cigarette. Lizzie wondered if she could make it to the sink without the woman noticing, but she had no chance. Moira was like one of those animals that were aware of the presence of prey, no matter how much they disguised themselves. She shot round and joined Lizzie at the sink, her body a little too close for comfort.

‘I thought all that virginity nonsense was becoming unfashionable,’ she said.

‘What do you mean?’ Lizzie asked, gritting her teeth through the pain.

‘You and Tony. What’s the matter with my son? I’d sleep with him if I were his girlfriend.’

Lizzie found this a strange thing for a mother to say and just wanted to get away from her. Moira carried on, relentless.

‘I’ve met your type before Lizzie. Driving men wild with your pouting and your sexy poses. But when it comes to it you prefer something...different.’

To Lizzie’s mortification, Moira reached out and ran her hand lightly over her cheek, her fingers deftly fluttering over her neck and down her shoulder, then taking in the curve of her breast. It took a moment for realisation to sink in. The pain in Lizzie’s stomach was now crippling, causing her to cry out. Gradually the world became a blur and faded away and then everything went black.

The next time Lizzie opened her eyes they were staring up at a stark, white ceiling. There were lots of noises and a smell...disinfectant. Our Lady’s. She was back in the mother and baby home. It had all been a dream. She still had Mary Ann. She could run away with her.

There was a voice.

‘Well what a relief to see those beautiful eyes.’

Lizzie looked to where the sound was coming from. A plump, young nurse was standing by the bed with a temperature chart in her hand.

‘How are you feeling?’ she asked in her singsong Irish accent.

‘Thirsty,’ Lizzie croaked, realising she was in a hospital. ‘What hospital is this?’

‘St. Stephen’s, gorgeous. Now you just rest. I’ll go and fetch you some water and see if Doctor Owen is about.’

Lizzie’s last memory was of Moira Hamilton making a pass at her. Anything after that was gone. She wondered why she was in hospital. Surely it was only flu; the only cure for that was bed rest and plenty of fluids.

The young nurse returned clutching a glass of water and was accompanied by a tall, handsome man in a white coat. He looked very young to be a doctor. No more than thirty.

‘Hello Elizabeth,’ he said. ‘How are you?’

‘Very thirsty,’ she replied. The nurse passed her the water and left. The doctor pulled the curtain around Lizzie’s bed and sat down beside her, a concerned look upon his face. She became scared. Was he going to tell her she was dying?

‘Elizabeth have you any idea why you’re in here?’ he asked.

‘Flu?’

‘No. You had a very bad infection in one of your fallopian tubes, which had spread to your uterus and up into your bladder and kidneys – that’s why you’re so thirsty. We’ve given you antibiotics via an injection and will carry on with that until your temperature goes down. Unfortunately we had to remove the damaged fallopian tube.’

‘I don’t understand what you’re talking about.’

‘A woman has two tubes which carry eggs to the womb so they can be fertilised. One of these tubes became infected; so infected that it would have killed you had we kept it in. Unfortunately it does halve your fertility.’

‘I can’t have babies,’ she uttered.

‘It might be a little more difficult to get pregnant as you only have one tube now, and there has been some damage to your womb. Elizabeth I’ve seen cases like this before and I know what usually causes them.’

‘Yes?’

‘I need you to tell me who gave you an abortion.’

‘What abortion?’

‘You were left badly scarred internally, that was the cause of the infection. Whoever did it, did a pretty botched job. I need to know who he is so I can report him to the police.’

‘I can’t tell you. I’ll get into trouble.’

‘I take it he made you sign a worthless piece of paper saying you wouldn’t name him. Seeing as he’s breaking the law in the first place, he’s in no position to sue you. I need to know his name. Quite often these doctors have already been struck off and make a living by exploiting vulnerable young girls like you.’

‘Okay, it was a Doctor Halliday on Wigmore Street.’

‘Thank you Elizabeth. Now you get some rest. Nurse will be round with your tablets later.’

He went to get up, but Lizzie gripped his arm.

‘Doctor, you won’t tell my boyfriend will you? He thinks I’m a virgin.’

‘Lizzie whatever is said between you and I is strictly confidential. It’s up to you if you want to carry on living a lie.’

One more lie wasn’t going to make any difference to the other mountain of untruths she had piled up behind her. She sat and wept silently at the knowledge she may never have another baby. Without a shadow of a doubt, she knew this was God punishing her for having the abortion. Mary Ann was to be her only baby, and it was vital she got her back.

Tony arrived later that day clutching a big, bunch of flowers. He looked so relieved to see Lizzie awake and she knew the news she was going to give him would make him even happier.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked, kissing her on the lips. ‘What’s wrong with you?’

‘I’ve a kidney infection,’ she replied. ‘I’ll be fine.’

‘Well you’ve missed a wonderful Christmas. Mummy and Pa both send their love.’

‘Miss Christmas? What day is it?’

‘The twenty-sixth. It’s Boxing Day! You’ve been out for two days.’

‘My God. Please apologise to your parents.’

‘You’ve got nothing to apologise for. And I promise, as soon as you’re better I’m going to take you for a holiday. Get you ready for your West End debut.’

She took his hand, squeezing it. He was so sweet, that was why she’d decided to sleep with him. She couldn’t expect him to wait around forever and it wasn’t as though there was much chance of her having another accident.

‘And I promise, when we go away, we can have one room.’

It took a moment for the penny to drop but when it did, a big smile broke out across Tony’s face.

‘What’s made you change your mind?’ he asked.

‘Coming close to death I suppose. Life’s too short to deny yourself happiness and you make me happy Tony.’

‘I’m glad of that my darling,’ he smiled lovingly. ‘Because the feeling’s mutual.’

## **Chapter 16**

### **July 1959**

It was Lizzie’s eighteenth birthday and she was aggrieved that she was being forced to do something she didn’t want to do. It was the opening night of ‘Not a Penny Less’, the musical Bertie had co-written, and she wanted nothing to do with her former friend or his play. However, Tony’s cousin was one of the chorus girls and he insisted on going along to support her, and



Lizzie knew she couldn't refuse him, not when he had bought her the most exquisite diamond necklace for her birthday. She wore it with the white, silk dress she'd worn for the premiere for 'She Who Dare Not Speak', and even she had to admit she looked sensational.

Lizzie's career was going from strength to strength. The film was currently selling out cinemas and suddenly everyone wanted to know her name. After finishing in 'Our Lady of Grafton Street' she had gone straight into filming 'What a Palaver', a comedy based on the West End farces. It was set in a hospital and she'd played the Chief Surgeon's daughter, a temptress who was always trying to seduce the young doctors. Lizzie had got to work with James Robertson Justice, Margaret Rutherford and Dirk Bogarde and had felt like such an amateur in their company. The film had been enormous fun to make and she realised she enjoyed comedy a lot.

She sat at her dressing table, idly fiddling with her hair, trying to delay going to the theatre.

'Come on darling,' Tony called from the living room. 'What's wrong?'

Lizzie didn't respond. He knew nothing about what had happened with Bertie and Digger and she didn't want to talk about it.

Lyn rushed into the bedroom, a fraught look on her face, and sat down on the bed.

'Whatever's the matter with you?' she asked.

'I don't want to bump into Bertie,' Lizzie whispered. 'I'm still so angry with him.'

'Well don't talk to him. Although to be quite honest, I think you should. A part of you's been missing since you stopped being friends with Bertie.'

'But he betrayed me.'

'He helped you see Digger for what he really was. Was that so bad?'

'I know, but you know what happened afterwards. It was because of all that.'

'So the alternative would have been marriage to Digger, a baby, then you find out he's queer. Okay, Bertie was weak-willed but I bet he misses you like crazy and regrets the day he went anywhere near that lout.'

‘You sound as if you’re on his side.’

‘I’m on *your* side darling. But you’re clearly not happy without your beloved Bertie. Just think about it.’

Lizzie still found it difficult to leave the flat. She’d have rather had a quiet evening in with Tony; she could have cooked him dinner and watched the television. She wasn’t in the mood for facing the public and having people ask for autographs and wanting to take her picture. It was becoming an every day occurrence for her now but it still made her nervous, and tonight she was extra tense.

They arrived at Her Majesty’s Theatre, and as they got out of the car, it seemed a million and one flash bulbs started popping. Journalists were gathered on either side of the entrance and a gabble of voices were calling out for her and Tony. They had become a golden couple – he the handsome son of an acting legend and her the beautiful starlet. Despite shaking, Lizzie smiled and waved serenely, even posing when requested to. She wondered if anyone back home in Liverpool would get to see these pictures. Would the auld Biddies down Dingle Street find it strange how much Elizabeth Maine looked like Lizzie Gallagher, or would it not enter their head? After all *she* was dead.

They had a box close to the stage and Lizzie felt like a member of the Royal Family, sitting up high, looking down at the public. She couldn’t help but seek out Bertie. She didn’t even know if he was here tonight, he too suffered from terrible nerves, and this alone could cause him to remain at home and fret.

‘Darling I said we’d pop to the aftershow party and see Melody,’ Tony said. ‘Is that okay with you?’

‘Do we have to?’ she whined. She slipped her hand up his leg, hoping to distract him. ‘I thought we could go home and go to bed.’

He laughed out loud, pushing her hand away.

‘To think you were a prim little virgin when I met you! You’ll just have to wait. As delectable as you are, I have to show some family loyalty. Bed can wait.’

The musical was one of the best Lizzie had ever seen. It was set in a New York department store, and was based around a love story between the owner's son and one of the shopgirls. Lizzie knew immediately which songs Bertie had written. They were filled with innuendo and double entendres, and being reminded of his sense of humour made her miss him so much.

The party was held at the Connaught Rooms. It was being covered by *Harper's Bazaar* and Lizzie knew she and Tony would be the centre of attention. It was strange to see the expression on the faces of the young chorus girls who gazed upon her in awe. She was on the threshold of superstardom and exactly what they dreamt of being. Lizzie found this amazing given that she still felt like a nobody, and more to the point, a complete fraud, playing the part of someone who didn't exist.

Melody was a petite brunette who reminded Lizzie of an excitable puppy. As she talked, she looked up at Tony with eyes filled with admiration and it was obvious she had a big crush on her cousin. She commented on Lizzie's lovely hair and her dress and the beautiful necklace Tony had given her. Lizzie feigned interest in the conversation but all the time kept looking out for Bertie, and when she finally spotted him, she saw he was looking out for her. He sat in the corner, being talked at by some cast member; his eyes fixed instead on the young girl who used to be his best friend. Lizzie knew it was now or never and excused herself from Tony and Melody.

Her heart raced as she walked across the room, wondering what Bertie would say to her. Would he even talk to her? As she approached, she could see he looked equally scared and this made her feel better. He said something to the woman who was talking to him and she left. He stood up and Lizzie wanted to laugh at the bright, chequered jacket he wore when all the other men were dressed in tuxedos. She thought of his favourite song *Mad About The Boy* and recalled the opening line '*I met him at a party just a couple of years ago, he was rather over hearty and ridiculous*'. Those words could have been about him tonight.

'Hello Lizzie,' was all he said.

'Bertie,' she replied.

'I saw your film the other day. It's very good.'

‘Thanks.’

The atmosphere was so awkward. Lizzie wondered if she’d done the right thing in approaching him. She thought back to how easy conversation used to be between them, and realised it was the environment they were in that was making it difficult.

‘Do you want to go to the bar and have a drink?’ she offered. ‘We can’t really talk here.’

‘I’d love to,’ he gasped, his face brightening. ‘Let’s go.’

Lizzie made her way back over to Tony and explained that she had bumped into an old friend and they wanted to catch up in private. Amiable as ever, he said he hoped she had fun, and she left. She returned to Bertie, who stood looking terrified. A part of Lizzie wanted to slap him, the other part wanted to hug him and tell him how happy it made her to see him.

They went to the bar and although the few guests that were in there gave her second glances, they left her alone. She headed for a booth in the most private corner while Bertie went to get the drinks. He returned with Lizzie’s favourite – a gin and tonic, and she realised she hadn’t even had to ask him.

He sat opposite her in the booth and still found it hard to make eye contact.

‘Why did you do it Bertie?’ she asked, feeling there was no point in skating around the subject.

‘You could never understand Lizzie. You’re not a man. You don’t know what it’s like to be ruled by that horrid thing between your legs. Even an old fruit like me has to give in to temptation now and then. I swear I did not make any moves on him. Yes I always found him stunning, but he was yours and I love you and didn’t want to hurt you but he knew exactly what he was doing.’

‘I felt so humiliated Bertie. At the end of the day I know I’m better off without Digger. But you, I thought I could trust you more than anyone in the world.’

‘And you can. I swear I would never do anything like that to you again Lizzie. You don’t know how much I’ve missed you.’

‘And I’ve missed you but I’m scared Bertie. I’m scared that you’ll sleep with every man I go out with.’

‘I won’t, I swear. Anyway, I’m respectable now. I’m a married man.’

‘Married? Have you gone mad?’

‘No,’ he smiled, that cheekiness returning to his face. ‘It happened on New Years Eve. Damon...’

‘Damon?’

‘Oh of course, you don’t know about Damon do you? He’s in the chorus – nineteen, arse like a peach *and* he’s an American. He hasn’t got a pot to piss in but as soon as he and I hit it off, it was ‘goodbye Pierre’. Anyway, Damon’s older sister Ramona is also an actress and wants to make it on the English stage, but to be able to work here she needs a visa. So, we all got drunk on New Years Eve and yours truly came up with the idea of us getting married. So we did.’

‘Do you live with her?’ Lizzie frowned, jealous at the thought of Bertie having another important woman in his life.

‘Good God no. She’s shacked up with a Jamaican called Cornelius. I haven’t seen her since the wedding day.’

‘Wow, a lot *has* happened.’

‘And what about you? Dating one of the acting establishment. Are you happy with Tony?’

‘Very,’ she smiled. ‘He’s so different to Digger. He lets me make my own decisions and doesn’t bully me. The hilarious thing is he thinks he took my virginity away and he’s quite proud of the fact.’

Bertie let out a loud, mocking laugh but quickly checked himself. Their friendship was still too precarious for him to be making jokes at her expense.

‘Why on earth does he think that?’

Lizzie blushed; to admit the truth was painful, even if it was only Bertie.

‘I found out I was pregnant after I split up with Digger. I had an abortion. I hated myself so much afterwards I made a vow not to have sex again until I was married. I started going out with Tony and told him I didn’t believe in sex before marriage and he believed me. Then last Christmas I

fell ill and had to go into hospital. The abortion had left me damaged inside and I had to have bits and pieces cut away and it'll be really hard for me to get pregnant again, so I decided to start sleeping with Tony.

'Oh my poor Lizzie,' Bertie gushed, daring to reach out and grasp her arm. 'I wish I'd been there for you.'

'I've missed you so much Bertie,' she cried, a tear falling onto her cheek.

'Me too,' he replied, his bottom lip wavering. 'Can we put it all behind us?'

'Yes. But you must promise me that if a boyfriend ever makes a pass at you behind my back again, you'll tell me straight away.'

'Cross my heart and hope to die.'

Lizzie laughed.

'I would hug you but there might be pressmen lurking about and they'll think I'm cheating on Tony!'

## **Chapter 17**

### **March 1960**

It was supposed to be the most exciting night of Lizzie's life and as per usual, it was being spoilt by Manny. They were attending the Society of Film and Television Awards at the Grosvenor House Hotel and she was hotly tipped for an award for performance in 'She Who Dare Not Speak'. Manny was sulking and it didn't matter that under the table Tony had a firm grip on her hand, or that Lyn was fizzing with nervous energy and Bertie was being his usual, witty, sarcastic self – commenting on all the garments worn by the female guests. For Lizzie the atmosphere was ruined by her agent who sat with his arms across his chest, his bottom lip sticking out.

His gripe was that he wanted Lizzie to make a third 'What a Palaver' film. She had recently finished filming 'A Palaver Up The Amazon', playing a girl who lives in the jungle (Shepperton Studios) wearing only a fur bikini. She's captured by hunters and turned into a society lady. As always it had been great fun to make but Lizzie didn't want to become type-cast as the totty who wore very few clothes and got to say lines that were innocent and yet smutty at the same time. Instead she had accepted a role in 'St John's', a six-part television series set in a London Hospital. She was to play Nurse Helen Fitzgerald, a pretty young trainee who everyone confides in. There were no skimpy clothes or innuendo, just a chance for her to act. There was even talk of a second series being commissioned if it was successful. But the Palaver films paid more, and Manny was furious at the thought of taking a smaller cut.

The ceremony was underway, and Lizzie watched nervously as famous faces from stage and screen mounted the podium to accept their awards. She wondered what she could possibly say should she win. She was also worried about her appearance. She'd changed her image of late – her hair was now above her shoulder and hung in loose, sensual curls. She smoked more and found her voice was becoming raspier and posher. Sometimes, when she was on her own she would try and speak in a Scouse accent and it took more and more effort to do it. Every role she played was of the upper class girl with slightly loose morals and she began to believe that was who she was. Tony's family never questioned her on her background, but Moira would still give her leering looks when she had the chance, and Lizzie ensured she was never alone with her.

Her one time co-star, Dirk Bogarde took the stage, announcing that he was about to present the award for Best Actress and an excited gasp went around Lizzie's table. Manny finally spoke, leaning across the table and looking her straight in the eye.

'If you win I want the award displayed in my office.'

'Don't let him do it darling,' Bertie urged his friend. 'He'll only melt it down and sell the gold.'

'Are you saying that cos I'm Jewish?' Manny snapped.

'No, I'm saying it because you're a cunt.'

Suddenly from out of the arguing, Lyn jumped up in the air, screaming with joy, and then sat back down, throwing her arms around Lizzie.

‘Well done darling,’ she cried.

‘Have I won?’ Lizzie uttered.

‘Yes. Go up and get it.’

With wobbly legs, Lizzie walked the short distance to the stage to get the beautiful gold award. She felt as attached to this as she did Mary Ann. It was *her* baby and Manny wasn’t getting his hands on it. She wasn’t quite nineteen and already an award-winning actress. Manny had played no part in this. If he had his way, every film she made would just involve her looking pretty and acting stupid. There was only one person who had encouraged her to be a serious actress.

She took to the podium, holding on tightly to her prize, trying to mask her shaking.

‘Thank you so much for this award,’ she began. ‘I would like to thank someone called Max Bowers. He worked with me on an obscure film called ‘Nightstalker’ and for some reason he thought I had talent and gave me the number of Hilary Costello – a wonderful actress and teacher to whom I owe my craft. I’d also like to dedicate this award to Tony, Lyn and Bertie who are always there for me.’

She left the stage to applause and returned to the bosom of her ‘family’. Everyone got up and hugged her – except Manny who just told her off for not thanking him. Lizzie couldn’t believe that in three years she had gone from being an unmarried mother from Liverpool to an award-winning actress. She had a wardrobe full of fancy ball gowns, she drove an MG – bought for her by Tony, and she was about to start work on a television series. It seemed unbelievable.

For once Tony seemed reticent about attending the party that was held afterwards for the winners. It was difficult for Lizzie to get out of it given that she was the star attraction and all the photographers and journalists present wanted to get a picture of her. She’d learned how to shine. Even on days when she felt low and longing for home, she could switch on that dazzling smile the newspapers loved so much. She was portrayed as the posh girl next door who was wildly sexy at the same time. Lizzie had no idea how she managed to keep this role up. The only person who knew her true identity was Bertie, and she sometimes wished she could tell the whole world; but that was impossible. It would simply ruin everything she had achieved and put her back to square one.



Tony finally managed to whisk her away at one a.m., giving her his heavy woollen coat to wear to protect her from the cold. Lizzie thought they'd get a cab straight home but Tony said he wanted to go for a walk as there was something he had to get off his chest. In typical Lizzie fashion, she immediately thought the worst, positive he was going to shout at her for dedicating her award to Max, or finish with her because someone told him that she hadn't really been a virgin when they met. She couldn't bear to lose Tony. She wasn't even sure she was in love with him, but he was kind and dependable and had no side to him. He'd restored her faith in men and she was scared that he was about to destroy that once more.

They ended up in Wardour Street, in an all-night café where no one recognised her. The queer looks they got from the other patrons was because they were two well-dressed, young white people choosing to drink tea in an establishment where the customers were elderly Chinese men playing mah-jong. Lizzie realised she'd left her award back at the hotel. She hoped Bertie would snatch it back off Manny.

'I'm sorry to take you away from your big night,' Tony said, sipping his hot, sweet tea. 'But I needed to speak to you alone.'

'Okay.'

'David Dundon took me to lunch last week darling.'

'You never mentioned that!' she gasped. David Dundon was one of the most famous directors in the world – famed for making huge epics.

'I didn't tell you because I needed to digest his request. But the thing is, he's making a film about a fictional battle in the Boer War.'

Lizzie was flummoxed.

'The Boer War?'

He laughed and reached out, stroking her face.

'Oh my poppet I do love you. I won't go into details but it was a war between the Dutch and us over South Africa back in the last century. Well, David's making a film about a Dutch army

officer who ends up helping the English and becomes a hero – and he wants me to play the officer.’

‘Darling that’s fantastic!’ she gasped. ‘A starring role!’

‘Yes. The trouble is, it means filming in South Africa between August and January with probably only a couple of trips home.’

‘Oh I see,’ was all Lizzie could say. She didn’t mind being separated from him, just as long as he remained faithful. She couldn’t cope with another man doing the dirty.

‘I’ve thought about it and thought about it and I will miss you so much, but I’ve got to do it. This is my first big chance at a starring role. I can finally prove myself and not always have to rely on being a Haigh. Please say you understand my darling.’

‘Of course I do,’ she smiled. ‘Of course you must go, but I’ll miss you.’

‘And I’ll miss you too. I’m just so worried you’ll get lonely and fall into the arms of some unscrupulous actor who seduces you. So, I want to give you something that I hope will put men off.’

He reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out a ring box. Lizzie’s heart leapt into her mouth and she gave an audible gasp. She knew exactly what he was going to do and it was going to be the second proposal in her short life. She just hoped this one would turn out differently. He opened the box to reveal a beautiful cluster of white diamonds on a white gold band.

‘Lizzie will you marry me?’

She hesitated. Was she in love with him? Could she imagine spending the rest of her life with him? She then checked herself. How many men had she met who’d loved her and looked after her and treated her as an equal? None. She would be mad to let him go.

‘I’d love to,’ she replied.

A huge smile broke out across his handsome face and he shot across the table, scooping her up into his arms. The elderly Chinese men had seen what had happened and started clapping. Lizzie

took the ring from the box and tried it on her finger. It was the perfect fit. Everything Tony did was perfect.

‘Let’s marry when I come back from South Africa,’ he said. Lizzie just smiled in agreement, knowing full well she would have to come up with some excuse to postpone it until her twenty-first birthday. She also wondered if she should tell him it was doubtful she could have children. But she didn’t want to spoil the moment, so kept quiet for now.

Tony dropped her home but decided not to come in as he had an early morning meeting with David Dundon the next day. Lizzie entered the flat to find that Lyn had returned from the party but had gone to bed. They also had a house-guest – Bertie. He was fast asleep on the sofa, Lizzie’s award clasped tightly in his hand. Lizzie smiled at him and headed towards her bedroom, but, like an alert dog, Bertie sensed her and sat up.

‘Where did you get to?’ he yawned.

‘Tony wanted to talk to me on his own,’ she said, sitting beside him. ‘He wanted to give me this.’

She showed him the ring; Bertie gripped his cheeks and screeched.

‘Oh my darling Elizabeth! You’re going to marry into a dynasty.’

‘Am I doing the right thing Bertie? I’m not in love with him.’

‘Well how do you know that? Have you ever been in love before?’

‘I don’t think so. But there was someone...once. I don’t know, I’m just being silly. It’s just that he had a really devastating effect on me, even though I didn’t know him for very long. Silly stuff.’

‘Are you talking about Max Bowers?’

‘How did you know?’

‘I know you. But you’ve got to put him out of your mind Lizzie. He’s probably married and has an inbred kid on the way by now. You’re being offered marriage to a handsome, talented young

man who is mad about you. Marry him and you're a Haigh. No more 'What a Palaver' films for you. It's RSC all the way. And there are other benefits.'

'Like what?'

'You want Mary Ann back don't you? Well how could those witches in the convent refuse to tell you – soon to be Mrs Elizabeth Haigh – where your daughter is?'

'I can't do that! Tony thinks he's the only man I've ever slept with.'

'Tony loves you, he'll forgive you anything. Get that wedding ring on your finger and we'll start planning. Lizzie I swear this is the best thing that's ever happened to you.'

## **Chapter 18**

### **November 1960**

Lizzie was enjoying her first lie-in in three months. She'd been busy making 'Laura Hunter' – her last film for Manny. She'd sacked him in the summer, but as she'd already signed on the dotted line, was committed to the movie. She played a beautiful spy who foils a Russian plot to take over the world. There had been lots of stunts – all done by a very small man called Norman, who looked remarkably like her from a distance once he had donned a long, blonde wig and cat suit. Lizzie had, however, decided to shoot the skiing scenes herself and had flown to Switzerland to take a crash course. The ski chase was one of the biggest scenes and she had no intention of letting a stunt double do it. The payback had been a torn calf muscle and bruises all over her upper arms, but the scene looked fantastic.

Her new agent was called Maggie Calvin and today was their first proper meeting. She was an associate of Edgar and came highly recommended. They'd only met briefly and Lizzie had found her a million miles from Manny. She was tall and thin and looked like a lady and yet spoke with a broad Glaswegian accent. She wanted Lizzie to be taken seriously and had no objections to her appearing in a second series of 'St John's' (the reason she fell out with Manny). Lizzie was travelling over to her house in Hampstead today because she'd been sent a script for her to look at, a film which Maggie claimed was different to anything Lizzie had ever done before.

After a bath and some breakfast, Lizzie went to check the post and found there was a postcard from Tony. Lizzie would never admit it to anyone, but she was not missing her fiancé; in fact she'd enjoyed not having him around – which made her feel terrible, as Tony was one of the nicest men she had ever met. But instead of absence making the heart grow fonder, all it had done was made her realise she didn't love him and that he didn't deserve to spend the rest of his life with the wrong woman.

The postcard depicted a photograph of a zebra and as Lizzie turned it over, she could see he had crammed as much information in as possible – words seemed to cover the entire card.

*Darling Lizzie*

*Words cannot explain how much I'm missing you. We went into Johannesburg the other day and they were showing that awful Nightstalker film there and I went to see it just to get a glimpse of you. The film is going horribly wrong and it looks like March before we get home. I'll try and get home for a few days at Christmas. Write soon, send it to Charles and he'll forward it to me.*

*I love you*

*Tony*

Lizzie hadn't written to him once in the three months he'd been gone and she knew she should scribble something down to pass to his agent to send onto him. This entire romance just felt like another lie on top of all the other lies in her life, and she was growing steadily tired of it all. Tony deserved to be treated with a little respect, and after the disasters that had been Bobby and Digger, she realised decent boyfriends were thin on the ground.

Maggie Calvin had made a handsome wage from representing artists over the years. She lived in a huge farmhouse set in its own grounds in the middle of Hampstead. A swimming pool was at the front – covered by a sheet to protect it from the frost. Two very expensive cars were on the drive and Lizzie felt she had suddenly moved up into the major league. To be represented by someone like Maggie Calvin meant the acting world took you seriously.

She parked her little MG next to a huge, silver Bentley and felt dwarfed by it. Maggie came out to greet her and with that harsh voice, told her she was looking wonderful and gave her a very

ladylike kiss on both cheeks. She asked her housekeeper to bring them coffee and took Lizzie into the large drawing room from which she worked - mostly at the dining table by the window. She was also a wife and mother to two teenage sons and somehow this made her even less business-like and easier to talk to. This may have been her place of work but primarily it was her home.

‘You should feel very honoured young Lizzie,’ she smiled. ‘It usually takes an actress many years to start getting scripts sent to her. But this one has been marked out for you especially. Although I do believe you know the writer.’

‘Oh yes?’

‘Um, Max Bowers. He worked with you on Nightstalker I believe. Am I right in thinking you thanked him when you accepted your award?’

‘Yes I did,’ Lizzie uttered, the breath literally taken out of her body just by hearing his name. He hadn’t forgotten her after all. Maggie passed her the script and she glanced at it. It was entitled ‘A Girl of Our Times’.

‘It’s quite a departure for you Lizzie,’ Maggie explained. ‘I’m not even sure you’ll want to take it. Our Mr Bowers, despite being a Viscount seems to have quite the social conscience and has written and is directing this. It’s about a young cockney girl living on a housing estate whose husband runs off and leaves her to bring up two kids. She then falls for a bank robber who embroils her in his crime.’

‘Wow!’ Lizzie said. ‘I can do gritty though. I won the award for ‘She Who Dare Not Speak’ don’t forget.’

‘Exactly. I’m not Manny, I do trust your judgement.’

‘Could I meet with Max to discuss it?’

‘Of course. I’ll set something up. Why don’t you take it home and have a read through?’

Driving home, Lizzie metaphorically kicked herself. She’d only suggested meeting Max so she could see him again. He could have sent her the script for a Palaver film and she would have done the same thing. She asked herself why she was being so stupid. She’d last seen him two

years ago, when he'd been on the threshold of marriage, and now - more to the point - she was engaged to Tony. She considered turning the film down but she knew she couldn't. This was the sort of role she longed for. 'Laura Hunter' may have been fun, but she'd felt the whole thing just exploited her good looks and bubbly image. She worried about the accent though. She couldn't do cockney. Hilary Costello had tried until she was blue in the face but it just wouldn't happen. It was easier to speak like someone from the Home Counties than someone from Bow.

She considered calling Bertie and telling him her news but he was busy writing songs for a new variety programme that was going to be on the BBC of a Saturday night, so she felt it best not to disturb him. Instead she curled up on the sofa with a box of chocolates and the remainder of a bottle of wine she and Lyn had shared the night before. She blanked out the rest of the world and got down to reading the script. Two pages in and someone was called a 'bastard'; a woman a 'whore'; and Lizzie knew that if this did get made, it would end up with an X rating. Her character - Shirley Knight - was foul mouthed and lazy, but unlike in most films where girls like this would be portrayed as baddies, Shirley was the heroine. We got to feel sorry for her when she saw the life she had come from, with an alcoholic mother and a violent father. This was remarkably close to the world from which Lizzie really came and it was as if Max knew the truth about her without anyone ever telling him.

When the phone started ringing, she looked up and saw it was indeed dark outside. It was nearly five o'clock - she'd been there for several hours, enthralled by this shocking and provocative script. She leaned over and picked up the phone, feeling awfully rude for yawning.

'Keeping you up am I?' Maggie laughed.

'Do excuse me,' she blushed, even though Maggie couldn't see her. 'I need to learn some manners.'

'Your manners are perfect darling. Are you doing anything this evening?'

'Not that I'm aware of, no.'

'Okay, well I've spoken to Max Bowers and he's going to be at Wilson's until around nine o'clock and wondered if you'd like to join him.'

Lizzie's heart did that familiar flip.

‘Tonight?’

‘Yes. I can ring him back and tell him you can’t make it...’

‘No I can!’ she almost snapped. ‘Tell him I’ll be there.’

Lizzie’s racing heart seemed to have the effect of slowing down time and motion until she could see Max again. She didn’t know what she should wear or how to do her hair or how much make up to put on. Wilson’s was a private member’s club – women couldn’t join, only attend as guests, and it made her chuckle to think she was going there. She thought back to the times at the Carlton when guests would leave her bar and head off to Wilson’s for a late night drink, and here she was, about to go herself. She opted for a white Norman Hartnell two piece with a thick black belt and a black, velvet corsage. It looked tasteful and sophisticated and with the black stilettos she teamed it with, Lizzie felt mature and confident. That was until she thought of seeing Max and this made her feel weak.

The club was based in a townhouse just off Shaftesbury Avenue. A doorman greeted her, and the young man looked just a little star-struck to be meeting Elizabeth Maine. He kept his composure and let her in. Lizzie wasn’t sure what she was expecting, but it looked just like any other bar – albeit an upmarket one. The seats were leather Chesterfield; the air smelt of cigar smoke, the conversations hushed, and she noticed a few of the elderly patrons giving her admiring glances as she stood and looked for Max.

He was sitting at the back of the room, his long legs outstretched as he read *The Daily Mirror*. She laughed to herself, knowing he was reading this left-wing rag deliberately, just to annoy the very conservative gentleman who came here. Moving closer she noticed he was wearing glasses, something he hadn’t done before. They made him look even more intellectual and attractive, and it took all her strength to stop herself from running to him.

Sensing her, he put down the paper and smiled. Lizzie smiled back, feeling her body start to shake.

He stood up and leant down, kissing her on the cheek.

‘Lizzie, you look lovely,’ he said.



‘Thank you,’ she replied, sitting down.

He sat down with her and within moments a waiter was at their table.

‘What can I get you sir?’ he asked.

‘A gin and tonic and a dry bourbon please.’

The waiter made off and Lizzie couldn’t help but giggle, noticing some of the old men were still surveying her.

‘It’s very posh here isn’t it?’ she laughed.

‘You can say that again. I’m only a member by proxy because of my father. But I like to come here when I need some peace and quiet, and I thought we could talk privately.’

‘I’ve read the script. Thank you for thinking of me.’

He smiled that smile and it all came back to her; the way his eyes twinkled with affection, as though she meant so much to him.

‘How could I not offer it to you when you so kindly mentioned me in your speech?’

‘You were there?’

‘A friend was. He was quite bowled over by it. Most people in the industry didn’t know who I was up until then.’

‘Well I have a lot to thank you for. If it wasn’t for you I’d probably still be making terrible films like Nightstalker.’

‘It wasn’t that bad,’ he laughed. ‘Though I wasn’t surprised to discover your friend Lyn is really a German. She sings like someone trying to interpret a foreign language!’

Lizzie laughed a little too loudly then felt embarrassed, remembering where she was. The drinks arrived and she grabbed hers, drinking it down quickly, desperate for some Dutch courage. Though she didn’t know why Max made her so nervous – he was one of the most mild-mannered men she had ever encountered.

‘Do I hear correctly that your fiancé is in South Africa working with David Dundon?’

‘You do,’ she replied, not wishing to talk about Tony. ‘How did your wedding go?’

He furrowed his brow.

‘Wedding? Oh God yes, the last time you saw me I was due to marry Fiona. I couldn’t go through with it. You can’t marry someone just because they’re well bred. Love has got to be there somewhere.’

‘So you’re not married then?’

‘No.’

This news made Lizzie regret getting engaged to Tony all the more.

‘What happened with you and that boxer? I thought he was going to make an honest woman of you.’

Lizzie blushed slightly, but able to laugh about it now.

‘If you really must know, I caught him in bed with my friend Bertie.’

‘Bertie? As in *male* Bertie?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good God. What would his fans do if they found out he’s bisexual or homosexual or whatever he is?’

‘I did contemplate going to the papers, just out of spite.’

‘You’re above doing something like that Lizzie. Best to put it all behind you.’

‘At least I’ve made it back up with Bertie. I didn’t talk to him for ages.’

‘And Lyn? What is she doing now?’

‘She’s a journalist. She started off with an agony column in a woman’s magazine but her boss could see potential and sent her on a course. Now she’s a full-fledged reporter. She’s going to work on the Daily Mail next week.’

‘Good for her, even if she is going to work on a right-wing rag.’

Lizzie laughed.

‘Says he sitting in this right-wing establishment.’

He nodded in appreciation.

‘Do I get the feeling working with Simeon Hanson has politicised you?’

‘Oh yes,’ she smiled. ‘I may look like a dolly bird but in this chest beats the heart of a committed socialist.’

His eyes wandered down to where her heart was, or more to the point, the curve of her breast pushing against the prim suit.

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ he said softly.

Lizzie blushed and changed the subject.

‘So have you got anyone else in mind for the film?’

‘Well I’d like Tom Courtenay to play Ron, the boyfriend, but I don’t know yet. My main objective was getting you on board.’

‘Well I’d be an idiot to refuse. If I don’t start doing films like that soon, I’ll end up spending my life making rubbish like the last one I was in.’

‘And what was that?’

‘It’s called Laura Hunter and I play a spy who foils a Russian plot to take over the world. I spend most of my time rolling around wearing a cat suit, shooting a toy gun.’

Max laughed and sipped his drink.

‘You say it like it’s a bad thing.’

His flirting made Lizzie recoil back into her chair. She wished he wouldn't do it. She wanted him so much that to think he wanted her too made her head spin. She thought of Tony, thousands of miles away and it seemed so wrong to even contemplate being with another man.

'I'm sorry Lizzie,' Max retreated, sensing her discomfort. 'I wasn't being professional. So, can I let your agent know you'll be playing Shirley?'

'Definitely. I can't wait to begin.'

He drove her home in the car that matched her own, and all the while Lizzie kept worrying. There was something she had to tell him, something that might jeopardise him giving her the role. They reached her home and pulled up outside, and when Lizzie made no attempt to get out, Max realised she wanted to talk.

'You look worried Lizzie,' he said.

'There's something I haven't told you,' she whispered.

'What's that?'

'I can't do a cockney accent?'

'I'm sorry?'

'The film's set in London. I can't do a cockney accent. If it was set in Liverpool I'd be fine.'

'Oh yes, you're from Cheshire aren't you?'

'No I'm from Liverpool,' she blurted out, unable to lie to him. 'I'm not the daughter of a model and a racing driver. My father was a seaman who ran off when I was little and my mother raised me and my four brothers and sister on her own in a little house in Toxteth.'

'Are you joking?'

'No. Manny, my previous agent paid for me to have elocution lessons when I first started out.'

'So have you got family in Liverpool then?'

'Yes, but we don't get on. That's why I came to London, to get away from them.'

‘Why did you make up that story about coming from Cheshire?’

‘Because I thought I wouldn’t be taken seriously if people knew I was a Scouser.’

‘Talk to me in your proper voice then.’

Lizzie closed her eyes and tried to summon up the spirit of her former self. She thought of all the people back home; her family; Kit; the auld Biddies down her street.

‘It’s more difficult than I expected,’ she said, realising she’d said the whole sentence in her old accent. It was like hearing the voice of a stranger.

‘It’s very sexy,’ Max giggled. ‘You look like a lady but you sound like a fishwife.’

‘Eh you,’ she laughed, keeping it up.

‘Okay I’ll set it in Liverpool. If you help me re-write it.’

‘Stop pulling my leg Max,’ she scolded, returning to her new voice, the one that felt more comfortable.

‘I’m not. I want you to be in this film. Work with me Lizzie, help me re-write it and set it in Liverpool. You know the right expressions to use; the names of places....’

‘You’d do all that for me?’

‘Yes.’

‘In that case, let’s do it.’

They parted with a kiss on the cheek, and Lizzie floated into the house that she shared with Lyn. Being given the chance to work with Max was like a dream come true. It saddened her that they could never be anything but friends, but to be in his presence again was enough. He was going to come over to the house the next day and they were going to start work on the script. He also wanted to film it in Liverpool and this worried Lizzie. It would mean returning home and running the risk of bumping into people who thought she was dead. But then again, they would probably just think it a coincidence that she looked like Lizzie Gallagher.

She entered the flat and jumped out of her skin to find Bertie sitting on the sofa, waiting for her. He spent more time at this flat than he did the house he'd bought for himself in Paddington.

'How did you get in?' she asked.

'Lyn let me in as she was going out. She told me where you'd gone. I can't believe you've been reunited with Max Bowers.'

'I know,' she gushed, sitting beside him. 'What am I to do Bertie?'

'You do nothing. You're betrothed to Tony don't forget. I came round to give you my own wonderful news.'

'What's that?'

'I'm in love!' he exclaimed. 'In love in love in love.'

'Who with?'

'He's called Colin and he's a set designer for the show. Lizzie darling he's nothing like my usual type, he's fat and positively ugly. But when he looks at me, well I just melt inside.'

'Does he feel the same way about you?'

'Well he's asked me out on a date next week, so make of that what you will.'

'I really hope it works out for you Bertie,' she replied, then laughed. 'But just remember, you can't marry him, you're married to Ramona!'

'And you just remember that you're getting married to someone who loves you and will look after you. Don't blow all that by having it off with Max Bowers.'

## **Chapter 19**

### **Liverpool – February 1961**

Max was taking a big chance with 'A Girl of Our Times'. The only well known face was Lizzie's, everyone else came from a small repertory company in Liverpool and for a film with a

cast of unknowns to be successful, it had to be something quite extraordinary. Added pressure came from the fact that it was financed by his father, and if it bombed he faced family shame as well as damage to his own career. It was all very much a labour of love – in more ways than one.

For Lizzie this was the most devastating thing to happen to her since losing Mary Ann. Bobby, Digger, Tony – they all faded into oblivion when compared to Max. Working so closely with him for three months she had come to realise she was in love with him. Never before in her young life had she felt so passionately about someone. She loved everything about him; the way he laughed, the way he never got angry, the way he flirted with her and yet acknowledged her intelligence at the same time. The thought of seeing him every day kept her going, but next month Tony would return from South Africa and would expect her to start making wedding plans. She'd written to him explaining that she wanted to wait until next year when she was twenty-one, but he'd written back insisting it was fine. Tony wanted a big wedding and that would take over a year to plan anyway. All Lizzie could see it as was the thing to tear her away from her beloved Max.

For now Lizzie had to concentrate on making the film. The production company had hired the top two floors of the Adelphi Hotel for everyone to stay in, and when they were alone, Lizzie confided in Max that this was a big deal for her. As a child she and her siblings had seen the grand building close to Lime Street Station as the ultimate in luxury and would stand and stare at the grand ladies in their finery entering and leaving. Now Lizzie was a guest, and as the star of the film, she got the biggest suite – a huge room with Victorian wallpaper, a king-size bed, chairs, a sofa, and the adjacent bathroom had the biggest bath she had seen this side of New York. Max's room was directly opposite and she wondered what he would do if she sneaked over there one night. She didn't even have to ask herself, she knew exactly what would happen and it would make leaving him even more difficult.

On her first evening back in her home city, she gave an interview to a young reporter from the *Liverpool Echo*. A film being made around there was a rare occurrence and it had sparked a lot of interest. Lizzie sat demurely, lying through her teeth, pretending to be Elizabeth Maine who had only visited Liverpool a couple of times etcetera etcetera; in her head laughing at the thought of suddenly speaking in her true accent and seeing what reaction that would get.

The story was in the paper the next day, the headline reading '*Award winning actress chooses to make film in Liverpool*'. Lizzie read it as her driver took her to an abandoned prison just outside of the city, where she would be filming the final scenes, when Shirley is incarcerated for her crimes. The last role she'd had where she wore no make-up and had her hair scraped back was 'Our Lady of Grafton Street' – where everyone had complimented her on her Dublin accent. This time round the cast and crew were astounded by how convincingly she sounded like a Liverpudlian. Only she and Max knew the truth.

By the time they got back to the hotel Lizzie was exhausted and wanting nothing more than a long, hot bath before meeting Max for dinner down in the restaurant. She lay back in the rose scented bubbles and thought of a time when as a kid she would bathe once a fortnight at the municipal bath-house in scalding hot water with carbolic soap to wash with, all finished off with scratchy towels that took off a layer of her skin. Her ego boosted by her sense of achievement, she climbed out of the bath and as she stood drying herself, a knock came on the door. She cursed and grabbed the big, white fluffy robe the hotel had provided for her.

'Who is it?' she called out.

'Room service,' came the reply. She didn't recall requesting room service but could only guess they had come to change the towels or perhaps Max was surprising her with flowers. Tying the robe tight, she went to the heavy, wooden door and opened it. The sight of Uncle George standing there came like a physical blow, knocking her backwards. In four years he hadn't changed; he still seemed like a big, imposing monster with the coldest blue eyes she had ever seen. Without uttering a word, she tried to close the door but he stopped it, forcing his way into the room, slamming the door behind him. It was then that Lizzie screamed, trying to run past him but he was too quick, grabbing her around the waist and throwing her down onto the bed. He climbed on top of her, crushing her tiny frame. He clamped one of his huge hands over her mouth and Lizzie knew that however much she wriggled, she was powerless beneath him.

'I've waited for the day I could have you again you little bitch,' he hissed.

She clawed at his fingers, finally pushing them away from her mouth.

'How did you get in here?' she gasped, before he pushed her hands away and gagged her again.



‘Security,’ he said with a shake of the head. ‘Very lax, given a film star’s staying here. You may have changed your name and dyed yer hair but I recognised you the first time I saw you in the paper. Elizabeth Maine. Don’t make me laugh.’

She felt his free hand slipping down her body, pushing open the robe, moving down between her naked legs. She screamed from behind his hand, suddenly feeling as though all the years that had passed between now and their last encounter had melted away. The person she had become seemed like someone else. She was fifteen-year-old Lizzie Gallagher once more, the girl who was so frightened of her uncle she would submit to his perversions. She kicked and wriggled, but this just drove him on more. In a lightning move, he released her mouth and grasped her wrists, pinning them above her head, his mouth moving towards her, trying to kiss her. Just how he had the day Mary Ann was conceived.

There was a knock on the door, Lizzie was sure of it but George wasn’t aware – he was too busy biting and slurping at her neck. The knock came again, and a call.

‘Lizzie?’ It was Max. With all her strength, she lifted her head and screamed for help. George raised himself and looked at her, eyes filled with hatred, then hit her hard across the face. Dazed and confused, she was unaware of what happened next, except that there was a huge bang and suddenly from out of nowhere, a pair of hands appeared on George’s shoulders, physically lifting him off. She came round enough to witness Max punch her uncle in the face, before George pushed past him and ran out of the room. Max rushed to her and gathered her in his arms. The shock started to ebb away and the tears began to flow. She clung onto him, sobbing; terrified that George would return and try to kill them both.

‘I must call the police,’ Max insisted.

‘No!’ she cried. ‘Let him go.’

‘But Lizzie he was trying to rape you.’

She pulled away and looked up at him, but still holding on tightly.

‘Shut the door. I don’t want anyone knowing about this.’

Puzzled, Max did as he was told, and he commented that it was a miracle he hadn't broken the doorframe as he'd pushed it in. He rejoined Lizzie on the bed, taking her back in his arms and comforting her.

'Do you know him?' he asked.

'He's my uncle,' she whimpered.

'Your uncle?! But he was forcing himself on you?'

'Please don't tell anyone.'

'Lizzie I'm completely confused. You've got to explain what was going on.'

'He's done things to me since I was a child. I couldn't tell anyone because no one would believe me. He raped me when I was fifteen and I got pregnant. I still didn't tell mam he was the father.' She suddenly realised what she was saying. She was also aware that in her hysteria, she had reverted to her old voice.

Max eased her away and looked at her.

'You've got a child?' he asked softly.

She nodded, filled with shame. She started to sob once more.

'A little girl. Mam thought my best friend Kit was the father. She sent me away to a convent to have her and when she was born they let me keep her for six weeks, then they took her away from me. I haven't seen her since. When I came home my brother met me from the station and told me that mam had told everyone where we lived that I'd been killed, so I couldn't go home. Kit was coming down to London so I went with him. Uncle George has obviously seen through my new image and has been waiting for a chance to get me again.'

'Lizzie you've got to tell the police.'

'What's the point? Who would believe me? I don't want my name dragged through the papers and Mary Ann – my little girl, is nearly four now. I don't want her brought into it.'

'Do you know where she is?'

‘No. The nuns had her adopted.’

She looked up at him and he wiped away her tears with his thumbs.

‘I’ve only told Bertie the truth. No one else knows. Not even Lyn. It must remain a secret. I so ashamed.’

‘Lizzie, you’re Lizzie Gallagher....Elizabeth Maine, whatever you want to call yourself. You’re a beautiful, strong, talented woman and it doesn’t matter what happened in your past. I just wish I’d been here earlier to protect you. I swear, if I got my hands on that man again I’d kill him.’

‘I don’t deserve your kindness. I’m not a good person. I did something terrible.’

‘What happened to you wasn’t your fault. Your uncle forced himself on you, then you had your baby taken away. You were only a child yourself.’

‘I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about what happened afterwards. After I split up with Digger I found out I was pregnant again. I didn’t want to get back with him, I couldn’t trust him and I couldn’t bear to have another baby and have it adopted, so I went to see a doctor Lyn recommended.’ She couldn’t say any more; the shame burned so deeply within her and she wished she hadn’t started this outpouring. Max would hate her forever.

‘So you had an abortion?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she whispered. ‘But I got my punishment for it. It left me with a bad infection. I had to have half my insides taken away. I’ll probably find it hard to have another baby.’

‘Does Tony know this?’

She shook her head.

‘He thought I was a virgin when we met.’ She managed a sad laugh. ‘*He* thinks my father was a racing driver and my mother a model.’

‘Do you really want to marry a man who you feel you have to lie to?’

‘I can’t back out now, it would ruin my career.’

‘Lizzie you shouldn’t marry someone to maintain your career. You should marry because you’re in love.’

She looked down once more, the tears flowing freely, tears of regret for what had happened with Digger, the baby and Tony. It could have been all so different.

‘I fell in love with someone once,’ she said quietly. ‘Ridiculous as it may seem, I only knew him for a few days but he touched my life and I don’t think I ever recovered. But I couldn’t have him because I thought he was marrying someone else.’

He took her tiny hands within his and brought them to his lips, kissing them softly.

‘What would you say if he told you the reason he cancelled his wedding was because through meeting you, he found out what it was like to fall instantly in love with someone? That he hasn’t stopped thinking about you once in all that time and has looked for the first opportunity he could to find to see you again?’

She dared to look at him. He meant everything he said, she could see it in his eyes. There was nothing she could say to him, and for a moment she was just awed by the wonder of love. Compared to the other men she’d had – Bobby, Digger, Tony; Max was plain and ordinary, modest and intellectual, but to her he was the most beautiful person she had ever met.

‘Marry me Lizzie,’ he said,

‘What?’ she uttered convinced she was hearing things.

‘Marry me. I love you and I want you to be my wife.’

‘After everything I just told you?’

‘All I’ve heard is what a strong, wonderful person you are.’

‘But I might not be able to have babies.’

‘I don’t care. Let the family line go to my brother. I’m not interested.’

‘Are you serious?’

‘I’ve never been more serious in my life.’

Lizzie spontaneously burst into tears once more, this time tears of joy. She had just been given the chance to marry her beloved Max. How could she even think about refusing?

‘Yes,’ she sobbed. ‘Yes. I love you so much.’

She flung her arms around his neck and held him tightly. It felt so nice to be close to him, her body naked beneath the robe. His hand moved down her back to her waist and pressed her further against him and she knew what he wanted. She wanted it too, but they couldn’t, not yet. She pulled away.

‘Not yet Max,’ she said.

He frowned.

‘Am I going too fast?’

‘No of course not, I want you more than anything, but this hotel is crawling with people from the film. If they get wind that we’re sleeping together, it’ll be all over the papers and Tony will find out after everyone else does. All I ask of you is that we wait until Tony gets back next month and then once he knows, we’ll be free to do whatever we want.’

‘I guess so,’ he smiled. ‘I’ve got the rest of my life to have you.’

‘Exactly.’

‘But one request.’

‘Anything.’

‘As your husband to be I request I kiss you whilst no one else is looking.’

‘Well,’ she laughed, adopting an even posher accent than usual. ‘It would be awfully rude of me not to grant your request.’

He slipped his hands back around her waist and pulled her to him.

‘Come here Lady Bowers,’ he growled.

Lizzie kissed Max properly for the first time ever, and just how in silly fairy stories, a kiss from a prince awakens the princess from her slumber, or rescues her from some terrible fate, so did something awaken in Lizzie. She felt as though she had come home. With Max she was where she was meant to be, and whatever happened to them in the future, they'd be together forever.

## **Chapter 20**

Lizzie was glad once the exterior shots of the film were completed and she could head back down to London. The interiors were to be done at Shepperton and as far as she was concerned she never wanted to return to Liverpool again. Not that she had any need to; it made her head spin to think that on 7<sup>th</sup> July the next year, she would become Lady Elizabeth Bowers. Not that she'd ever get to use it, Max never referred to himself as Viscount Bowers and he preferred to mix with ordinary people than the aristocracy. He himself had loved Liverpool and would always get a saucy twinkle in his eyes when Lizzie spoke in her true accent. She could tell that this abstinence was driving him mad and she felt the same way but she remained firm, determined to do things properly. Tony was due back in two days time and he deserved the courtesy of being told before everyone else. The only person she'd confided in was Bertie – and after some initial sympathy for Tony, he became excited, deciding that becoming a Lady was even better than being a Haigh.

The thought of breaking Tony's heart terrified her. All her romantic life, she had been the one who got dumped, and she couldn't imagine inflicting that pain on someone as nice as him. But she had no choice. Max made her happier than anyone she'd ever met and she couldn't wait until they could go public with their love. He advised her to go and see Maggie as soon as she'd spoken to Tony, as she would be able to advise her on how to handle the press. Right at that moment Lizzie was the nation's sweetheart, but she could guarantee that once this story broke, that attitude would change. But with Max by her side, she didn't care.

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The day Tony was due back from South Africa, Lizzie spent the entire evening drinking wine to blank out her worries. Lyn was watching some awful programme on the television and couldn't

understand why her little friend was rooted to the sofa, clutching her knees and gulping down sauvignon like it was going out of fashion. By the time Lizzie went to bed she had a throbbing headache and just needed to sleep. However this wasn't to be, within moments of nodding off, the doorbell rang, the noise resonating through her. She buried her head under the pillow, hoping Lyn would see to it.

Listening in the dark, she heard Lyn's voice and a laugh – a man's laugh, and she realised who the visitor was. She sat up in bed, turning on her lamp and started to shake. There was a knock on the door and she uttered a quiet 'come in'.

The door opened and Tony walked in, looking like a completely different person. He'd lost weight and was deeply tanned. He also looked exhausted and Lizzie wondered if she should put off telling him until another day – when he felt better.

'Hello you,' he smiled, walking towards the bed. She could see he had a paper bag in his hand. He had brought her a present and she felt even worse.

'Tony,' she smiled and remained motionless when he sat on the bed and hugged her, kissing her on the cheek.

'I've woken you up darling, I'm sorry,' he said. 'But I got back this morning, had a sleep and just had to come over to see you.' He lifted the paper bag. 'I've bought you this.'

She took it from him and out of it pulled a wooden carving of a man holding a shield and a spear.

'It's a fertility symbol apparently,' Tony explained. 'So we can have lots of babies.'

'There isn't going to be a wedding,' she said, deciding it was now or never.

'What?' he frowned.

'There isn't going to be a wedding Tony.'

His brown face paled and he stood up, backing away slightly.

'Oh my God you've found out haven't you?'

Lizzie looked up at him, wondering what he was talking about.

‘I’m sorry?’ she asked.

‘I swear it meant nothing Lizzie,’ he pleaded. ‘It was New Year’s Eve, I was drunk...’

‘Y-You cheated on me?’

‘I thought you knew.’

‘How would I have found out? You were in South Africa on New Year’s Eve.’

‘It was Melody, my cousin. She came out to see me. It was a one-off, drunken thing. I thought she’d come home and told you because she felt guilty.’

‘I haven’t seen her. But I’m glad you did it because it makes me feel better about breaking up with you.’

He sat back down.

‘Why are you breaking up with me if it’s not about Melody?’

‘I was going to lie and tell you that I’d thought about it and decided I didn’t love you enough to spend the rest of my life with you, but seeing as you’ve done the dirty yourself I might as well be honest. I’ve met someone else...someone who I really do love.’

‘Who?’

‘He’s called Max and I met him several years ago.’

‘Max Bowers? The man you mentioned in your speech?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you been seeing him all the time we’ve been together?’

‘No. We met again when I started working on his film. Nothing has happened between us – I wanted to wait until I’d told you. But Max had asked me to marry him and I said yes.’

‘When you’re already engaged to me?’

She twisted off her ring and handed it to him.



‘Not any more.’

‘Lizzie have you lost your mind? I love you. Forget what happened with Melody. I want to marry you. You only fell for this other bloke because I was away. We can start again.’

‘I don’t want to start again Tony. I love Max like I’ve never loved anyone in my life. I’m sorry.’

‘I can’t believe this is happening. All I’ve been thinking of is getting home to you and seeing you again, and you do this to me.’

‘And I suppose you were going to tell me about Melody if I hadn’t have said anything?’

‘Melody was a mistake. And I know you Lizzie. I know this whole Max thing is a mistake too. You were lonely, that’s all.’

‘Tony I am in love with someone else and I don’t want to marry you. How many times do I have to tell you? Now please, just go.’

‘Lizzie don’t do this to me. You mean the world to me.’

‘Go.’

Without saying another word, he took the carving from her, got up off the bed and walked out of the door. Lizzie tried hard not to cry. She wasn’t in love with him but they’d shared some happy times, and she felt sad that he’d left her life. But at least she was free to love Max now.

It was an early spring day and Maggie Calvin was taking full advantage of the nice weather by having her morning tea on the patio. Lizzie felt like some sort of Victorian lady, sitting in the garden, surrounded by beautiful trees and plants whilst sipping Earl Grey. She told Maggie the whole story and like a daughter confessing to her mother, she feared her disapproval. Maggie sat nodding in contemplation, not giving anything away.

‘You realise Edgar’s going to put pressure on me to drop you?’ was the first thing she said.

‘And are you?’

‘No, because you’re a wonderful actress and a wonderful person. I’m going to do all I can to ensure you come up smelling of roses.’

‘That means a lot to me.’

‘So when are you and Max planning on getting married?’

‘Next July, just after my twenty-first birthday.’

‘Fabulous. Well what I would recommend is a bit of a gap before you announce your engagement.’

‘But I’m itching to tell people.’

‘But darling if you announce it now you’re going to be painted as some little slut who has met someone else and dumped the son of a national hero. What I suggest is you and Max keep it secret until say early June, then make an announcement.’

‘You mean not tell anyone at all?’

‘No one you can’t trust.’

‘How awful. I was hoping we could be together now.’

Maggie laughed, throwing her head back in that dramatic fashion.

‘What it is to be young in love. Wait until you’ve been married five years, you’ll be glad to see the back of him sometimes.’

Lizzie couldn’t imagine ever feeling that way about Max. After leaving Maggie she drove to Shepperton where he was filming scenes that didn’t involve her. When they were alone, she told him of Maggie’s plan and she could see the disappointment in his face. While it was all hush hush, spending the night together was out of the question, especially now she had broken up with Tony. Maggie was going to officially announce it, and the press would be tailing her to find out why.

She returned home to find Lyn in the kitchen hunched over her typewriter, busy finishing an article. Her friend had changed in recent years; she’d grown the peroxide blonde out and was now a brunette, she’d put on some weight and her voluptuousness had turned to fat. This hasn’t stopped men falling at her feet and she still had a different boyfriend each week. Lizzie decided to take a chance and tell her everything, hoping she could rely on her to be discreet.

‘So you’ve got to wait to try out the goods?’ Lyn frowned. ‘How fucking awful.’

‘I’ll live. I’m sure Max is worth waiting for.’

‘I can’t believe you’re going to be a Lady. Will I have to courtesy to you?’

‘Don’t be stupid, I’ll still be your Lizzie. Max doesn’t use his title anyway.’

‘I just wish I could do something to help you be together,’ she giggled. ‘In my experience, the quiet intellectual types are the best fucks.’

‘Lyn!’ Lizzie exclaimed, blushing. ‘That’s my future husband you’re talking about!’

The press ran Maggie’s statement on Friday but everyone at Shepperton was too polite to ask Lizzie why she’d split up with Tony. Or maybe it was just that some of them had seen the closeness between her and Max and had put two and two together. But seeing as he was the boss and she the star, they knew better than to express their suspicions in public. Lizzie felt very down about it all and was happy to see Bertie turn up, wielding some sandwiches and a bottle of lemonade. They had an indoor picnic in her dressing room and Bertie was full of talk about Colin. Lizzie felt a pang of jealousy. Even though their love was illegal, and could get them imprisoned, at least within their close circle they could be open; which was a luxury she and Max were not afforded.

‘Now darling, please tell me you’re not doing anything this weekend,’ Bertie said, mouth full of cheese and pickle sandwich.

‘No I’m not. I can hardly spend my time with my fiancé can I?’

‘Exactly. So, I was wondering if you could do your best friend the biggest favour.’

‘Yes?’

‘Well it’s Colin’s birthday and I want to take him away for the weekend, obviously we can’t stay in the same room, so I’ve found us this divine little hotel on the outskirts of Oxford; very secluded, very discreet. I’ve booked us into separate but adjoining rooms. So, to all intents and purposes we’re sleeping separately, but I can sneak into his room at night. I was wondering if my little poppet would like to make use of that spare room. After all, you could do with a break

and I would look more credible with a female companion. I hear there's a swimming pool and a lady who does lovely facial treatments and things.'

'I'm not playing gooseberry to you and Colin.'

'I'm not expecting you to. You'll be free to come and go as you please. Say you'll come.'

'Okay,' she sighed. 'I've nothing else to do.'

'You darling!' he squealed. 'It's just what you need.'

Bertie drove Lizzie to Oxford alone - they were meeting Colin there so as not to look too suspicious. Lizzie found it disgusting how two men that were in love had to go to such lengths just to spend a weekend together. She wondered if there would ever be a time when their love was legal. After all, it wasn't as though they were hurting anyone.

The hotel was a beautiful Georgian building in the middle of its own grounds. The car park was half empty so Lizzie guessed there weren't many guests staying which would ensure Bertie and Colin's privacy. Bertie told her to go in first and check in as he was going to wait for Colin. She took her Louis Vuitton overnight bag into the oak reception. Behind the desk sat a powdered elderly woman who smelt of lavender and looked somewhere close to death.

'Mrs Preston,' Lizzie said as instructed.

'Thank you madam,' the old woman said, turning and fetching a set of keys from the vast array that hung behind her. She gave Lizzie the key to room 37 and instructed her to take the lift to the second floor. The hotel reminded her of a scaled down version of the Adelphi, and this un-nerved her somewhat. Room 37 was just by the lift and she let herself in. It was a bright and pretty room with floral wallpaper and matching curtains. A sumptuous double bed stood in the middle and the washstand looked like a genuine antique.

She jumped out of her skin when one of the adjoining doors opened and Max emerged carrying a bottle of champagne. Lizzie clutched her chest in surprise.

'What are you doing here?' she gasped.

‘I’m officially booked into the room next door,’ he smiled. ‘But I was rather hoping I could spend the night in here with my future wife.’

‘You devil!’ she shrieked. ‘You and Bertie...’

He nodded and laughed.

‘I cooked it up with Bertie and Lyn.’ He took her hand and sat her down on the bed, stroking her hair. ‘We knew if we told you the truth you wouldn’t come in case you were followed. So we made it all up. No one knows we’re here except those two, and I’m really sorry, but I don’t think I can put off making love to you for much longer.’

Lizzie laughed and got up to shut the door, locking it behind her. She then turned to face Max, and began to unbutton her blouse.

‘You’d better try the goods,’ she smouldered. ‘I just hope you’ll still want to buy.’

He giggled and reached out, grasping her hand and pulling her onto the bed. He looked down at her, his fingers busy unclasping the front of her bra.

‘Oh don’t worry, I knew I wanted to buy the moment I met you!’

## **Chapter 21**

Lizzie had never felt so bored in her whole life. As a child she’d often dreamt of being rich and having her portrait painted and it would hang in some stately home. Now it was coming true she realised it was as tedious as doing algebra at school. She had now been Lady Elizabeth Bowers for three weeks, and as soon as she and Max had returned from their honeymoon in the South of France, they’d been summoned to Aldridge Hall by his parents Viola and Nicholas. Max was itching to get back to London to start on his new film; ‘A Girl of Our Times’ had been a huge success, even gathering a massive following in the independent film community in the US. Max now had money being thrown at him to make films in a similar vein, and his next project was about a cockney wide-boy who has an affair with his boss’s wife and gets her pregnant – forcing them to run away together. The script was finished and he wanted to start casting but he also found it hard to be horrible to his parents. They’d been so accepting of Lizzie, especially after

the Fiona fiasco. They were just happy that their eldest son had found a lovely girl to marry, not worried that she wasn't an aristocrat, and had appeared in films wearing not much more than a bikini. They'd met the real Lizzie and fell instantly in love with her.

Max did all he could to avoid Bowers family traditions, but his parents begged him to humour them and let them commission a portrait of Lizzie which would be hung in Aldridge Hall along with Viola and all the previous young Lady Bowers. She wore a pink, silk, strapless Chanel ballgown and a million pounds worth of diamonds around her neck and in her ears. Her hair was swept up into a chignon and a professional make-up artist had come in to ensure she looked nothing but demure and virginal (the portraits in the past had been done *before* the wedding). It was a far cry from the straggly haired single mother she had just finished playing in 'A Girl of Our Times'.

Jolyon Masters, the artist, was a complete perfectionist and threw a hissy fit if she so much as sneezed. When Viola entered the room, disturbing him, he turned apoplectic. Lizzie and her mother-in-law exchanged amused glances but said nothing. Viola was a lovely woman, and it unnerved Lizzie somewhat to see her husband had married a younger version of his mother. Petite, blonde and with huge blue eyes; Viola looked how Ma Gallagher would have had she married an Earl.

'How are you getting on my love?' she asked, sitting in a Queen Anne chair close to Lizzie. 'In pain yet?'

'Just a little,' Lizzie replied through gritted teeth.

'I remember my own sitting. It took four days. I was almost on the point of cancelling the wedding by the end.'

'Don't distract her!' the temperamental Jolyon snapped.

Viola laughed.

'Joly, Lizzie's a professional actress, I'm sure she can talk and pose at the same time.' She sighed. 'I'm so glad Max has finally settled down. You make him so happy.'

Hearing this caused Lizzie to smile but the moment Jolyon hissed, the smile disappeared.

‘I suppose you’ve got lots of film projects lined up,’ Viola continued and Lizzie got the feeling this questioning was leading somewhere. She hoped her mother-in-law wasn’t going to suddenly turn vicious.

‘I’m going to see my agent in a couple of days,’ Lizzie relied. ‘I’ll find out what’s on offer then.’

‘I sometimes wish I’d had a career but becoming a mother is so wonderful. The happiest days of my life were when Max and Angus were children. Grandchildren would be so lovely.’

Lizzie was glad she was wearing such thick made up as it hid her blushes. Up until marriage, Max had insisted she wear her Dutch cap even though she assured him she’d find it difficult to conceive anyway. But he could take no chances; his parents had done a lot for him as it was – allowing him to marry a girl who had no breeding. If she’d got pregnant out of wedlock it might have changed their outlook completely. Since the wedding day they had not spoken of children but she hadn’t used any contraception.

‘You do want children don’t you Lizzie?’

‘Very much so. Max and I haven’t discussed it yet but I want them sooner rather than later.’

‘I’m so glad to hear that,’ Viola swooned. ‘And you know Max isn’t one of those old fashioned men who would expect you to give up your life don’t you?’

‘I’m not sure if I had a baby I would want to carry on making films anyway.’

‘Oh you are an angel. I knew my son had chosen well.’

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Maggie greeted Lizzie with a big kiss on the cheek as she entered the house. It was the first time the two women had seen each other since the wedding and Maggie was eager to know how married life was treating her young client. Lizzie was still full of the first flush of love and could only talk about Max and how wonderful he was and how they now had a beautiful house in Chelsea and she was going to make it look like a palace for him. Maggie sat smiling at her innocence, thinking how jaded she would become one day. It happened to everyone.

Eventually they got round to work. Maggie put on the glasses that hung around her neck and picked up some letters from the floor.

‘Now you can take your pick young Lizzie,’ she said. ‘The BBC want you to make another series of St John’s. I said you’d think about it. They’re looking to make it run for twenty weeks this time, so it’d be quite a commitment. Rank want you to star in Palaver in Moscow – the usual ensemble. You play a beautiful British spy etcetera etcetera. Then there’s this, the biggie.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Paramount want you to try out for a film called ‘Shotgun’. It’s a thriller about a young woman who claims to have witnessed a murder but no one believes her and thinks she’s going mad. We’re already talking six figures for you.’

‘Paramount? Would I have to go to Hollywood?’

‘You certainly would. This would guarantee you superstardom Lizzie.’

‘I don’t want to do it.’

Maggie’s face fell.

‘What?’

‘I don’t want to do it. Max and I are trying for a baby. I don’t want to go to America.’

‘Lizzie are you mad? The Americans love you. You’ll never get an offer like this in England.’

‘I don’t care. Let someone else do it. I want to stay in St John’s and I’d also like to do the Palaver film. They’re always a laugh.’

‘I think you’ve completely lost your mind. I thought you’d be delighted about the American offer.’

‘Max is my first shot at happiness in a long while Maggie. I don’t want to ruin it by jetting off to America for six months. I’m twenty-one now, I want to settle down with a family. I never really wanted to be an actress in the first place.’



## Chapter 22

### London – August 1967

‘The Sexiest Woman in the World’ opened her eyes and decided she felt just that – sexy. Max had been up until gone one o’clock that morning working on the script for his new film and she knew he wanted to rest; but Lizzie was feeling frisky. She had no idea what was causing this – the sultry August heat or the fact that she had topped Film Magazine’s poll to find the world’s most desirable actress. Whatever it was, she was determined to have her husband.

Like a child, she rolled over and leapt on top of Max, straddling him. His sapphire blue eyes opened and on focusing upon her, he started to laugh.

‘Can’t I get any sleep?’ he groaned playfully. ‘You’ve been like this for the past three mornings.’

‘Look matey,’ Lizzie giggled, tossing back her waist-length blonde hair. ‘Most men would kill to have sex with me. Now just shut up and surrender.’

Max groaned playfully and pulled her down to him, kissing her. However their fun was cut short by the doorbell ringing. A loud, persistent ring that was impossible to ignore. With a sigh Lizzie climbed off Max.

‘I’d better go and see who it is,’ she complained.

Max pulled her back down again,

‘Ignore it,’ he whispered. They started to kiss again, but the bell rang again and Lizzie knew whoever it was, they weren’t going to go away. She jumped off the bed and grabbed her dressing gown, fastening it as she made her way down the stairs. She heard a child whimpering from the other side of the door and she immediately guessed who it was.

Bracing herself, she opened the door and there stood Lyn looking as if she’d done a day’s work and yet it was only nine o’clock in the morning. On her ample hip sat William, her two year old son – snotty nosed and crying - as usual.

‘Darling the nanny hasn’t turned up and I’ve got a meeting with Penguin today. Please can you take him?’

‘Oh Lyn I was going to meet Bertie for lunch. I haven’t seen him in six weeks.’

‘Take Will with you. Stick a dummy in his mouth, he’ll soon shut up.’

Before Lizzie could even agree, the toddler was thrust into her arms, along with the big bag that contained most of his paraphernalia.

‘Thanks hun,’ Lyn gasped. ‘I owe you dinner.’

With that she turned around and hurried down the path. Still a little startled, Lizzie shut the door and took stock of the situation. Motherhood had not come easy to Lyn and she was impressed with how Lizzie could placate William if he was screaming, therefore, without much say in the matter, she had become an un-official part-time nanny to her Godson.

She turned around to find Max, stark naked, standing at the top of the stairs, reminding her of what she was missing.

‘Is he staying for the day?’ he sighed.

‘It looks like it,’ she replied. ‘Sometimes I wonder why Lyn ever had a baby.’ She stroked the little boy’s reddened cheek. ‘Come on solider, I’ll make you some breakfast. I can guarantee your mummy hasn’t.’

William was a bone of contention between Lizzie and Lyn. For five years Lizzie and Max had been trying for a baby with no success, and yet Lyn had one and didn’t really want him. It made headlines when the daughter of a Nazi soldier married Marcus Levy, the Jewish owner of Chariot Publishing. As his second wife, and stepmother to his two teenage daughters; Lyn felt she had to compete with Sylvia, his first wife and provide him with a baby. She’d struck gold first time and gave him a son. William was a beautiful child with jet black hair and huge brown eyes, and yet most of the time Lyn palmed him off on the nanny or Lizzie, even when she wasn’t working. Lizzie even kept one of his pushchairs in the house as he visited so often. Sometimes she wondered if Lyn would let her and Max adopt him - he must have thought they were his parents anyway!

Max wanted to spend the day writing, so Lizzie took William out to give him some peace and quiet. She drove to Eelbrook Common in Fulham, where there was a small playground. Even

with no make up on and her hair tied back, it was obvious who she was, and the other mothers watched her slyly, wondering how come Elizabeth Maine had a baby. Little did they know that even though William was not hers, out there somewhere she actually did have a ten-year-old daughter.

William soon got bored of the swings and started grizzling. As Lizzie bent to lift him out, her head swam and she felt as though she was going to fall over. It was a feeling she hadn't experienced in years but she recognised it immediately. She tried hard not to jump the gun, but she had to bite her tongue to stop herself yelling with joy.

Another young mother rushed to her aide, grabbing her arm and steadying her. Lizzie thanked her, feeling rather embarrassed.

'It is you isn't it?' the young girl asked, a question Lizzie always found ludicrous. Whoever she was, she was definitely *her*!

'Yes,' she smiled.

'I didn't know you had a baby.'

'I haven't, he's a friend's.'

'I see. Well I'm looking forward to the new series of St John's. Is Sister Fitzgerald going to marry Doctor Simon?'

'Oh I can't tell you that!' Lizzie laughed. 'The BBC would have my guts for garters. You'll just have to wait and see.'

Lizzie was far too woozy to risk driving to Kings Road and instead left her car in Fulham and walked the half-mile to the restaurant where she was meeting Bertie. She decided that after lunch she would stop off and see Doctor Crawford, her GP's and ask if he could do a pregnancy test. This baby couldn't have come at a worst time. She had a new comedy film coming up made by the Palaver team; it was called 'House of Wanton Women' and was the usual farce about a virginal middle-aged man who stumbles upon a mansion full of beautiful vampires who seduce him and turn him into a Dracula-type figure. Lizzie was to play Elvira, the main vampire.

Maggie despaired at her refusal to do Hollywood films but Lizzie wanted to dedicate herself to her marriage and potential family.

Despite the bad timing, the baby was the best thing that had happened to her in a long time. If she had to drop out of the film, so be it, let them sue her, she didn't care. What was money compared to becoming a mother once again? She couldn't stop smiling as she walked along New Kings Road. Elderly women who didn't recognise her just thought her a pretty young mother and cooed at Will. Men beeped their horns and even the ones who didn't know she was famous were just impressed by a girl in a mini-skirt, her long blonde pony tail hanging down to the middle of her back, a big smile on her face.

She couldn't wait to see Bertie again. Colin had taken him to Dublin to meet his folks. To Lizzie's and Bertie's amazement, they knew their son was gay and accepted it. Lizzie found this wonderful, given that she came from a large Irish community in Liverpool and their attitude towards homosexuals had been appalling. After spending time in Dublin, the two men had driven around Ireland sightseeing – a far cry from Bertie's previous holidays in Morocco and Tunisia. Still, he was with his beloved Colin, so what interest would he have in the pretty, compliant brown boys North Africa now?

As she entered Nico's, a bistro close to Sloane Square, she spotted Bertie, and for the first time ever, realised her best friend was ageing. He was now thirty -seven and although his hair was longer at the back, and he sported long sideburns, the front was receding and like Max, flecks of grey had started to invade his temples. It all reminded Lizzie of how long they'd been friends and she found this comforting.

He waved and rolled his eyes on seeing she had Will with her as usual. She wheeled the pushchair through the tables, trying hard not to bump into diners, and was glad when she made it to the back of the restaurant. Bertie stood up and kissed her on both cheeks, telling her she looked beautiful.

'Darling I've got us a pot of coffee, or do you want something stronger?'

'I would but I've been lumbered.'

'She's the limit, she really is,' he tutted. 'Where's the nanny?'

‘Hasn’t turned up apparently. Anyway, how was Ireland?’

‘Wonderful. I want to live there one day. It was so peaceful Lizzie. Quite astounding to think your relatives come from there. Ooh, talking of which...’

He fished around in his leather bag, talking as he did.

‘We came back via Liverpool and I decided to have a little walk round before getting the train back to London. I saw this had thought you might like to see it.’

He pulled out a copy of the *Liverpool Echo* and Lizzie laughed, recalling her early days in London when she would bore Bertie with the things she’d read in the *Echo* and was convinced were true. To Liverpudlians, the newspaper was as important as *The Times* or the *Daily Mirror*. Lizzie thanked him and tucked it into the bottom of Will’s pushchair. Bertie then told her all his news; he was going to be teaming up with a young lyricist called Jeremy Walsh to write a new West End musical based on *Of Mice and Men*. All the time Lizzie listened quietly, biting her tongue, desperate to tell him her suspicions that she was pregnant, but if she told anyone, it should be Max, not Bertie.

She left Bertie and headed home, stopping off at the GPs on the way. He gave her a bottle, requesting she took a urine sample the next morning and that the results would be back by the beginning of the following week. Lizzie was positive she wouldn’t be able to wait that long to tell Max; she was incapable of keeping secrets from him.

Arriving home she found Lyn waiting for her, looking considerably less flustered than she had that morning. Lyn was unrecognisable from the glamour puss Lizzie had met all those years ago. Now thirty-three, she was at least three stone overweight and her straggly, mousy hair needed a good brush. Max had poured her a glass of wine and retreated to the kitchen to carry on with his script, leaving her in the living room. As Lizzie wheeled Will into the room, his slightly tipsy mother stood up, holding out her arms.

‘Hello my little man, how have you been?’

‘Lyn you’ve really got to sort this nanny situation,’ Lizzie complained. ‘I’m starting a new film soon; I can’t look after Will all the time.’

‘I know darling. I promise this is the last time. But guess what, Penguin are going to publish my novel.’

‘I didn’t even know you’d written a novel.’

‘Oh yes, a sizzling expose of Swinging London. Absolutely filthy. It’s bound to get banned. Isn’t that marvellous?’

‘Fantastic. Just make sure you find time to look after your son.’

Lyn drained her glass and stood up, taking hold of Will’s pushchair.

‘Thanks Lizzie, you’re a diamond.’

She went to walk out, then spotted something at the bottom of the pushchair and bent down to pick it up. She frowned slightly when she saw it was *Liverpool Echo*.

‘From Bertie?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ smiled Lizzie. ‘I haven’t read it for years. It’ll be like a trip down memory lane.’

Lyn and Will left, and Lizzie made herself and Max a cup of tea. She left him in the kitchen and settled in the living room. As she sat down, a wave of nausea swept over her which although was unpleasant, gave her the greatest joy, knowing what it probably meant. She wished she could get the results from the doctor straight away – a week seemed so long.

The front page of the paper was dominated by an article about the closure of one of the main docks and the effect this would have on the men who worked there. Lizzie then turned the page and the headline and photo shot out at her, knocking her for six;

### ***TOXTETH MAN MURDERED IN RAPE ATTACK***

*Toxteth docker George Shea 58 was yesterday found stabbed to death after a woman handed herself into Police. The woman, who cannot be named, alleges that she stabbed Shea as he attempted to rape her whilst she was walking home from Moorfields Station. She led officers to Shea’s body where he had been killed by a blow to the neck with a sharp implement. The woman is currently helping Police with their enquiries.*

Lizzie had to sit and take stock of the situation. Uncle George was dead. Her tormentor was dead and she didn't feel anything - not even relieved. She got up and took the newspaper into the kitchen. Her expression obviously saying more than she was feeling. Max stopped typing and looked up at her.

'What on earth is the matter?' he frowned.

She couldn't talk, just laid the paper across the typewriter. Max read it and seemed to read it again, then looked up at Lizzie.

'How do you feel?' he asked.

'I don't know. He's dead Max. George is dead and he can't hurt me any more.'

From out of nowhere, an almighty sob racked her body and she started to cry. Max left his chair and rushed to her, gathering her in his arms and holding her tightly. She felt at last that chapter of her life had closed. After what had happened when she'd returned to Liverpool, she'd lived in fear that one day George would find her again, but that couldn't happen now. She only hoped the police would believe the poor woman's story, because Lizzie didn't doubt for a moment that George had been trying to rape her.

The morning Lizzie was due to get the results of her pregnancy test, she awoke and had to run to the toilet to be sick. Max was asleep and unaware, and a part of her wished he'd wake up just so she could tell him. She tried to work out how far gone she was; she couldn't recall having a period since around mid-June. If she estimated correctly, then it meant by March the following year she would be a mother once again.

Doctor Crawford welcomed her into the surgery and sat her down. She could tell by the smirk upon his face that the news was good and she tried to bottle up her excitement.

'How are you feeling Mrs Bowers?' he asked.

'I was sick this morning and I keep feeling dizzy.'

'Well that's no surprise seeing as you're pregnant.'

'I really am!?' she squealed.

‘You are. Congratulations.’

‘It’s a miracle. Thank you so much.’

He laughed.

‘I think you should be thanking your husband not me!’

Lizzie practically ran home, desperate to see Max. She could not recall feeling this happy in her entire life, not even on her wedding day. After all this time of trying and constant disappointment, her wish had finally come true. Her mind raced ahead of itself, planning on what she was going to say to Maggie – she wanted ‘House of Wanton Women’ to be her last film for some time. She wanted to be a mother more than anything in the world, and she planned on dedicating her life to her baby.

Max was in the kitchen eating a bacon sandwich and nearly choked as Lizzie jumped at him, throwing her arms around his neck.

‘I’m pregnant!’ she exclaimed.

‘What?’ he laughed, mouthful of food.

‘I’m pregnant! We’ve done it Max.’

He roared and shoved the rest of the sandwich into his mouth and stood up, picking Lizzie up and whirling her around. When he put her down, Lizzie pulled away and looked up at him.

‘I can’t believe it’s finally happened to me,’ she gasped. ‘Uncle George is dead and I’m going to have a baby. And it’s with you. I’m so happy Max. That horrible chapter of my life is over, and it’s all because of you.’

‘I didn’t kill your uncle!’

‘No but you’ve given me a baby, and that’s the greatest thing anyone could do.’

## **Chapter 23**

**October 1967**



It wasn't a good day for Lizzie. She was feeling more sick than ever; it was Max's birthday and she wanted to get home to him, and she really wasn't in the mood for having her hair teased to within an inch of its life and coated in foul smelling hairspray, before being poured into a PVC catsuit that was considerably tighter than when she'd had the fitting in July. This morning she had to film a scene where she tied Wally – the main character, who was played by a big, lumbering actor called Howard Greening - to a chair and tried to suck his blood. In the Palaver films Greening had played everything from Lizzie's husband, to her doctor, and being a big, lecherous bear he wasn't very convincing as a middle aged virgin. It was strange for Lizzie to be playing Elvira, the oldest Wanton. The starlets playing her accomplices were all in their late teens and early twenties and suddenly she felt very old and was glad to be pregnant and getting out of this game. Not that it had done anything to dampen her sex appeal. When she'd walked out on set in the cat suit, there had been a collective intake of air from every male crew member. But Lizzie couldn't have felt less sexy if she tried.

Part of the scene required her dancing around the chair to which Wally was tied, but every time Lizzie turned, a shooting pain would grip her left hip, forcing her to stop. In the end the director had to replace her with one of the starlets, who was a similar size to Lizzie and could film all the long shots, pretending to be her.

Returning to her dressing room, Lizzie began to panic. The pain was getting steadily worse and she was starting to feel hot - as though she was running a temperature. Without being told, she knew something was wrong with the baby and feared she was about to miscarry. No one on the set even knew she was pregnant and thought she was just coming down with a stomach bug. She asked to go home and the director wasn't pleased, but on seeing how pale she'd become, he relented and called her a car.

Back home Max was ensconced in the living room, meeting with Alan Boardman, the Casting Director of his next film. Lizzie tried not to disturb them as she entered the house and instead made her way up to bed. However Max heard her and stopped her as she was half way up the stairs.

‘Are you okay Lizzie?’ he asked.

‘I’m fine,’ she winced, turning around to look at him, trying to mask the agony she was in. ‘I just need a lie down.’

Max accepted her word and retreated back to the living room. By the time Lizzie made it to the top of the stairs, she felt so sick she thought she was going to spew there and then on the carpet. She made it to the toilet and vomited so hard that the pain in her hip worsened and it took her ten minutes get back up again. She crawled into bed, sweat dripping off her. She kept telling herself she was coming down with flu and a lie down would solve everything, but deep down she knew it was something far more serious.

She stripped down to her underwear and slipped between the sheets. The fabric stuck to her skin and she couldn’t move without taking it with her. In her delirium she lived with the hope she wasn’t miscarrying as there wasn’t any blood and the pain wasn’t in her womb as such but rather her side. There could be a hundred and one reasons why she was feeling this way.

Tiredness engulfed her, and her last thought was one of relief as her body seemed to become numb and the pain stopped. Sleep was like a welcome friend and she knew that when she awoke everything would be okay.

It felt like a short nap, but when Lizzie opened her eyes, she realised she’d been asleep for some time. She focused and realised that the ceiling above her was much higher than the one in her bedroom. There was that smell – disinfectant, it reminded her of when she had the infection in her womb. She suddenly felt someone clasp her hand and she looked round. It was Max. He was sitting in a strange chair. This wasn’t home. This was hospital.

‘Oh my darling,’ Max cried. ‘I thought I’d lost you.’

‘Where am I?’ she asked.

‘St Stephen’s. You’ve been here for two days.’

‘What happened?’

‘I came upstairs to check on you and found you unconscious on the bed. I called for an ambulance and they brought you here. Thank God they did, you could have died.’

‘What’s the matter with me?’

His face darkened.

‘Don’t you worry about that now. Get some sleep.’

‘I’ve lost the baby haven’t I?’

‘Lizzie get some sleep. We can talk later.’

She wanted to argue, but she passed out again. The next time she awoke, it wasn’t her husband with her, rather a young male doctor, studying the chart at the end of the bed. Lizzie went to move, but a sharp, crippling pain gripped her lower stomach, like something cutting in. Instinctively, she put her hand down and through the thin hospital gown felt something along her bikini line – a strip of plaster, as if she had been cut.

‘What’s been done to me?’ she panicked.

The young doctor realised she was awake and turned to look at her.

‘Hello Elizabeth,’ he said softly. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘Where’s Max?’ she winced.

‘He’s gone home to get some rest. He’s been here for the past two days. You gave us quite a scare.’

‘What’s happened to me?’ she whimpered. ‘I’ve lost my baby haven’t I?’

‘It’s not for me to discuss. Wait until Mr Morrissey, your consultant comes round tomorrow morning.’

‘Please don’t treat me like a child. I need to know what happened to me.’

The doctor physically winced at what he was about to do, and Lizzie immediately knew it was bad news. She started to cry before he’d even sat down.

‘You were very lucky. A lot of women who have what you did, die. But your husband found you in time, and I see no reason why you can’t make a full recovery.’

‘And the baby?’

‘You had what is called an ectopic pregnancy. It means the baby was growing outside of your womb – in the fallopian tube. Any longer and the tube would have burst and you’d have died from internal bleeding. I’m so sorry, but we had to remove the baby and the tube.’

‘But I lost the other one when I was younger,’ she cried. ‘Does that mean.....?’

He hung his head.

‘I’m sorry. You can no longer have children.’

The scream of ‘No’ that Lizzie cried was so loud it should have awoken the entire hospital. There was nothing on earth – apart from something happening to Max – which she dreaded more. She’d been willing to give up her whole life for this child and now it was dead.

‘I’m so sorry,’ the flustered young doctor repeated, getting up and scurrying to the door, unable to cope with this hysterical woman. ‘I’ll fetch a nurse.’

Within moments the Night Sister came rushing into the room, sitting beside Lizzie on the bed, gripping her heaving shoulders, comforting her.

‘There there darling,’ she said softly. ‘That’s it. Just take it easy.’

The kindly nurse sat with Lizzie until the sobs turned into painful whimpers. She could only think of her baby, the beloved baby she’d wanted so much. Just like the child she’d created with that brute Digger, Max’s baby had gone down the toilet. There would be no funeral, and no headstone to visit and lay flowers on. This baby had been as real to her as Mary Ann who she’d given birth to and held in her arms. Mary Ann would be the only child she’d ever have and yet she didn’t know where she was. She wondered what she had done that was so terrible that made God keep on punishing her.

The nurse eased her away, stroking her wet hair off her face.

‘I’m going to get a sedative for you darling,’ she said. ‘It’ll help you to sleep. You need your rest.’

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Lizzie left the hospital two days later. Fortunately Maggie hadn't announced the pregnancy to the press, so there were no flowers or Get Well Soon cards waiting for her. When Susan Hopkins, one of her fellow actresses on St John's gave birth to a stillborn, the studio had been inundated with well wishers and tokens from the public, and though they only meant well, it just made the situation a hundred times worse.

Back home Lizzie insisted on sitting in the living room with the curtains drawn. She even slept in here, unable to go upstairs and face the room that was going to be the nursery. Every time Max tried to get her to talk she told him to leave her alone and he had no choice but to respect this. Gradually her tears subsided and she was just left with a feeling of emptiness. She sat for hours staring at the fireplace, cradling her vacant stomach. She thought of death, imagining going to Heaven and seeing her two babies; the one she'd murdered and the other who'd rejected her. She then recalled what Father Seamus used to preach about suicide and how anyone who took their own life would go to Hell, and she knew that by doing it, she would never get to see her children, and instead spend eternity in the company of Uncle George.

When the pain got too much she asked Max to pour her a glass of red wine. Alcohol had always been a good way of numbing pain and as the warm liquid nestled in her belly, she felt relaxed in a way she hadn't since losing her baby. Her limbs felt floppy and her eyes droopy, and seeing the change in her appearance Max took the opportunity to approach her. He sat beside her on the sofa, trying not to wince at the smell emanating from her – she hadn't washed in days.

'Lizzie I've got to go to Yugoslavia in two weeks time for filming. I'm going to get Bertie to stay with you.'

'I don't need a babysitter Max,' she snapped.

'You're in no fit state to be alone. I insist Bertie stays here.'

She didn't reply, just thrust her glass at him.

'Get me another drink please,' she asked.

Knowing arguing with her was futile; Max fetched the bottle from the kitchen and topped up her glass. Lizzie drank it down quickly, waiting for its anaesthetic to take effect. She then lit her thirtieth cigarette of the day.

‘I’ve also had Maggie on the phone,’ Max continued. ‘They’re going to postpone filming Wanton Women until the first of December.’ He chuckled. ‘Would you believe they’re going to knock out another Palaver film in the interim?’

‘Will your mother want you to divorce me now?’ Lizzie suddenly asked, the wine loosening her tongue and giving her the courage to ask the question that had been playing on her mind since the miscarriage.

‘Why on earth should my mother want us to divorce?’ he frowned. ‘She loves you.’

‘But I can’t provide you with heirs.’

‘I don’t need to provide heirs. Angus is marrying Jemima; their children can carry on the Bowers name.’

‘I’m useless to you.’

‘Lizzie stop talking like that and snap out of it. We don’t need a baby to be happy. We just need each other.’

‘The doctor reckons I probably won’t even have periods any more. I’ll be like an old woman and I’m not even thirty.’

‘You’re just as beautiful and sexy as you’ve ever been. Once you’re back on your feet you’ll realise that. Now please, just try and pull yourself together; it’s killing me seeing you like this.’

He got up and went back into the kitchen. Lizzie finished her glass of wine and proceeded to pour the rest of the bottle down her throat. She then sat and chain-smoked, tears falling down her face as she thought about her life. She was twenty-six years old and barren. No matter what Max said, she knew he wanted children and yet he was being punished for something she’d done many years ago - aborting Digger’s baby. It seemed so unfair, and she was just waiting for the day when he would realise this and leave her.

## **Chapter 24**

**Pinewood Studios – December 1967**

It was hard to believe that the girl sitting in the corner of the trailer, with her mousy roots showing through, her skinny body wrapped up in a terry dressing gown, sucking hard on a Woodbine, was at any moment going to be transformed into a sex kitten. It was Lizzie's first day back on set of 'The House of Wanton Women' and she was terrified of what was going to happen. Terrence Whatmore, the director was aware of her miscarriage, but she wasn't sure about the rest of the cast and crew, and the thought of facing them made her shake. She didn't want kind words and looks of sympathy; she just wanted to be at home in front of the fire. In her hand she clutched the note Max had left on the pillow

*My darling*

*Just remember the superstar you are. I will try to rush home to you as soon as possible.*

*I love you so much.*

*Max*

She crumpled it back up and put it in the pocket of her dressing gown. There was a knock on the door and she jumped out of her skin. She hoped she could ignore it - she didn't want to speak to anyone. Then she remembered where she was and knew she had to be professional.

'Come in,' she said.

The door opened and Wilma, her young assistant entered. The girl was assigned to Lizzie to cater to her every whim. It was a privilege only the stars of the films were granted.

'How are you feeling?' the girl asked, closing the door and sitting opposite Lizzie in the banquette.

'What did they tell you?' Lizzie snapped.

Wilma shifted uncomfortably in her seat.

'That you'd, you know...'

'What?'

'Lost a baby. I'm very sorry.'

‘I suppose they’re all laughing at me.’

‘Of course not. They all feel sorry for you. But if it helps I’ll tell them not to mention it.’

Lizzie reached out and gripped Wilma’s slight hand.

‘I tell you what would help. Go and get me a bottle of vodka.’

‘I can’t do that, it would mean leaving the set.’

‘Just fucking do it! You’re being paid to look after me, now go and get a bottle of vodka for me. There’s a shop on the corner that sells booze this time of the morning.’

‘I really don’t know what Mr Whatmore would say...’

Lizzie grabbed her handbag and retrieved a pound note from the bottom of it.

‘Just go.’

She may have been tiny and frail, but she was frightening enough for Wilma to do exactly as she was told. She took the money and left the trailer. Lizzie lit another cigarette with the butt of the one she’d just finished and felt a little more relaxed knowing vodka was coming. Wine had long since stopped having any effect on her, only vodka numbed the pain now. Without alcohol, the voices in her head, telling her she was evil, would speak to her, sending her insane.

Wilma had left the door open and seeing this, Betty Leech, the hairdresser took the opportunity to come in and be nosy. The woman was shocked to see the once voluptuous and vibrant Lizzie now a bag of bones, with terribly matted hair and sunken eyes.

‘We’re gonna have to put a wig on that,’ she said. ‘You’ve let your roots grow.’

‘What is that to do with you?’ Lizzie snapped. Betty stood back, shocked. She’d worked with Lizzie on all of the Palaver films and had always found her polite and sweet natured. The miscarriage had obviously affected her badly. No wonder really, what with her husband being a Viscount, he was bound to want heirs.



‘I’ll go and get a wig for you,’ Betty said, retreating quickly. Lizzie ignored her, counting down the minutes until Wilma returned with the drink. Unfortunately before then, she was visited by Lucy the wardrobe mistress who had brought the cat suit with her.

‘Come on Lizzie, time to get changed,’ the young Scottish woman urged.

Like a zombie, Lizzie took the PVC cat suit and stripped off her robe, slipping into it. Lucy gasped on seeing the outfit that once clung to Lizzie’s curves now hanging like a sack. With a shake of the head, she commented that it would have to be safety pinned in places that wouldn’t show. Lizzie didn’t really care. She just stood idly by, letting her do whatever she wanted.

Finally Wilma returned with the vodka in a brown paper bag. Lizzie didn’t want all the various assistants to know what she was doing, so ran to the toilet, locking herself in a cubicle and swigging down the bitter tasting liquid until the bottle was half empty. On her empty stomach it didn’t take long to start working, and soon that comforting warmth was engulfing her body. She didn’t care what happened to her after that.

An hour and a half later she was ready to start filming. Terrence Whatmore whispered loudly to the Assistant Director that he was worried about continuity given the drastic change in Lizzie’s appearance. This made her feel all the more self-conscious and sent her scuttling back to the toilet and the bottle of vodka she’d stuffed down the back of the cistern. When filming finally started, she was so drunk she forgot her lines and kept giggling at the most inappropriate times. Everyone on set exchanged awkward glances, not knowing what to say or do.

The last scene of the day was Elvira instructing one of her apprentice vamps on how to seduce a man, and it involved Lizzie strutting around the make-believe dungeon in six inch heels, while the nubile young girl flaunted her body in front of the vampire hunter played by the terribly camp Gideon Hickson. He was doing his usual gurning and making funny noises, but all Lizzie could hear was a little girl’s voice calling for ‘mummy’. It was so loud she was convinced someone had brought their young daughter onto the set. She tried to concentrate on her lines, but she heard it again. It was Mary Ann. She was calling to her. Her daughter was calling to her.

‘Lizzie you missed your cue again,’ Terence complained.

‘Huh?’ Lizzie uttered as she heard the voice again, beckoning to her. ‘I need to go.’

At the speed of light, she shot off the set; leaving everyone so shocked that for a moment no one followed her. She ran to her trailer, ripping off the wig and the cat suit and pulling on her dress. As she left the trailer she spotted Paul, the floor manager heading towards her. She couldn't let him catch her and so jumped into her car, speeding off with a screech. Mary Ann needed her and she was going to find her. She was so drunk she found it difficult to control the car and kept clipping other vehicles. Not even worrying about the police catching her, she made up her mind she was going to Liverpool. She'd never driven there before, but knew if she made it onto the M1 she could follow her nose and get there eventually, all the time that voice calling her on; whispering '*mummy, mummy*'.

'I'm comin' darlin'' she replied, not even realising she had slipped back into her original accent.

By midnight, she'd made it to Liverpool without somehow being arrested or causing an accident. The drink had worn off and she now had a piercing headache to contend with. She needed sleep. Mary Ann wouldn't be around now, she would be tucked up in bed, waiting for her mummy to come and get her tomorrow.

She parked in a road close to Lime Street and got her bag from the back of the car. In her purse she only had six shillings and that was it. In the glove compartment she found a pound note. She certainly didn't have enough for a hotel. But then again, she was Elizabeth Maine; she could go anywhere she wanted.

She got out of the car, freezing in just her mini dress (she'd left her coat in the trailer back at Pinewood). She realised that she still had the hairnet on which the wig had been placed. She pulled it off, letting her straggly hair flow freely, forgetting that she was still wearing the theatrical make up from the film. She headed for the Adelphi, smiling to herself when she recalled this was where Max had proposed.

The reception was quiet and behind the desk was an elderly man who was reading the *Echo*. He paid no attention to the scruffy girl approaching him.

'I'd like a room please,' she asked.

He looked up from the paper, raising his eyebrows in contempt.

‘Oh aye luv, and how do you propose to pay for that?’ he asked in a harsh, North Liverpool accent.

‘Don’t you know who I am?’ she snorted. ‘I’m Elizabeth Maine.’

‘Yeah? And I’m the Queen of Sheba. Sling yer ‘ook.’

‘I really am Elizabeth Maine and I need a room.’

‘Do you want me to call the Police?’

Lizzie realised she was on a hiding to nowhere and backed down, deciding to spend the night in her car. She threw the man a filthy look and stomped out of the hotel, trying to retain some dignity. She’d forgotten just how cold Liverpool was in December and the night air bit into her arms. She went back to her car and climbed into the backseat, snuggling down for the night. Tomorrow she had a big task ahead of her. She was going to drive all around the City until she found her little girl. She’d been calling to her and she was going to find her. It all made sense now, why she couldn’t have any more babies. She was meant to dedicate herself to Mary Ann.

Despite being cramped, Lizzie slept well and didn’t wake up until the next morning. The windows of the car were frosted over and the cold had bitten into her bladder. She was dying for the toilet and got out of the car, rushing into Lime Street Station before she wet herself. She emerged from the cubicle and saw herself for the first time since fleeing the film set. Dark make up was caked around her eyes, and thick pancake covered her skin. Taking some toilet roll, she scratched the hard paper over her face until it was free of make up. Standing before her now was Lizzie Gallagher. Not Elizabeth Maine or Lady Bowers, but the woman she would have been had she been allowed to remain in Liverpool. She had that same pallor and pinched bone-structure that generations of poor Irish women had. There were flecks of grey in her hair just like her mother had by the time she was thirty. She felt sickened by herself, feeling stupid for ever imagining someone like her could bear children by a Viscount. Max wouldn’t want the heirs to the Tynedale estate looking like raggedy Dublin beggars.

She wearily made her way back to the car; her head so sore, she knew the only thing that would help her was more vodka. She had a vague memory of hiding some in the dashboard once and was delighted to find it was still there. She gulped most of it down and started the car again.

Everywhere she drove there were mothers taking their children to school. Snotty nosed little kids in tatty uniforms or some who couldn't afford the uniform at all. She drove past her old school, slowing the car to examine the faces of the little girls who went in. There were so many blonde angels holding on tightly to their mummy's hands it was hard to tell. But Lizzie was positive that when she saw Mary Ann she'd know.

By midday she'd driven past every school in Liverpool and had seen many beautiful little girls of around eleven years of age, but she'd felt no connection with any of them. After filling up on petrol, she had a few shillings left and became aware of her rumbling stomach. She decided to go to the tearoom in Lewis's, where Kit had taken her for her fifteenth birthday – two days before Uncle George raped her. Pushing that to the back of her mind, she planned her next move. She'd have a bun and a cup of tea, then set off around Liverpool to look for Mary Ann; and she would do it day in day out until she found her.

Lewis's was Liverpool's smartest department store. In Lizzie's previous life, it was the sort of place the Gallagher family frequented only on special occasions. Nowadays she was rich enough to buy everything in the shop. She laughed to herself when as she entered, a well to do woman held the door for her and she thanked her by addressing her as 'luv'. It felt both alien and comforting to be speaking in her proper voice again.

She took the escalator to the top floor, ignoring the stares of the people who passed her, and wondered if she was mad – walking about in just a flimsy floral frock in the middle of winter. On reaching the top, she passed through the kitchenware department to get to the tearoom. The shop was decorated for Christmas, and by the brightly decorated tree stood a little girl fascinated by it. She was around ten or eleven, dressed warmly in earmuffs and a pink anorak. Her long blonde hair hung down her back and as she happened to turn and look at Lizzie, she could see she had the most beautiful blue eyes. It was *her*. It was Mary Ann. She had no doubts whatsoever – standing before her was her daughter.

Not wanting to frighten the child by telling her who she was, she approached her gently, pretending to look at the tree too. The child spoke first.

'That's a lot bigger than the tree we've got at home,' she said in a local accent. 'What's your tree like?'

‘I haven’t put mine up yet,’ Lizzie replied. ‘P’raps I should make mine look like this, it’s very pretty.’

‘We’ve got a puppy and he ate all the ornaments off our tree,’ the little girl laughed.

‘Puppy’s are naughty like that. What’s your name?’

‘Natasha.’

‘Puppy’s are naughty like that Natasha. How old are you sweetheart?’

‘Eleven.’

Lizzie’s hopes rose. She was the right age; she was petite and blonde and beautiful – just how she imagined her Mary Ann.

‘Whereabouts are you from?’ she asked.

‘Birkenhead,’ Natasha replied. ‘Mam let me have the day off so I could come and see Santa.’

‘That sounds like a good mam to me.’

Suddenly from out of nowhere, a flustered looking woman appeared. She was older than Lizzie, wearing a thick, camel overcoat. She snatched Natasha’s arm, pulling her away.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ she snapped at Lizzie.

‘I was just making conversation. You’ve got a beautiful little daughter there.’

‘Yeah, well, have yer own kids,’ the woman hissed. ‘Don’t try and nick other people’s.’

She whisked Natasha away and Lizzie’s heart broke, convinced that her little girl had been taken from her once more. Without stopping off for food, she took the escalator back down to the ground floor and left the stop. She wandered aimlessly through Liverpool City Centre; stopping off at a newsagent’s to buy a miniature of vodka, swigging it as she walked along.

She made it as far as Albert Dock and round onto Pier Head. Today, the Mersey looked cold and bleak and depressing. On the other side of the river was Birkenhead and the Wirral, where she’d once dreamt of escaping to, at the time her idea of the poshest place in the world. The wind from

the river almost blew her hair off and an auld fella who was walking past, stopped, in that way Liverpudlians always did.

‘You alright there luv?’ he asked in his gruff voice. ‘You must be freezing.’

‘I’m fine thanks,’ she smiled sweetly.

He hovered around for a while, then made his own way. Lizzie carried on staring out into the river, wondering who would miss her if she just jumped in and let it wash over her. Would her body float all the way to Ireland? All of a sudden she felt a hand on her shoulder and heard a voice so familiar she thought she was hallucinating again.

‘There you are,’ he said. Lizzie turned around. It was Max, a fraught, but relieved look upon his face.

‘Everyone’s been so worried about you. I got a phone call from the studio saying you’d run off. I was stuck in Scotland and couldn’t do anything so I rang Bertie and asked him to search for you. It was he who suggested you’d come here, so I drove down from Glasgow. I’ve been looking all around this city for you.’

‘I was trying to find Mary Ann,’ she whimpered. ‘She was calling for me.’

‘I expect she was my darling,’ he sighed, pulling her head to his chest.

‘She’s out there somewhere,’ she cried. ‘But I’m too tired to carry on looking. Take me home Max.’

## **Chapter 25**

Lyn’s literary agent, Holmes Forrester decided to hold the launch party for her first novel ‘Eaton Square’ at Sleaford Manor in Windsor. It was a huge house in its own grounds, belonging to music producer Melvin Dee, and infamous for the wild parties that were held there. The official launch had been at the headquarters of Penguin Books a couple of weeks previously, but Holmes had felt that something a bit more ‘relaxed’ was required. ‘Eaton Square’ was a cert to cause a stir; it was highly explicit and some of the sex scenes had even made Lizzie blush and she’d led

quite a life. It was typical of Lyn to be provocative and do something to ensure the attention remained on her.

Lizzie arrived with Max, Bertie and Colin. Max had done all he could to stop her from going, she was due start filming a new series of St John's in a couple of days and he wanted her to take some time out to prepare for it. Her character – Sister Fitzgerald was pregnant and Max was worried how this would affect Lizzie. If she was honest with herself, she was dreading walking around with a cushion stuffed up her uniform, but she was nothing if not professional and knew she couldn't allow her personal fears to prevent her doing the job. For her, this party was an ideal way of blanking it all out and feeling like a free young woman again.

A fleet of cars were parked outside the manor house, glinting in the evening sun. Lizzie fizzed with excitement at the thought of partying. She gloried in Max's disapproval of her outfit – a see-through dress decorated with a pattern like peacock's feathers. Beneath it she wore just the skimpiest of panties, and it horrified her husband that her breasts could be seen quite clearly. But Max's protestations were minor, these days it was easier to go along with Lizzie's demands. When denied something, she would either throw a terrible tantrum, destroying everything in sight, or else she would drink an entire bottle of vodka and lock herself in one of the spare rooms for three days.

Bertie pulled up and they got out of the car, Lizzie stretching and greeting the sun like some sort of Goddess. She was aware of how beautiful she looked, her hair golden and flowing down her back, her dress showing off her wonderful body. She wore a blue jewelled bindi in the middle of her forehead; Louisa Walker one of her co-stars in her last film, an adaptation of DH Lawrence's *The Rainbow* given it to her. Louise had embraced Eastern mysticism and introduced Lizzie to some of the thinking. She considered Max awfully old fashioned because he refused to embrace it as well. Lizzie concluded it was old age stopping him opening his mind – he was thirty-five now after all.

Holmes Forrester greeted them at the door; he was a lecherous old queen who would leer at Bertie, even though Bertie was far from fresh meat.

'Darlings,' he slurred, already pissed. 'Come into the garden, we're just warming up.'

They followed him through the various corridors and hallways out to the gardens. Like the grounds of Aldridge Hall, the trees were topiary, there was a fountain and in the distance a summerhouse stood. Today it was littered with beautiful people; someone had set up a record player and *Eight Miles High* by The Byrds was playing. Amongst the tiny girls in tiny dresses stood Lyn, looking like a big, fat beacon. The author of this glitzy book now weighed at least seventeen stone and her bulk was camouflaged by a kaftan she'd purchased in Marrakech. It was hard to comprehend that this was the same curvy, blonde bombshell Lizzie had met ten years ago. But despite her size and the fact she'd let herself go since having Will; Lyn still possessed amazing sex appeal and had a gaggle of men surrounding her right at this moment, hanging onto her every word.

A trestle table was set up along one side of the garden, upon which stood endless bottles of champagne, all getting far too warm in the sunshine, but no one seemed to care. They followed Holmes over to one of these tables and he poured everyone a glass. While the men sipped theirs, Lizzie gulped hers down and rather impolitely picked up a bottle and proceeded to pour herself out another glass.

'Darling can you please steady yourself?' Max asked. 'It's only six o'clock.'

Lizzie turned to face her husband, chucking him under the chin.

'And can you please lighten up?' she giggled. 'We're supposed to be here to party.'

She spotted Lyn waddling towards them, the crowd parting to let her through.

'Hello darlings,' she gushed. 'Lovely to see you all,' she looked at Lizzie in her tiny, flimsy dress and grimaced. 'How come you can still wear clothes like that?'

'I guess not saddling myself with motherhood helped,' Lizzie replied and the others all shot uncomfortable glances at each other. Everyone in her circle knew how much the miscarriage had cut her up and she still hadn't recovered properly. She'd been sacked from the Palaver Films team after running out on 'House of Wanton Women', and all she'd done since then was *The Rainbow* and was about to make 'St John's'. She spent a lot of her time drunk and Max often pleaded with her to get help, which she refused. She hated talking about painful things and found it much easier to cope with it all, just by getting out of her brain.



‘Anyway darling,’ Lyn said, diffusing the atmosphere. ‘There’s everything here you could possibly want, so don’t be afraid to ask.’

Bertie looked around at the endless faces, none of whom seemed to be over the age of twenty-five.

‘Who are all these people?’ he asked.

‘Mainly friends of Melvyn’s – models and the likes. They make me feel positively fat and ugly.’

‘Yes, well you do look as though you’re entering a competition to find a look-a-like for Mama Cass,’ Bertie quipped in that way only he could get away with.

‘Oh how I love your sense of humour Albert,’ Lyn laughed. ‘Come on, let’s get seriously pissed.’

As usual with parties, people gravitate towards those they feel they have the most in common with, and Colin and Bertie couldn’t shake off Holmes. Max found Marcus in the study and they were sharing a bottle of scotch, while although Lizzie started off with Lyn, the more champagne she drank, the bolder she got, longing to go off and find other beautiful people. The house was so big that several parties developed in different rooms and Lizzie found herself wandering from one to another trying to find someone to talk to. Everywhere she went, men couldn’t take their eyes off her, even in these days of sexual liberation, it was still rare to see a woman who was practically naked. Lizzie ignored them. Even though she was tired of Max’s prissiness and constant nagging, she was still hopelessly in love with him and no other man could compare.

She ended up in a small drawing room in the West Wing of the house. Melvyn Dee obviously never used this one because it had not been decorated to his garish tastes but rather kept its original Victorian splendour. Like a moth to a flame, Lizzie was drawn to the well-stocked drinks cabinet in the corner. The bottles were covered in dust and probably very old but she didn’t care. There was a bottle of vodka in there that looked hardly touched and she couldn’t resist opening it up and swigging it down. She needed something longer lasting than champagne and vodka always worked a treat.

Putting the bottle back and enjoying the calmness that engulfed her, she stopped and realised she could hear someone playing *Scarborough Fair*. It wasn’t the record; this was someone with a

guitar, singing it to themselves. She noticed there was another room off this one and as she glanced in, she saw that people had congregated in there. Evening was turning into night and they had lit some candles. The air was filled with the smell of incense and marijuana, and in the centre of it all sat the singer, a young man with long, black hair and a little beard. Lizzie recognised him from *Top of the Pops* but she couldn't remember his name. His voice was strong and raspy, making this song sound different to the Simon and Garfunkel version. A semi-circle of devoted followers sat cross legged at his feet and Lizzie decided to join them, seating herself next to a beautiful young girl with long, titian hair and a face covered in freckles, she appeared to be no older than eighteen and Lizzie felt terribly ancient.

Sensing she was being scrutinised, the girl turned her head and looked at Lizzie. She smiled but her dark eyes were not focusing, she had obviously taken something and half her mind was somewhere else in the universe.

'I love your bindi,' she said. 'Where did you get it from?'

'A friend of mine went on an enlightenment course in India,' Lizzie explained. 'She brought it back for me.'

'Wow, far out. Who are you here with?'

'I'm a guest of Lyn Beckford. We've been friends for a long time. Do you know her?'

'No, I'm here because this is my father's mansion. What do you do? You're very beautiful.'

'I'm an actress,' Lizzie replied, noticing a young man heading towards them, an intent look upon his face. He sat down before them, offering a cigarette from a packet. The young girl refused but Lizzie accepted.

'Having a good time girls?' he asked in a broad cockney accent.

'The best,' the young girl smiled. 'What about you?'

'Not too bad. You two fancy something to get the party going?'

'Yes,' Lizzie laughed. 'More vodka.'

The wide-boy laughed, letting his eyes wander down to her chest and back again.

‘Vodka don’t even touch the sides darling,’ he said. ‘What I got is the best acid going. Take this and you ain’t just gonna see shooting stars, you’re gonna be riding ‘em.’

‘How much?’ Lizzie’s companion asked.

‘Ten bob. I can’t say any fairer than that.’

She looked at Lizzie, wanting her opinion.

‘What do you think?’ she asked.

‘I will if you will,’ Lizzie said. She’d never taken any drug in her life and she figured twenty-seven was as good an age to start as any.

‘Good girl,’ leered the spiv.

‘Okay,’ the other girl said. ‘I’ll take two.’

‘I’ve left my purse I the car,’ Lizzie panicked.

‘It’s okay, this is on me.’

Her new friend paid the drug dealer for two small tabs of paper that looked like miniature postage stamps. Lizzie wasn’t quite sure what she had to do with it and copied when the girl placed hers upon her tongue, shutting her mouth quickly. Lizzie did the same thing and found it tasted like confirmation wafers. It was rice paper soaked in a bitter tasting liquid that made her wince. The paper dissolved and eventually the taste went away. Unlike vodka there was no immediate effect and she wondered if Miss Dee had wasted her money. The spiv started to circulate around the rest of the room and most of the people in there took him up on his offer.

The singer moved onto another song. Although Lizzie wasn’t sure what it was, but she wanted to know how he managed to sing so slowly, as though every word was being extended and warped. She opened her eyes to look at him and at that moment their eyes met. She gasped in amazement to see his irises were red, like flames. He had a fire burning inside of him, giving him super powers that meant he could do anything he wanted. Her eyes wandered down to his body and saw he wasn’t wearing trousers but his legs were covered in velvet fur, his feet were hooves. He was one of the centaurs she remembered reading about at school. She had to investigate further,

crawling over the bodies lying on the floor and went to sit beside him, stroking his beautiful black mane. His singing got louder and stronger and made Lizzie feel amazing as though her touch was giving him life.

She climbed to her feet and started to dance, throwing her body about in wild shapes as the people in the room clapped her on. She looked up and saw the ceiling had melted away and she could see the stars above. Feeling the sudden need to breathe fresh air she ran out into the garden, not seeing anyone she knew except Lyn who was at the far end of the field, standing on a box, her fat body clad in white robes like an angel. Lizzie couldn't accept this. Lyn had recommended Dr Halliday to her, and he had ruined her life, stopped her from having babies. Lyn must have known this would happen so how could she be an angel? Lizzie was determined to knock her off that box and let everyone see her for who she really was.

Barefoot, she charged across the grass towards Lyn but before she could reach her, a terrible thing happened. A puff of black smoke appeared and as it cleared, she saw the most hideous creature emerge – a tall, thin man with red scaly skin and horns coming out of his head. He had the body of a lizard but stood upright like a human. It was the Devil. He had come to get her and take her to Hell, where she deserved to be. She didn't want to go. She wanted to go to Heaven and see her babies.

She turned to run away but he caught hold of her, his arms clasping around her waist and spinning her round. His grip was stronger than any human being's and his opaque yellow eyes terrified her. She reached out and tried to stick her nails into them but he pulled his head away. He gripped her tighter and she fought by wriggling around, trying to fend him off, digging her nails into his scaly cheeks and scratching him hard.

Suddenly, a mighty force grabbed her arms and pulled her away from the Devil. She didn't resist, grateful for the angels who were willing to give her another chance. She felt her body being bundled and moved throughout the garden and the house. She wondered if this meant she was being taken to Heaven. She hoped so. She often wanted to be dead and to think that it might finally be happening was a relief.

With no control of her body, she was manpowered and pushed up a flight of stairs, convinced she had died and at the top she would find St Peter waiting for her. Instead she was pushed into a

room and the next thing she knew, she was being coerced into a bed. Opening her eyes, she saw the angel Lyn looking down at her, an exasperated expression on her face and a glass of water in her hand.

‘What have you taken?’ she sighed.

‘Bit of paper,’ Lizzie giggled.

‘Acid. Come on. Drink this.’

Somehow Lyn managed to tilt Lizzie’s head and pour the water down her throat, she then laid her back down and left her to sleep. Slumber came remarkably easy to Lizzie and she had the most vivid dreams, most of them revolving around her life in Dingle Street. One of which she awoke from convinced she was fifteen and still there. She fell asleep once more and the next time she awoke, it was by a knocking on the door. Sitting up and rubbing her eyes, she realised she had a painful, sickly headache and found the daylight unbearable. She whispered for the person to come in and was at first delighted to see Max, but that was short-lived when she saw the sticking plaster running down his left cheek and the black eye he sported. An instinct told her she had something to do with this.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked, keeping his distance.

‘My head’s a little sore,’ she replied. ‘What happened to your face?’

He shook his head.

‘You really have no recollection do you? You came out into the garden last night and launched yourself at me. You nearly gorged my eyes out and dug your nails into my cheek so hard I needed stitches. Why did you take acid Lizzie?’

‘I wanted to see what it was like,’ she cried, ashamed at what she’d done, mortified at seeing her beloved husband as the Devil. ‘Stop nagging me.’

‘I’m not nagging you. I just want to help you. The way you’re going you’ll be dead by the time you’re thirty.’

‘Good,’ she whispered, turning to look at the wall. ‘I’ll get some peace and quiet then.’

## **Chapter 26**

### **Dublin – February 1969**

Lizzie felt better than she had for a long time. Max had come up with the idea that in order to keep an eye on his wife, the easiest thing to do would be to cast her in his latest film. In almost a reprise of one of her earliest roles, Lizzie was playing a young Irishwoman whose husband becomes involved in the Republican cause. The difference being this time the couple weren't a pair of young farm-workers but rather middle-class lecturers living in Dublin. Most of the filming was done on location, the interiors in a small studio in Drumcondra on the outskirts of the city. This film meant a lot to Lizzie and she'd promised Max that she'd stop drinking. She hadn't touched a drop since Christmas and it made her feel like a different person.

Today they were filming the scenes that would make the final sequence, on some cliffs about twenty miles from Dublin's port. The weather was suitably cold and misty for the scene where Siobhan – Lizzie's character – takes the ashes of her dead husband to the sea for scattering. All alone, her family have disowned her for marrying a Republican and she stands reflecting on her life, and the lonely future that awaits her. It was freezing cold and Lizzie shivered violently as she stared out at the Irish sea. She thought about her relatives who had sailed across this perilous stretch of water many years ago, across to a new life in Liverpool. And what sort of life had it been? Filled with poverty, incest and even now as the most successful member of her family, she was still living day in day out with the horrors of her past.

The pain in her heart made her cry, the weeping looked great on camera but as Max stared down the lens, he knew the tears were real. Life hadn't been easy of late, and while they loved each other passionately, a brick wall had built up between them. Every time he reached out to hold her or make love to her, she would freeze. It seemed knowing she could no longer get pregnant, she saw no point in having sex. Max would wait forever for her, but he knew Lizzie and he knew she would be waiting for him to leave her. She lived under the conviction she was bound for bad things.

As was typical of Lizzie, the scene was done in one take and once the cameras stopped rolling, she found it hard to stop crying. Max left his position and ran to her with an overcoat, which he wrapped around her.

‘That was fantastic my darling,’ he gushed. ‘Fabulous. Let’s get you back to the hotel.’

They were staying in a four star hotel on the banks of the Liffey. It was basic compared to some of the places Lizzie had stayed in, but it was comfortable and warm and she couldn’t wait to step into a warm bath. She was alone, as Max had some more shots of the cliffs to take. She decided that she’d get dressed up for him and suggest they went to dinner somewhere nice. It was time she made an effort in their marriage. Perhaps she would even let him make love to her tonight.

As she passed the reception, the elderly woman behind it stopped her.

‘I’ve a telephone message for you Lady Bowers,’ she said. Lizzie always signed in under her official title as fans always turned up looking for Elizabeth Maine.

‘Oh, thank you,’ she replied, taking the piece of paper and heading back to her room. In the lift she opened it out and found it simply read;

*Mrs Levy rang, could you please call her at home. It is urgent.*

Lizzie wondered what on earth could be the matter with Lyn that it required an urgent phone call. Knowing Lyn as she did, it was probably something quite trivial, so on getting back to her room, she called room service for a pot of tea and settled down for a cuppa before even phoning her friend. Lyn was obviously expecting her, as it only rang once before she picked it up.

‘Hello,’ she barked.

‘It’s me. What’s the urgency?’

‘Oh darling I wish you were here with me. What am I going to do?’

‘What’s wrong?’

‘That fucking bastard Marcus has got me pregnant again. The cunt said he was pulling out in time and he didn’t, I’ll kill him.’

‘I thought you were on the pill.’

‘I had to come off it, it was making me ill. I swear I’m going to cut his cock off.’

‘So William’s going to have a little brother or sister?’

‘Is he? I don’t think so. I’ve got to have an abortion Lizzie. My publisher is breathing down my neck for a second book. I can’t write and look after a brat. Why do these things happen to me?’

Lizzie didn’t respond, just put the phone down and sat staring into space. She could not believe how selfish Lyn could be at times. She already had a beautiful son and God had now blessed her with another baby and all she could do was think about killing it. And how utterly thoughtless, to ask her poor barren friend for advice, whining about her own misfortunes. Lizzie sank into despair, her anger with Lyn turning into a feeling of hopelessness and disappointment at her own body. The voices spoke to her, telling her she was useless and a waste of space; louder and louder they grew until she could bear it no longer. She had to deaden them; blank them out and prove them wrong.

She put on her coat, picked up her purse and left the room. She stopped off at reception and instructed them to tell Viscount Bowers she had popped out for a while and not to wait up for her. She then stepped out into the cold night, not quite knowing where one went in Dublin for a drink. She hailed a taxi and the driver advised her to go to Temple Bar. On arrival she found it a bustling enclave of pubs and bars and she hoped there was somewhere she could sit and have a drink, without men hitting on her and hassling her.

She heard faint strains of *Somebody to Love* coming from a doorway and noticed it was a small, scruffy looking bar called ‘The Purple Onion’. Wandering in, she breathed in the smell of incense and pot. The customers were hippies and the atmosphere mellow – Lizzie decided she was going to like it in here.

Behind the bar was a young man with a bushy black beard. The twinkle in his eyes told Lizzie he recognised her.

‘What can I get you?’ he smiled.

‘Have you any vodka?’ she asked.



‘Sure. Straight?’

She thought better of saying ‘yes’.

‘No, tonic would be good.’

‘Sorry man, no tonic. Lemonade okay?’

‘Yes, fine, thank you.’

She watched as he poured her drink, filling half the glass with vodka and adding just a splash of lemonade. Lizzie grabbed it and drank it down quickly, passing the barman the glass, before she’d even paid.

‘Put another in there,’ she smiled.

Three vodkas later and Lizzie was feeling a whole lot better. The voices had stopped and her head was filled with the usual nothing that alcohol brought. She was about to order her fourth drink when two other young people - a man and a woman - joined her at the bar. They looked a little older than the other student-types that were in there; the man was well-dressed with fair hair and sideburns even larger than Bertie’s, and the girl reminded Lizzie of Cher with long, black hair and a large nose. The man smiled at Lizzie.

‘Are you here on your own?’ he asked. He had an accent; he sounded Scandinavian. Definitely not Irish.

‘Yes,’ Lizzie smiled sleepily; enjoying the warmth the vodka was giving her.

‘Well may we join you?’

‘That would be very nice, thank you.’

‘And let me get you a drink.’

Lizzie was delighted to have another large vodka and the company of people who had no idea who she was. The young man was called Lars and his companion was an Italian called Maria. They were studying at Trinity College and when they asked Lizzie her name and what she done, she told them she was called Lizzie and was a model from England. For tonight she could be

whoever she wanted to be. Lars was very generous and before long Lizzie was so drunk she could barely speak without slurring her words, and was aware she was leaning into Lars; not that Maria seemed to mind.

‘We live about five minutes from here,’ Lars suggested. ‘I have some seriously strong vodka back there. Would you like to come back with us?’

‘I’d love to,’ Lizzie giggled. ‘I love meeting new people.’

The next thing Lizzie knew, she was in a tiny flat above a nearby shop. She had no recollection of getting there and the confusion made her feel a little sick. She was aware that the flat was decorated with posters of Lenin and Trotsky and Che Guevara, and this reminded her of Simeon Hanson’s place.

She collapsed on the sofa, Lars sitting next to her, offering her another glass of vodka.

‘Try this,’ he smiled. ‘Or perhaps you would like something stronger. Do you smoke?’

‘Pot?’

‘Umm. Good quality stuff.’

After the horrors at Holmes Forrester’s party, Lizzie had decided to avoid drugs. But pot was different to LSD; it just mellowed you out, and that was what she needed. Maria rolled a joint and soon the three of them were sharing it on the sofa. From then on time and motion seemed to slow down, and everything became like a dream to Lizzie. She couldn’t see properly or speak coherently; she was only aware of feelings and movement. She was positive she was being moved but couldn’t be sure of it and the next time she regained consciousness, she was lying on a bed. Almost paralysed, she was aware she was naked but was powerless to move. Hands seemed to be exploring every part of her body but she could barely see who it was; opening her eyes was such an effort but when she did, all she could focus on was the black cloud of Maria’s hair across her stomach. At that moment she was sure the lights in the room started to flicker but it all became too much and she fell asleep.

She awoke some time afterwards, opening her eyes to find herself naked and alone in a huge bed covered in goat skin rugs. Her head was spinning and she was no longer drunk or stoned, but

instead felt sick and dizzy. Snatches of the previous evening came back to her and she realised it was probably very late. She looked at her watch and saw it was a quarter to three. Her blood ran cold; Max would be worried sick and would no doubt nag her to death. Getting out of bed proved painful with the room swaying and her stomach lurching as if she was on a ship. She tried to get into her clothes as quickly as possible and walked out into the living room to find Lars and Maria on the sofa smoking ordinary cigarettes and drinking coffee.

‘Thanks for a good night,’ was all she said.

‘No worries,’ nodded Lars, waving his cup at her.

Lizzie went out into the street and realised she had no idea how to get back to the hotel. The freezing night air made her feel slightly drunk again and she looked around for a cab. There was nothing to be found so she had no choice but to walk back. She found her way to the Liffey and from there looked out for recognisable buildings that would lead her back to the hotel. It was half past three when she stumbled in, the light was out and Max was asleep. He wasn’t even waiting up for her – he used to do it when she first went out drinking, but it was almost as if he was expecting it now.

Trying not to wake him, she slipped off her clothes and got into bed beside him, hoping that in the morning she could lie to him and say she’d come in earlier.

‘I thought it was too good to be true,’ came the voice from the other side of the bed. Lizzie’s heart stopped – Max wasn’t asleep at all.

‘I haven’t been drinking,’ she pleaded. ‘I just bumped into some friends.’

‘And what friends have you got in Dublin Lizzie? Don’t treat me like an idiot. Just get some sleep, you’ve got to be on set by nine.’

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Three weeks later and they were home. The film was in the can and Max was preparing for his next project - a film about the Spanish Civil War that was actually being made in Malta. Lizzie wanted to come along too but wasn’t able to as Maggie had arranged an audition for her to do a

stage play of *Little Women*. The Casting Director wanted her to play Jo, the tomboy sister, but Lizzie was convinced that at nearly twenty-eight she was too old for this. It all seemed such a waste of time, and she'd rather be with her husband.

She had a meeting with Maggie that morning and as she drove over to Hampstead felt proud of herself. She had a totally clear head, despite attending a party the night before. Now that homosexuality was no longer a crime, Bertie had celebrated by buying a new house in Pimlico and openly moving Colin in. Not much had changed; the neighbours just thought they were friends sharing, but even if they did discover the truth, there was no longer the threat of being reported to the police. The housewarming had been typically Bertie – lavish and entertaining, but Lizzie made a promise to Max to only have one glass of wine and she stuck to it. When they went home they made love for the first time in ages and it had been wonderful and this morning Lizzie felt nothing could possibly go wrong.

Maggie greeted her and they went into the drawing room office as usual, but before Lizzie could sit down, Maggie passed her a large brown envelope.

‘This came for you darling,’ she said. ‘Coffee?’

‘Yes please.’

Maggie went off to the kitchen to make the coffee herself, as her housekeeper was on holiday. Lizzie studied the envelope, wondering whom it was from. It felt too thin to be a script; the back was made of card and this usually indicated photographs. She guessed they were probably from some actor trying to get her to choose him as her next leading man. She ripped open the envelope and pulled out the first photograph and when she did she almost screamed with shock, and dropped it. With shaking hands she picked it up off the floor and dared to look at it. The photo was of her, naked and spread-eagled on a bed with another woman leaning over her, kissing her. For a moment she had no idea who this girl with long, jet-black hair was; then it came back to her, Dublin and meeting Lars and Maria. The next photo was of Maria kissing her breasts and the next one must have been taken on a timer; Lars was on one side of her, naked and kissing her breasts; Maria was on the other side, her hand between Lizzie's legs. Fumbling in the envelope, she pulled out the note that accompanied it.

*You must have been stupid to think we didn't recognise you Elizabeth. We want £10,000. If we don't have this in one week's time we will take these photographs to the newspapers. We will meet you at Holyhead Ferry Port at 10am on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March. No police.*

Lizzie heard Maggie's footsteps coming down the hall and stuffed the photographs and note into her bag. Maggie joined her, putting the tray onto the coffee table and sitting down.

'Who was the envelope from?' she asked.

'Oh, some actor,' Lizzie shrugged. 'Thinks he'd make a good leading man.'

This was a crisis so big and so embarrassing Lizzie couldn't even ask Bertie for advice. Lyn would have known what to do but she was so wrapped up in her own problems – Marcus had discovered she was pregnant and threatened to divorce her if she aborted – that she wouldn't be interested in anything Lizzie had to say anyway.

When she got home, Max was in the living room polishing his camera equipment, but as usual his eyes were upon her, scrutinising her, always looking out for evidence of drink or drugs.

'Hello darling,' he said. 'How did the meeting go?'

'I've got an audition on Friday,' she replied distractedly. 'I still can't imagine myself in a crinoline dress.'

'I'm sure you'll look as beautiful as you do in Biba.'

Lizzie took her bag upstairs and put the envelope in a drawer in her dressing table. Max had no reason to look in there and it gave her a chance to think about it and decide how she would deal with it herself. Max could never know; he wouldn't believe she'd done it all without consenting to any of it; he'd think she'd been deliberately unfaithful to him with a man and a woman!

If ever she'd needed a wake up call, this was it. Alcohol had gotten her into this terrible situation and she knew there and then she could never drink again. She would use the time Max was away to get her head together, and she was now determined to get the part of Jo March. If she was acting every evening, she wouldn't be able to go out partying.

Friday came and she felt so nervous about the audition that she had to persuade Bertie to go along with her. The theatre was just down the road from the Palace, where rehearsals for *Of Mice and Men* were going strong. Bertie had finally dropped the Johnny Duvall moniker and wrote under his real name. It was funny seeing the posters outside the theatre announcing 'Preston & Walsh's *Of Mice & Men*'; it really made it seem as though her darling Bertie had made the big time.

He was waiting outside the Piccadilly Theatre and greeted Lizzie with a big kiss for luck. Miriam Smithson, the Director, had a fierce reputation. One of the only female theatre directors around, she'd taken on a somewhat male persona, dressing in suits and ties, and Lizzie hoped her previous reputation of being a dolly bird didn't go against her with this Women's Libber.

She had been practising this part for days, and had memorised every word of the short monologue she had to recite in front of Smithson and the Casting Director. Playing to an almost empty auditorium was terrifying but she managed it and at the end, the adrenaline rush that came was better than any glass of vodka. The icing on the cake was when Miriam stood up and applauded her, declaring there and then that she'd got the job.

Lizzie was elated and like in the days of their youth, she and Bertie squealed all the way along the road. She left him at the Palace and jumped into a taxi; once upon a time, she'd have wanted to go for a celebratory drink, but now all she wanted was to get home and tell Max. Winning this part was the first step on the road to her recovery and she knew he'd be immensely proud and relieved.

She got in to find him sitting at the dining table, so deep in thought it seemed he didn't even notice her enter the room. It was only as she got closer, she saw what was preoccupying him. The photographs taken in Dublin were spread all over the table. Lizzie suddenly felt unbearably sick.

'I had a toothache,' he said calmly. 'I couldn't find any aspirin in the bathroom so I thought I'd look in your drawer....'

'I can explain everything,' she pleaded. 'It was when we were in Dublin. I was so upset when Lyn rang me saying she wanted an abortion that I went out and got drunk. I met those two and they plied me with drink. I had no idea what I was doing.'

He shook his head.

‘I can’t cope with you any more Lizzie.’

‘But I’m going to change. I got the part in Little Women. I won’t have the chance to drink.’

He sat back rubbing his temples and Lizzie could tell he meant every word that he said. The time had come that she had dreaded for so long, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

‘I can’t cope with all this. I love you so much and I always will, but you’re making me ill. I never know what mood you’re going to be in. You go missing, I’m terrified you’re lying dead somewhere. You need help, someone to talk about your past.’

‘A psychiatrist? You think I’m mad?’

‘I don’t think you’re mad at all Lizzie. But you’ve had some terrible things happen to you and you need someone professional to help you come to terms with it all. Not me.’

She began to shake and cry. Even though she had prepared herself for this day, she’d always hoped it wouldn’t happen. Max was so reliable; he loved her so much. He couldn’t abandon her. If he left, her world would end.

‘Please don’t leave me Max,’ she cried. ‘I’ll change. I promise.’

He got up and walked over to her, gripping her shoulders and looking at her. She could see he had been crying and it made her realise how much her behaviour had got to him. She had never hated herself more.

‘While I’m around you do nothing to help yourself. You just rely on me and I can’t help you any more. I’ll pay off these people for you and then I’ll go to Malta. When I come back I’ll move into a flat. You can stay here.’

‘Max no,’ she sobbed. ‘Max please don’t leave me.’

‘We’re no good for each other. I’m not strong enough for you.’

‘But you still love me.’

He kissed her on the head.

‘I will always love you Lizzie, and maybe one day we can be friends, but you need to sort yourself out first.’

## **Chapter 27**

When Max moved out, he asked Bertie to move in. Even though Lizzie had driven him to the brink of despair – to save her feelings he’d neglected to tell her the doctor had diagnosed him with clinical depression – he loved her desperately and needed to make sure she was taken care of. Bertie and Colin moved into the Chelsea house, and every hour on the hour, Bertie would creep into Lizzie’s room and check on her, making sure she hadn’t done anything stupid. Her initial reaction to Max’s leaving had been to commit suicide, but gradually the feeling subsided. She didn’t even need to drink any more to feel numb, it seemed with each day her emotions were shutting off one by one. It was as if she could feel the life slipping out off her anyway.

When not rehearsing her lines for *Little Women*, she would simply sit on the sofa and stare into space, locked in her own little world. She would ruminate on her life and it’s many failures – getting pregnant, having her baby taken away, coming to London and falling for a married gangster then a bisexual boxer who slept with her best friend. It seemed she couldn’t do anything without making a complete mess of it, and a voice that wasn’t her own would mock her and tell her how stupid and worthless she was. Nowadays she didn’t fight it, instead she listened. The voice, even though it was cruel to her, had become a friend. At least it never abandoned her like everyone else did.

The theatrical world is very incestuous and soon word of the Bowers’ split was spreading like wildfire. The cast of the play were shocked when Lizzie turned up on the first day of rehearsals and performed the whole thing immaculately. Lizzie could act on automatic pilot and somehow even though that voice was rampant in her head, telling her she would never go through with the show and would let the whole company down, she managed to ignore it and got on with the job. At night she would go home and push the food Colin had cooked for her around her plate, then take herself to bed. She didn’t sleep; just lay listening to the voice in her head. As the days went on she realised she couldn’t take it any longer and once the show was over she would kill herself. Everyone was counting on her to play Jo and if she dropped out of this too, her final act on earth



would be another failure. So it was the least she could do to keep going for a while longer, then when it was over she would tell Maggie to cancel all appointments, as she wanted to rest.

Knowing she was about to die gave Lizzie a sense of peace that had been lacking for some time. Her pain would be over soon, so enduring it became easier. On stage she would be going through the motions but all the time plotting her demise. She decided she'd do it in Ireland, the land of her forefathers. She would take herself off to some little village, book herself into a B&B and take the whole bottle of tranquillisers the doctor gave her. She shared her plans with no one; knowing they would only feel obliged to talk her out of it, but secretly wishing her gone, looking forward to the day she stopped ruining their lives.

Miriam was determined to make the production a happy experience for everyone and wanted to get rehearsals of the saddest part of the play out of the way first. Beth's death was the most tragic point of the novel and Pauline Cole, the young girl playing the part was nervous that she wasn't going to get it right. She reminded Lizzie of herself at fifteen – shy and desperate to please. She seemed such a child and it made Lizzie realise what she'd had to go through at such a young age.

Pauline had returned from a holiday and far from looking like a corpse, she was tanned and glowing, and as she languished on what would be her death bed, giving it her all, the cast chuckled at how odd it looked. Except for Lizzie. She sat beside her, trying to remember her lines, her mind was a complete blank. There was nothing in her head. If someone had asked her where she lived she would have been stumped for an answer. In fact, she didn't know where she was or what she was doing on this stage or why these people were looking at her. She started to shake, feeling like a child that had been separated from its mother, scared that she would be abandoned forever with no one to care for her.

'Leave me alone!' she cried at all these staring faces. She got off of her seat and ran to the back of the set.

She heard gasps as a big, stern looking woman strode over to her. Lizzie had no idea who she was. Perhaps she was a teacher.

'Have you been taking drugs Elizabeth?' she barked.

‘Leave me alone,’ Lizzie cried, sliding down the set, gathering her knees up. ‘Don’t touch me. Leave me alone.’

The woman turned and looked out into the auditorium.

‘Boris, call Dr Bernstein.’

Lizzie struggled as a man and a woman from the stage gripped her arms and led her away. She was taken to her dressing room and sat down. The young woman sat beside her, holding her arm.

‘Are you okay Elizabeth?’ she asked. ‘Is it a bad trip? Don’t worry, we’ve all had them.’

‘Who are you?’ Lizzie cried. ‘Who are you? I want my mam.’

‘The doctor will be here soon Elizabeth. He might be able to give you something to bring you down again.’

Lizzie had no idea what this girl was talking about and decided it was probably best to say nothing at all. She just sat shaking and whimpering until the door opened and the stern looking woman entered, this time accompanied by an elderly man with flecks of grey in his dark brown hair. He looked at Lizzie from beneath a bushy brow.

‘This is the patient is it?’

‘I think she’s taken drugs Doctor Bernstein,’ the older woman said. ‘She says she doesn’t know who we are.’

‘Okay, leave us alone. I’m sure we can get to the bottom of this.’

He cleared the room and Lizzie wanted to run too but she couldn’t find the strength. Instead she sat holding on tightly to the arms of the chair. The doctor knelt beside her, studying her face.

‘How old are you Elizabeth?’ he asked.

‘T-Twenty eight,’ she replied. ‘Why are you asking?’

‘Just so I can get a better picture of you.’

From his pocket he got a small torch and shone it into each of her eyes, making her blink and flinch.

‘Well you haven’t been taking drugs,’ he said more to himself than her. ‘Elizabeth are you taking *any* form of medication?’

‘Why are you asking me these questions?’ she snapped. ‘Leave me alone. You’re with them. You just want to take me away. Leave me alone.’

The doctor sighed in frustration; the door opened and the stern woman returned, an expectant expression upon her face, as if she thought the doctor could give Lizzie an injection and make her normal again.

‘Do you know if she’s had a recent trauma?’ he asked her.

‘Her marriage has just broken up,’ the woman replied. ‘What do you think is wrong with her?’

‘Well I couldn’t swear to it as I’m not a psychiatrist, but I think you’re looking at a classic example of a nervous breakdown.’

Lizzie wasn’t quite sure why Doctor Bernstein asked for a blanket which he wrapped around her, or why he took her from the theatre and out to his car. Maybe he was a Russian and they were abducting her, or perhaps he was a murderer or something. She was desperate to scream for help, but as if anaesthetised, she was paralysed, unable to utter a word. She was driven through streets she did not recognise and was taken to a building. A house in a posh street that reminded her of somewhere in her past - somewhere she’d seen a doctor who had done something terrible to her.

Doctor Bernstein took her to his Harley Street practice and made her wait in a small anteroom. He sat beside her, and she could smell tobacco on his breath. A cigarette. She needed a cigarette, badly.

‘Elizabeth I’m going to call a doctor who can help you,’ he said slowly. ‘Is there someone who can come and sit with you?’

‘Bertie,’ she whimpered. ‘I want Bertie.’

‘Bertie? Is that your husband?’

‘Bertie’s at the Palace,’ was all she could say. ‘Bertie’s at the Palace.’

‘Which Palace Elizabeth?’

‘Theatre. He’s at the Palace Theatre.’

The doctor suddenly left her and although she was scared of him, she was even more terrified of being alone and watched him as he stuck his head round the door and spoke to someone unknown.

‘Carol can you get the number of the Palace Theatre? Phone them and ask if they have someone called Bertie there. If there is, come and get me.’

He closed the door and returned to Lizzie’s side.

‘What’s your date of birth Elizabeth?’

‘First of the seventh, forty one,’ she replied, precisely, like a child would.

‘And where do you live?’

‘Number sixteen, Dingle Street, Toxteth, Liverpool L8.’

Doctor Bernstein realised Lizzie had regressed back to childhood. He had no idea if she was from Liverpool or not – her accent was very convincing but then again she was an actress. But the way she phrased her responses, the blank expression upon her face; in her head was someone very young.

‘Okay, well sit there quietly and we’ll get you some help as soon as possible.’

He left her side and went to sit at a desk, writing notes. Lizzie wondered what she was doing here. This place looked like Doctor Draper’s surgery in Paradise Street, but Doctor Draper was very old and he never wore a suit, always a scruffy jumper with egg stains on. The door opened and a fat woman squeezed into a yellow dress gestured to Doctor Bernstein. He left the room and Lizzie wished she could hear through walls – desperate to know what was being said about her.

Time seemed to pass very quickly, and soon the door opened and another man walked in. He looked familiar, like Bertie, but this man was old; his hair was receding and he had big, fluffy

sideburns and a moustache. Bertie was only twenty-seven and clean-shaven with a head full of wavy blonde hair. But it was the eyes, those naughty blue eyes that twinkled lovingly at her.

He sat beside her and wrapped his arm around her shoulder, pulling her close to him.

‘Oh Lizzie,’ he sighed. ‘My darling Lizzie what have they done to you?’

‘Are you Bertie?’ she frowned.

He didn’t answer, instead looked at Doctor Bernstein.

‘What’s the matter with her?’ he asked.

‘She’s showing all the symptoms of a nervous breakdown. I’ve rung a psychiatrist friend of mine and he’s coming to assess her. If he agrees with me, I’ll have no choice but to commit her.’

‘Well I want her taken to a private hospital. Not one of those terrible asylums that disguise themselves as cottage hospitals. My parents had me locked up in one of those when I was seventeen and I would not wish that on my darling Lizzie.’

‘Have you any idea what might have caused this? I believe her marriage has ended?’

‘Yes, and she had a miscarriage a little while ago. Poor Lizzie, she hasn’t had an easy life.’

‘Well if we get her a nice hospital to stay in and some rest and relaxation, she should be right as rain before we know it.’

Lizzie had absolutely no idea what they were talking about. She wasn’t married and she hadn’t had a miscarriage. She had a baby girl and the nuns had just taken her away from her. Who were these men?

Soon yet another stranger, a younger and very good-looking man, joined them. He shook hands with the others and then knelt down beside her.

‘Hello Elizabeth,’ he said. ‘I’m Doctor Alexander.’

‘Call her Lizzie,’ Bertie said. ‘She’ll probably respond to that.’

‘Okay. You’re a friend I take it?’

‘Yes, Bertie Preston. I’m one of her oldest friends.’

Lizzie said nothing, but she panicked. Why was Bertie looking so old?

Doctor Alexander returned his attentions to her.

‘Lizzie do you know where you are?’ he asked.

She shook her head.

‘No. I’ve only just got to London. They took my baby away and I’ve come to London to get a job. Where am I now?’

‘Okay okay, don’t fret,’ he said softly. ‘We’re going to take care of you.’

‘She must think she’s fifteen again,’ Bertie said fretfully. ‘She came here when she was fifteen.’

‘It’s very common,’ Doctor Alexander said. ‘People either revert to a time when they were happiest, or else back to when some sort of trauma occurred. If she did have a baby taken away from her, this could be it.’

‘Will she have to go to hospital?’ Bertie asked.

‘Yes, it will be for her own good.’

‘I want her to go somewhere private. Don’t worry about the cost, I’ll pay. I can’t have my Lizzie treated like a piece of meat.’

‘Okay, well I’ll phone the Lodge in Richmond and see if they can admit her.’

Lizzie realised she was going to be taken yet somewhere else and she started to shake, reaching out for Bertie.

‘Don’t let them take me,’ she cried. ‘Bertie I want to stay with you.’

‘Darling you need to go somewhere they can look after you. I’ll visit you every day, I promise.’

The doctor came off the phone and knelt beside Lizzie once more.

‘Lizzie, Bertie and I are going to take you to a nice hospital. They’ll look after you and get you better.’

‘No I’m not going!’ she yelled. ‘You can’t make me. Bertie take me home.’

‘Lizzie I can’t. You need constant care.’

‘No!’ she yelled, darting out of the chair and heading for the door. Bertie and Doctor Bernstein caught her, manoeuvring her back into the chair. Doctor Alexander asked Bertie to keep her still and he did this by gripping her shoulders. She whimpered in terror as she watched Doctor Alexander start to roll up her sleeve – this was it, they were going to inject her with poison and kill her. Frozen with terror, she watched as he took a syringe from his bag along, with a little clear bottle. He filled the syringe with the contents of the bottle and aimed the needle for her arm. She watched as it penetrated her skin and waited for death to come. Within moments she was engulfed with a feeling of sleepiness, but remained conscious at the same time. It was like being drunk, but without the sickness or headache. She wished she could feel like this all the time.

By the time the sedative wore off, she was safely ensconced in the Lodge. It was a beautiful former mansion in Richmond and catered for people with money, whose extravagant lifestyles had been the ruin of them, usually from over indulgence in drink and drugs. Lizzie’s room was plain and she was stripped of any item she could use to harm herself. The nurse then placed her in a chair by the window so she could look out onto the beautiful gardens. She still had no idea why she was here and wondered if it was some sort of bed and breakfast.

The door opened and a man walked in. He was dressed casually in a black polo jumper and slacks. He smiled at her and sat on the bed.

‘Hello Lizzie,’ he said. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘Tired. Where am I?’

‘You’re in hospital. You were a little poorly so we’ve brought you here to look after you until you’re well again. I’m Mr Wilson, your consultant, you’ll be seeing me every day.’

‘Am I mad?’ she asked, some remote rational part of her brain realising this was an institution.

‘No Lizzie you’re not mad. You just got over-tired with life and we’re going to help you enjoy it again.’

## **Chapter 28**

### **Ibiza – July 1974**

Not many women would want a framed copy of *Playboy* for their thirty-third birthday, but that was exactly what Lizzie got. But this was no ordinary copy; this was *her* front cover. Compared to the young starlets that usually graced the magazine, she was positively over the hill; but she had the body of a woman half her age and looked ravishing. Her blonde hair was tousled and falling over one eye; her lips pink and glossy. She wore a silver, cut-away swimsuit on the cover, but inside she was nude. The shots were tasteful and had been taken on her boyfriend Alessandro’s yacht in the middle of the Mediterranean back in April. Lizzie had been proud to show off her magnificent physique, and her lover had looked on proudly as she’d done it.

Lizzie had been with Italian playboy Alessandro DeMatteo for two years. After leaving the Lodge in the winter of 1969, Maggie had arranged for her to go to stay with a friend of hers in Los Angeles. The sunshine and positive attitude of the Californians was infectious and she’d ended up staying. She had to be hastily written out of ‘St Johns’, but she didn’t care, work didn’t seem so exciting any more. The only film she made in that time was a feature length *Columbo* in 1972, playing a wealthy English woman whose husband is murdered. Most of her days were taken up with sunbathing or lunching with her new friends. She met Alessandro at a party for her thirty-first birthday and he’d spent the following two months pursuing her with the most expensive and extravagant gifts.

Alessandro was nineteen years her senior and for the first time ever, Lizzie felt protected by a man in an almost fatherly way. He offered her a fantastic lifestyle; he owned a Formula One racing team and she was perfectly aware that when he was away in Europe on business he was unfaithful, but she didn’t care. A lasting legacy of spending three years on anti-depressants was that she now felt somewhat detached from the world. She no longer needed alcohol, and her only vice was the occasional joint. Most of the time she could cope with all life threw at her by not feeling very much at all.



The call from *Playboy* had come as a total shock. She thought she'd been long since forgotten, but the issue was dedicated to Girls Next Door from the early 1960s. Lizzie's sexiness had once come from her innocence, although that seemed such a long time ago it could have been another girl they were referring to. Alessandro liked nothing better than the thought of having a *Playboy* model as his companion and encouraged her to do it. Now, as the icing on the cake, he'd had her cover immortalised in a 24 carat gold frame so she could remember herself in her prime - even when she was old and wrinkly.

Alessandro was holding a party for her here at the huge villa he owned just outside of Ibiza Town. Lyn and Marcus and Bertie and Colin were staying over, while the other friends they'd picked up around the world were just stopping by before going off to another party or another island. Lizzie's outfit for the night was a reflection of her newfound confidence. It was black and sexy with a low-scooped back and a plunging neckline, and with it she would wear a long, gold chain that hung between her breasts. To add that extra something, she decided she needed a really deep tan and had spent the past two days by the pool, soaking up the rays and reading 'I Quit' – Lyn's latest novel. Lyn had become somewhat of a feminist icon in recent years, her books always telling the story of powerful women who took sex and pleasure where they wanted it. The graphic sex and drug taking scenes had caused a stir in the literary world, and Lyn revelled in being a figure of notoriety once more. 'I Quit' was about a woman who leaves her womanising husband after he's caught with a girl half his age; she then takes up with an eighteen year old boy in revenge. There had been calls to have it banned, but it had gone on to become a bestseller.

Lizzie's peace and quiet was disrupted by lots of voices and sounds coming from inside the house. She lifted her head just as the French doors slid open; Alessandro came out, his podgy body lobster red after sunbathing without using Ambre Solaire. Behind him walked Lyn, Marcus, Bertie and Colin, and with a squeal of delight, Lizzie put down her novel and stood up to meet them. Lyn had changed dramatically in recent years. On reaching thirty-eight she'd panicked about approaching forty and being so fat. To remedy it, she had gone to see a quack in Harley Street who'd prescribed her copious amounts of amphetamines, and in three months had lost five stone. She was now thinner than she'd ever been before and her breasts had all but disappeared. Even though her body was skinny, her face was ageing rapidly and she looked haggard. She'd

permed her greying hair and dyed it a shocking red and now only wore black clothes – today a see-through kaftan and black bikini underneath.

‘Hello darling!’ she squealed, running to Lizzie. They embraced and Lizzie recoiled at feeling her friend’s bones through the flimsy fabric. Lyn pulled away and looked down at Lizzie. ‘How come you look more beautiful every time I see you, and yet I look like an old bag?’

‘You don’t look like an old bag,’ Lizzie lied. ‘You’re as gorgeous as you ever were.’

‘You really should learn to lie more convincingly darling,’ Bertie piped up. Lizzie pulled away from Lyn and ran to her oldest friend. He looked wonderfully camp having shaved off what remained of his hair; just leaving a fuzzy cover, his sideburns and his bushy moustache. Lizzie kissed him hello, then greeted the other men.

‘Darling what do you want to drink?’ Alessandro asked in his gruff Italian accent.

‘Oh champagne definitely,’ Lizzie giggled, feeling good that she now had the confidence to have two glasses of champagne and not want to drink the whole bottle. Alessandro strode back into the house, glancing back at Marcus and Colin.

‘I think these three are going to be gossiping,’ he quipped. ‘Anyone fancy a game of snooker?’

‘I say,’ replied Marcus. ‘Anything to get away from the three witches.’

‘Okay, you two go and set the table up, I’ll join you soon.’

Within minutes, the three friends had a bottle of champagne to share. Lyn stripped down to her bikini, her ribs and bony hips on show; Bertie was wearing a fetching pair of Speedos, totally revealing and decadent, but so him.

‘How are the children?’ Lizzie asked Lyn.

‘Will has finally settled into boarding school,’ she replied, rolling her eyes to the sky. ‘Four times he’s run away. Four times.’

‘You’re a heartless bitch sending a nine year old to boarding school,’ Bertie hissed.

‘How can William cope with my lifestyle?’ she snapped. ‘He’s such a sensitive child, he needs constant attention. I wish he could be more like Samantha’

Samantha was the baby Lyn had wanted to abort back in 1969; but something magical had happened to her when the little girl was laid in her arms in early 1970. In a way that hadn’t happened with William, Lyn had fallen madly in love with her and she was now the apple of her eye. Poor William was pushed to the sidelines more than ever and sometimes Lizzie wished Lyn would let her adopt him. He was a darling little boy who just wanted a mother to love him.

‘It broke my heart leaving Sammy,’ Lyn pouted. ‘I almost brought her here.’

‘You should have,’ replied Lizzie. ‘It would have been lovely to see her.’

‘Well,’ Lyn fizzed, as if she had something exciting to say. ‘If you say yes to what I’m about to offer, you could see Sammy all the time.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I’d like you to come back to England to make a film.’

‘What film?’

‘Top Position. They’re only making it into a movie aren’t they? One of *my* books into a film. Salim Farrah, the producer would like you to play Buffy Adams.’

‘Me? Bloody hell. I don’t know what to say.’

‘You’ll need to come back to London to meet with Salim and Wade Jackson, the director but darling it’s a shoo in. Please say you’ll do it.’

‘Why not?’ Lizzie smiled. ‘Top Position’ was about a woman who is left her father’s printing business and the handsome son of one of his rivals tries to get it off her by seducing her. Buffy Adams was a tough talking bitch - completely different to any of the roles Lizzie had played before. But acting work had dried up and she was grateful to Lyn for this offer.

‘Lizzie darling there’s something else we need to tell you,’ Bertie said, his face was grave, and Lizzie’s good spirits melted away, scared of what he was going to say. ‘Max and Annabel have had a baby. A little girl.’

For a moment Lizzie found it impossible to respond. In 1972 Max had married Annabel Chan, an Anglo-Chinese make up artist he'd met on the set of one of his films. Hearing the news had almost sent Lizzie over the edge, but she'd instead booked a session with Leon Miles, her psychotherapist and had talked through her feelings, trying to come to terms with it. The pain of knowing Max had found another woman who probably wouldn't drive him to illness, was strong enough to cut through the fog of her anti-depressants; but Miles had managed to make her see that her relationship with Max was a closed chapter in her life and she had no choice but to move on. After all, Max had.

Now Annabel had given him something Lizzie never could – a baby. She couldn't stop tears coming into her eyes and that instinct to run and grab the vodka bottle was stronger than ever before. But that wouldn't solve anything except destroy everything she'd built for herself since Max had left her.

'I'm sorry,' was all Bertie said.

'That's fine. What have they called her?'

'Liza,' Lyn snapped. 'Fucking cheek, he may as well have called her Elizabeth and done with it.'

Instead of being insulted, Lizzie felt touched. Max obviously still thought of her, even going as far as naming his darling new baby after her. Lizzie wished she could see Liza – she should have been theirs.

'Well if you see him, give him my best wishes and tell him I'm happy for him.'

There was a moment's silence while Lyn and Bertie waited for her to burst into tears or go into hysterics, but Lizzie wasn't going to do any of those things. For the first time in her life, she could accept what was happening to her and wasn't going to allow it to ruin her entire life. She laughed at their long faces and rubbed her hands together.

'So, you two. Are we going to get ready for the party?'

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Alessandro had to fly off to Los Angeles so couldn't join Lizzie in London. It felt strange for her to be back. She was homeless, as she'd sold the house she'd shared with Max in Chelsea. She went to stay with Bertie and Colin, preferring it to the chaotic Levy household and being an unpaid babysitter to Samantha.

Lyn thought the best way to discuss Lizzie's role in 'Top Position' was by meeting at St Moritz, London's trendiest restaurant. Maggie demanded that she attend, along with Lyn, Wade Jackson the Director and Salim Farrah whose money would be funding the whole project. Lizzie had met Farrah before; he was an Arab playboy and it was rumoured he had seven wives back in Kuwait. That didn't mean he refused to embrace the Western lifestyle, and he had a penchant for beautiful women and gambling. He'd once made a pass at Lizzie at a party in Cannes, when Alessandro had just gone to the bathroom. She'd politely refused his offer - men like Salim Farrah had lost their appeal many years ago.

Wade Jackson was a squat, balding American who had made his fortune directing pornographic films. He was a coke buddy of Salim's and no doubt the seeds of their working partnership had been sown when they were high. Salim was a very beautiful man with honey coloured skin, jet-black hair and a classical bone structure. It was only when everyone was seated around the table, that Lizzie noticed the furtive glances between her friend and the handsome Arab, and she realised exactly why Salim had agreed to fund Lyn's film. He was screwing her.

As was the way with modern restaurants, the food was sparse and it was lucky Lizzie wasn't particularly hungry. She decided to keep a clear head and stuck to drinking tonic water, while Lyn swigged back Martinis as though they were going out of fashion.

Wade was chomping at the bit like an eager terrier.

'I'm thinking soft focus, I'm thinking lots of music; sexy clothes. You know there's a whole club scene of beautiful people here in London, let's use them.'

'Is there going to be nudity in this film?' Maggie asked.

'You know it's awfully fashionable to have nudity in films these days,' Salim said in his deep, dark voice.

'Yes but I don't want my client playing those sorts of roles.'

‘In all fairness Miss Calvin,’ he replied. ‘But she has just done *Playboy*. It was after seeing that I became convinced I wanted her to play Buffy.’

‘I’ve never done a sex scene,’ Lizzie stated and all eyes suddenly fixed on her.

‘And we don’t expect you to darling,’ Maggie cooed.

‘No I want to. I’m not going to look like this forever. Let me do it now, it sounds like fun.’

‘Oh Lizzie!’ gasped Lyn excitedly. ‘We’re going to make you the sex symbol of the 1970s!’

## **Chapter 29**

### **January 1975**

Wade wanted the film to be a hot, steamy affair but Lizzie wasn’t quite sure how he hoped to achieve this in the middle of January. For the interior shots he hired a run-down hotel in Euston and converted rooms into various sets - Buffy’s office, her home and also the bachelor pad of Lloyd Kavanagh. Lizzie had yet to meet her leading man, her only knowledge of him was that he was a young Irish actor called Malachi Sellars. Annie, the Casting Director assured her he was sex on legs and Lizzie certainly hoped she was right. If he weren’t attractive it would be pretty difficult to make the most explicit film of her career seem convincing.

Today was the first day of filming and it was a rehearsal of the scene where Buffy’s in her father’s office, and meets Lloyd for the first time. Lizzie sat at the desk (which Wade had retrieved from a skip in Camden) and all around her the lighting people fussed; Wade wanted soft focus, so all sorts of filters were being put over the cameras. In the actual scene Buffy is dressed in a tight fitting suit with lots of buttons undone, but for today Lizzie was clad in her uniform cheesecloth shirt and flared jeans.

‘Right Elizabeth,’ instructed Wade. ‘You’re pensive; your father has recently died, you’re wondering what you’re going to make of his company. Okay, roll cameras.’

Ever the professional, Lizzie knew how to slip straight into character. She sat pouting and shifting bits of paper around the desk. The door to the office opened and she looked up. In

walked the sexiest looking man she had ever seen in her life. His lived-in face reminded her of Digger but his twinkling light blue eyes were totally unique.

He sauntered over to the desk, perching his pert behind on it. Lizzie had to try hard to keep her eyes from wandering to it, as the script required Buffy to be cool and professional, hiding the fact she found Lloyd wildly attractive.

‘Miss Adams?’ he asked, his voice raspy and his accent soft. If Lizzie wasn’t mistaken, he was an Ulsterman.

‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘And you are?’

He stuck out his hand.

‘Lloyd. Lloyd Kavanagh.’

Lizzie shook his hand and looked into his eyes and a connection was made between them that wasn’t even part of the script.

That night Lizzie invited the whole cast and crew to a party at Nico’s, the disco Alessandro had recently bought on Park Lane. Even though Alessandro was in Spain buying racehorses, he told Lizzie to do what she wanted with the club. Her number one priority was to look hot for Malachi. and she went back to the little flat she was now renting in South Kensington and spent ages rifling through her beautiful clothes. She settled on a midnight blue halter neck dress with a thin, silver belt; fluffing up her honey coloured hair and spritzing it with hairspray to give her that just out of bed look. She made sure she applied lots of lipgloss and wrapped herself up in the fluffy white jacket Alessandro had bought her in Greenwich Village. He’d wanted to buy her a mink, but Lizzie didn’t like the thought of wearing dead animals and had fallen in love with this bolero jacket in a thrift store. Alessandro had been horrified to be even seen in such a place and paid five times the asking price just to retain some sort of dignity.

Lizzie knew she looked a million dollars, and couldn’t wait to see Malachi’s face when he laid eyes on her. She wasn’t sure if it was age, experience or just the fact that she wasn’t in love with Alessandro, but she had no qualms about flirting with another man. Malachi was gorgeous and she knew darn well Alessandro had other women scattered around, so why shouldn’t she have a little fun?

Nico's had yet to establish itself as a top nightspot. Prior to Alessandro buying it, the place had been a run-down casino but he'd converted it into a disco after hearing they were the hottest things in New York. It still smelt of paint, and the carpets were bouncy, but the décor was top of the range with mirrors and a huge, tiled dancefloor that lit up. The DJ was playing tracks imported from America, and Lizzie had to admit she preferred this upbeat stylish music to the glam rock silliness that had been all the rage for the past couple of years.

As the hostess, it was Lizzie's job to circulate and she did her best, talking to everyone and making sure the waiters were keeping them supplied with drinks and canapés; but she couldn't relax, constantly looking out for Malachi. She tried hard not to be disappointed – he probably had somewhere else to go; it wasn't the end of the world if he didn't show up.

She found herself dancing with Wade, who she deduced to be gay, given that he hardly looked at her and spent most of his time studying the backside of the handsome young African waiter who was flitting around, serving champagne.

'How do you feel about tomorrow?' Wade asked.

'Nervous,' Lizzie laughed. 'But I'll manage.'

Tomorrow she and Malachi were filming their first love scene and Lizzie was more scared than she was letting on. The young starlets on the scene today thought nothing of running around nude, but she was of a different era, where the sexiness came from what couldn't be seen rather than what was on offer.

'Where did Annie find Malachi?' she asked.

'Waiting tables in a bar in Belfast would you believe? She loved his look and chatted to him and discovered he's been all round the world acting with different theatre groups. This is his first film.'

'He's very good looking.'

Wade glanced over her shoulder.

'Well here's your chance to tell him.'



She turned around and saw Malachi walking towards her through the crowd. He looked sensational in a black jacket and jeans; his walk a confident swagger. He was a vain, strutting peacock and Lizzie fancied him like crazy.

‘You look beautiful Lizzie,’ he said, kissing her on both cheeks.

‘Thanks,’ she blushed. ‘Please get yourself a drink.’

‘I’ll let you two ‘lovebirds’ get to know each other,’ Wade chuckled and he minced off in the direction of the young waiter.

Lizzie and Malachi stood awkwardly for a moment, before Malachi broke the ice.

‘So, you looking forward to tomorrow?’ he grinned.

‘Yes of course,’ she lied. ‘It’s not real sex is it?’

‘No,’ he laughed. ‘My days of having real sex on camera are long over.’

‘You mean....?’ She gasped, then laughed for sounding so innocent.

‘Don’t tell Wade, I’ll get kicked off set.’

‘You’ve lived quite a life haven’t you?’

‘You don’t get to my age and not really, do you?’

‘How old are you?’

‘Thirty two.’

‘You’re younger than me. I’ll be thirty four in July.’

‘Umm, an older woman,’ he purred and she felt his arm slip around her waist. ‘Very sexy.’

‘Do you mind,’ she scolded playfully. ‘This is my boyfriend’s club.’

A flash of doubt shot across Malachi’s usually smug face.

‘He’s not here is he?’

‘No, he’s in Spain!’ she laughed. ‘Anyway, we have a very *open* relationship.’

His eyes wandered down to her cleavage and back up again.

‘Well he’d be mad to have such a gorgeous girlfriend and presume she’s going to stay faithful.’

They spent most of the evening together, dancing and talking. She learnt that he was from Belfast and his father had been a shoemaker. To escape going into the family business, Malachi had run away to Italy at fifteen. By eighteen he was married to a woman ten years his senior and now had a thirteen year old daughter who lived in France. Lizzie could relate to someone who had made their own way at such a young age; he was a free spirit like her, but she still fed him the stock line about coming from Cheshire etc etc. She had no intention of building any kind of future with Malachi Sellars, so what was the point of boring him with the truth?

By around eleven thirty, Lizzie was thinking about going home, but Malachi had other ideas. He slipped his hand around her waist and pulled her close to him, whispering in her ear.

‘You know, back at my place I’ve got some of the finest hash this side of Morocco. How about we go back, have a little smoke and continue our chat?’

‘I can’t turn up stoned tomorrow, it’ll look terrible.’

‘It also might make filming a little easier. Come on Elizabeth, you know you want to.’

‘It’s Lizzie,’ she said with a snort. ‘I leave Elizabeth on set.’

Malachi lived in a basement flat off the Kings Road – a tiny studio that brought home to Lizzie that he was still an actor at the start of his career. He lit some candles and lava lamps and set cushions about the floor. Lizzie kicked off her high heels and sat down while Malachi rolled a joint. He then sat beside her and puffed hard on it, passing it to her. She drew in the smoke, holding it in her lungs. Malachi laughed, taking it back off her.

‘Ah a woman who knows what’s she’s doing. I like it.’

‘Do you flirt with all your leading ladies?’

‘Pretty much. Do you know I’ve never been faithful to a woman in my life?’

‘And why is that?’

He chuckled sleepily.

‘I’m easily distracted.’

Lizzie laughed too, feeling the joint take effect. She sighed and lay back on the pillows. Malachi took another toke then laid it on an ashtray. He lay back with Lizzie and proceeded to unfasten her belt. Lizzie thought briefly of Alessandro but soon brushed that aside. Once upon a time she wouldn’t have even considered being unfaithful, but those times had long since gone. She figured she’d suffered enough and now it was time for her to have some fun.

She gasped in surprise and excitement as Malachi slipped her belt from around her waist and took hold of each of her wrists, fixing them above her head and tying them together with the belt.

‘You know the best way for us to do the scene together is by having sex beforehand don’t you?’ he said.

‘Really?’ she smiled.

‘Um. Then it won’t come as such a surprise when I see your beautiful *beautiful* body.’

‘Well it would be awfully unprofessional of me to say no then wouldn’t it?’ Lizzie replied with a smile.

## **Chapter 30**

### **London – August 1975**

On the afternoon of the premiere of ‘Top Position’, Lizzie became Mrs Malachi Sellars at Chelsea Town Hall. To say they had fallen in love on set was probably an over-statement. They had a mutual lust that led them to becoming addicted to each other. Lizzie also liked the fact he made her laugh and didn’t take life too seriously. Without the film even being released, word had started to spread within the industry and Maggie suddenly had an influx of offers coming in for Lizzie. Most of the roles involved her taking her clothes off, but she had done it once, she didn’t mind doing it again.

Malachi's star was rising too. He'd signed a contract with a modelling agency that wanted him to be the face of a new aftershave, and it had been on the set of this commercial in the Nevada Desert that he'd asked Lizzie to become his wife. She accepted eagerly, then remembered she hadn't even told Alessandro about her new relationship. The Italian had not taken it well, but a week later he was seen out and about on the arm of Miss United Kingdom, so he'd obviously recovered quickly.

The wedding was a lot different to the pomp and circumstance of Lizzie's first marriage. The Town Hall was filled with theatrical types and Lyn cried as she watched Samantha perform her duties as Lizzie's bridesmaid. Another guest was Fleur, Malachi's thirteen-year-old daughter. She had come over from France with Juliette, her mother and it was the first time she had met her. Fleur was a vision of beauty, with long, silky blonde hair, an angelic face with her father's blue eyes. Her body was just blossoming into womanhood and seeing her made a lump come into Lizzie's throat. She was barely this age when Uncle George had raped her and made her pregnant. It made her realise what a child she'd been.

Juliette, however, was at the other end of the spectrum; her beauty was fading fast, and while it was still obvious to see she had once been a fashion model, her body was turning to flab. She did nothing to hide the black roots sprouting from her blonde hair and her face had that pinched, puckered look that often came from smoking too many cigarettes. She seemed to only criticise and snap at her daughter and Lizzie wondered if it came from jealousy. She wondered if she'd had Mary Ann around she too would have resented her daughter's youth and beauty. She'd never know, but she doubted it – she would just have been grateful to be a mother.

After the wedding, a chosen selection of guests headed off to the premiere. There would be no royal attendance at this event; with an X rating, many classed it as no more than soft porn and Lizzie kind of agreed. Wade Jackson was a wise man, and had appeased the growing feminist movement by including as much nudity from Malachi as there was from Lizzie, so no-one could accuse him of exploiting her. Inevitably, Mary Whitehouse had called for it to be banned, but that pleased Lizzie. There was something satisfying about offending the moral majority.

The premiere was being held at the Prince Charles cinema just off Leicester Square. As the wedding party turned the corner to make their entrance, they all got the biggest shock to discover

a media circus camped outside. There was a whole bank of photographers and journalists and Lizzie had no idea why they were here.

‘I don’t understand....’ She uttered.

Malachi laughed and gripped her hand tighter.

‘They’re here because of you. They all remember you as the girl next door; prim Nurse Fitzgerald, and here you are, as nude as the day you were born.’

They entered the cinema and the cameras went mad, journalists were firing questions at her; asking if she was going to go nude again; wanting to know about the wedding. For the first time in her career, Lizzie found herself enjoying the attention. For so long she’d felt like a charlatan and undeserving of the adulation, but something within her had changed. She was famous, there was nothing she could do about it, so she may as well pout and pose with the best of them.

The reception/premiere party was held at Sabrina’s, a disco near to Malachi’s old flat off the Kings Road. Their new home was a mews house in South Kensington and Lizzie was looking forward to getting back there and christening all the rooms. Within a few minutes, the usual debauchery had kicked off – cocaine was being sniffed off every surface and couples on the dancefloor were bumping and grinding, turning themselves on before going off somewhere more private.

Lizzie stayed off the illegal substances and tried to make sure everyone was happy. She felt rather sorry for Bertie. Colin was going through some sort of mid-life crisis and had started being unfaithful to him - picking up young men in nightclubs and bars. Tonight he was off chasing some young thing on the dancefloor while Bertie stood nursing his drink, looking on forlornly. In the end Lizzie beckoned him over and boogied with him and Malachi. He tried to smile, but that look of disappointment never left his face.

Another thing troubling Lizzie was Juliette’s lack of concern for her young daughter. For one thing, a child so young shouldn’t have been at such an adult party and secondly, the woman seemed quite un-perturbed that Fleur was at that moment being chatted up by Farouk, Salim’s young nephew. Lizzie wondered if now she was officially the child’s stepmother, she had any right to intervene.

Before she could make a decision, she was interrupted by a familiar cry resonating above the sound of the disco music. Lizzie looked up to see Lyn coming towards her, hands in the air, doing a strange sort of dance, her kaftan billowing in the places it didn't cling onto her increasing girth. Lizzie couldn't keep track of her friend's weight! Following behind her was Wade Jackson and Salim Farrah; both the men looking a little embarrassed at Lyn's antics.

'Darling!' she squealed, grasping Lizzie's hands. 'I have the most fantastic news. Guess what, Salim wants to make 'The Race'!'

Salim stepped forward and took Lizzie's hand, bringing it to his lips and kissing it.

'Lizzie I would like it very much if you and your new husband would reprise your roles.'

Lizzie squealed with excitement, glancing round at a grinning Malachi. 'The Race' was the sequel to 'Top Position' and it follows Buffy and Lloyd as they fight for control of the company, which is under threat by a ruthless American businesswoman. Lizzie was aware that part of the plot involved the woman seducing Buffy, which meant she would be doing her first lesbian scenes, but she didn't mind; at least this time she would be in control, unlike the time with Maria and Lars in Ireland, when she'd been out of her mind.

'You're going to be a superstar darling,' Lyn fizzed. 'The press love you. The world is going to be your oyster.'

Lizzie's spirits were so high that she felt invincible. How could she possibly be down when she had a successful career and a gorgeous new husband? Okay she wasn't in love with Malachi, but they got on very well and there was no doubting he was the sexiest man she had ever met.

While Malachi went off to socialise, Lizzie decided to make conversation with Juliette - try and get her to look after her daughter who was now having her bottom groped by Farouk Farrah. Juliette was propped at the bar, cigarette in one hand, glass of whisky in the other. Lizzie sat beside her, retching at the smell of stale alcohol that emanated from her. Sickened because once upon a time, she smelt the same way.

The drunken woman turned to her and smiled sleepily.

‘So you’re the woman who has tamed the great Malachi Sellars,’ she said in her smoky, Gallic voice.

‘I wouldn’t say tame,’ Lizzie laughed. ‘But I hope we stay together.’

Juliette drained her glass the beckoned to the barman to refill it.

‘Just don’t expect him to be faithful, it’s not in him.’

‘Did he cheat on you a lot?’

‘No, just the once. But it was with my mother.’

‘What!?’

‘I came in one day and found him fucking my mother.’

‘Oh my God,’ Lizzie winced. ‘I’m so sorry. The only excuse I can make for him was that he was very young.’

‘Malachi, he’ll still be screwing when he’s eighty.’

‘No wonder he’s so good at it.’

‘Too good at it,’ Juliette shrugged.

‘Did you choose to have a baby with him?’

‘No. I kicked him out when I found him with mama, then I found out I was pregnant. I was going to have an abortion but I couldn’t afford it.’

‘But you don’t regret having Fleur?’

‘Not now she’s off my hands, but when she was a baby I could have happily drowned her.’

Lizzie looked round and spotted said Fleur being led by the hand by Farouk, to another part of the club.

‘She’s going off with Farouk,’ she panicked to Juliette. ‘You’d better go after her.’

‘Let her go,’ Juliette shrugged. ‘She’s old enough. I lost it at her age. She needs to learn about life.’

Juliette may have been able to treat her daughter’s burgeoning sexuality nonchalantly, but for Lizzie the thought brought nothing but panic. Fleur was partly her responsibility now and she wasn’t going to let her stepdaughter become a teenage mother like she had. She made her excuses to Juliette and left, weaving her way through the crowd, trying to spot the youngsters. She headed to the toilets, knowing cubicles were a favourite haunt for a furtive fumble, but instead the only people in there were the beautiful girls snorting cocaine and re-doing their make up. Lizzie then headed for the gents and found that empty, except for Colin chatting up a very nubile looking young man. Lizzie wondered if she should tell Bertie but she had the distinct feeling that her friend knew his partner would be off looking for some fresh meat tonight anyway.

Leaving the toilets, she noticed a light coming from under the door of the manager’s office, and getting close, she could hear very distinct moans of pleasure. Normally she would not dream of stopping a couple making love, but seeing as this was her thirteen year old stepdaughter, she was willing to make an exception. She pushed the door open and was greeted with the sight not of Fleur and Farouk sprawled across the desk, but her new husband, trousers around his ankles, between the legs of a pretty blonde who had played a model in the film. They were so far gone, they didn’t even notice Lizzie enter the room, and she couldn’t be bothered to interrupt them. She quietly closed the door and stood for a moment composing herself. She remembered the utter devastation she’d felt on finding Digger in bed with Bertie, and how different she felt now. She’d been warned about Malachi, but was rather hoping he wouldn’t do it on their wedding day. A part of her had hoped she’d be the one to tame him, but she was old enough to realise that men never changed. What did irk her was the fact that it was in such a public place and he’d run the risk of making her look stupid.

She wandered into the corridor and near the fire escape found Farrouk and Fleur doing nothing more than harmless snogging. Leaving them to it, she returned to the manager’s office just as Malachi emerged, tucking his shirt into his trousers, his face flushed.

‘Er hello darling,’ he smiled sheepishly. ‘I was just...just..’



‘Don’t bother lying Malachi. I saw you. If you’re going to fuck around please do it where there isn’t half the British press lurking about. I’ll take you humiliating me in private, but I refuse to let you ruin my career.’

## **Chapter 31**

### **London – May 1977**

Malachi was late. Lizzie had been sitting at the table in Quaglinos for fifteen minutes and she felt decidedly self-conscious. This dinner had been his idea; he claimed to be missing her and wanted to catch up. With the success of ‘Top Position’ and ‘The Race’, both their careers had taken off – Lizzie was no longer cast as the pretty girl next door; she had become the sexy older woman. Her latest production - a steamy Victorian tale set in Cornwall, was explicit for BBC standards. She played a rich married woman who has an affair with her friend’s son. Malachi was starring in the adaptation of Lyn’s book ‘I Quit’ here in London and wanted to see his wife now she was back to film the interior scenes at the BBC studios.

The door to the restaurant opened and Malachi walked in, that apologetic look upon his face. He greeted Lizzie with a kiss on the cheek and sat opposite her.

‘You’ve got a tan,’ he said. ‘It can’t be that hot in Cornwall.’

‘It was baking,’ she laughed. ‘I think I must have lost half a stone, roasting underneath all that crinoline.’

‘I hope you don’t mind, but the girl who’s playing my young lover might be joining us for dinner. She’s over here from California and doesn’t know anyone....’

‘She’s not an American in the book.’

‘I know, but Starr - that’s the girl – wrote to Wade and begged him to let her be in the film and he agreed. She seemed a bit awestruck when she found out I was married to you and wanted to meet you. Is that okay?’

‘I suppose so,’ Lizzie groused. ‘Although I wanted you to myself.’

They had barely started on their first bottle of wine when the door opened and Lizzie could swear she heard every man in the room take a breath. Malachi waved at the vision that had entered and Lizzie's heart sank. Starr was probably the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. No more than twenty, she was a statuesque blonde, with huge tits squeezed into a cheesecloth shirt, tight jeans emphasising her curved hips and slim waist. She had golden Farrah Fawcett hair and that honeyed complexion only Californians seemed to naturally possess. Lizzie felt like a wrinkled dinosaur.

'Oh my God!' the girl exclaimed as she reached their table, after kissing Malachi hello. 'Is it really you? Elizabeth Maine?'

She sat down and gripped Lizzie's hands, her turquoise eyes shining with excitement. 'I have watched you all of my life. My parents are English and they're always watching British shows on PBS. Your performance in 'She Who Dare Not Speak' inspired me to become an actress.'

'I'm very flattered,' Lizzie replied, not quite sure what to make of this over-exuberant girl.

'And to think you're still a big star now,' Starr said with a shake of the head. 'I hope I'm as gorgeous when I'm your age.'

Lizzie smiled to herself. There was the sting. Of course, Starr's bitchiness went right over Malachi's head, but she picked up on it straight away.

'Have you done much acting Starr?' she asked.

'No, I'm a model back home. Swimwear mostly. I am such a fan of Lyn Beckford's books. When I found out they were making 'I Quit' I begged Wade for a part. I did worry I was too old to play someone young enough to be Malachi's daughter.'

'Why, how old are you?'

'Twenty. Did you play younger roles when you were twenty?'

'No, I found myself playing older girls,' Lizzie laughed. 'I'd had a hard life.'

'Did you really?' Starr asked in that phoney way Americans had of pretending they were interested.

‘Starr’s a very unusual name,’ Lizzie said. ‘Is it your real name?’

‘Hell no,’ she grimaced, trying to be goofy. ‘My real name’s Sharron but all my life my parents have called me Starr because I’m a little star to them. And I figured Starr MacKenzie is as good a stage name as any.’

‘It’s very pretty,’ Malachi said, his eyes twinkling as he looked at her, his mouth practically drooling. ‘Like you.’

Lizzie took an instant dislike to Starr MacKenzie and hoped she wouldn’t have to make her acquaintance again. She was one of those girls who hid behind a veneer of sweetness, but in reality were the biggest bitches going. Malachi was obviously infatuated and Lizzie thought it best to let him get it out of his system. He couldn’t keep it in his trousers, rather like an over-sexed dog, and whatever he did with Starr, it wouldn’t mean anything.

The following day was Bertie’s forty-seventh birthday and Lizzie was holding a dinner for him at home. Fleur was over from France and Lizzie took the afternoon off filming to pick her stepdaughter up from the airport. She had such a good relationship with the now fifteen-year old Fleur, she was a quiet, reserved girl who always seemed to expect bad things to happen to her. A lot like Lizzie herself at fifteen, maybe that was why she felt so close to her.

They dropped Fleur’s bags at home, and Lizzie took her shopping in High Street Kensington, to buy a dress for the evening. Fleur was reluctant to wear the electric blue, strapless gown her stepmother bought her from the designer market, but Lizzie knew she would look beautiful. They then returned to the house and Fleur helped Lizzie to prepare the food. Gradually the guests arrived; Bertie and Colin, then Lyn and Marcus accompanied by the now twelve year old William. It made the adults smile to see the timid looks the young boy was throwing at the gorgeous Fleur and they realised they were now the older generation.

Just when Lizzie was about to give up on her husband ever returning home, he came striding in; followed by Starr MacKenzie.

‘Starr was at a loose end,’ he said. ‘I thought you could make the food go round.’

‘Of course,’ Lizzie smiled politely, watching as Starr made a beeline for Fleur.

‘Oh my God, I love your dress!’ she gushed. ‘Where did you get it?’

‘Kensington Market,’ Fleur replied quietly.

‘Are you French?! That’s so fantastic...Who are you?’

‘I’m Malachi’s daughter.’

Starr left her side and rushed over to Malachi, gripping his arm.

‘Oh Malachi let me take.... what’s your name?’

‘Fleur.’

‘Let me take Fleur to a disco. I won’t bring her back late, I promise.’

Fleur’s face lit up at the thought of going out with this beautiful, older American girl.

‘Please papa,’ she asked.

‘Okay,’ he replied. ‘But no later than midnight and I want you to eat first.’

They settled down to dinner and Lizzie seethed at the fact that this was supposed to be in Bertie’s honour and yet Starr had commanded the whole meal. Her voice resonated around the room, rendering even Lyn speechless. Lyn wasn’t happy, her diet pills had caused her angina and she’d been forced to stop taking them, so she was fatter than ever now - a size twenty-four and she was determined to get slim again by not eating anything, which was making her grumpy.

The main course finished, Malachi gave his permission for Starr to take Fleur out; but before they left, Starr insisted on helping Lizzie take the plates out to the kitchen to thank her for letting her join them for dinner.

‘Your friends are really something,’ she said quietly, stacking the plates up. ‘The fag of the year and the fattest woman in the world.’

‘What do you want you little bitch?’ Lizzie hissed.

‘A bit of British hospitality. You’re like a block of ice. It’s lucky that your husband is so nice.’

Lizzie held up her left hand, waving it in Starr’s perfect face.

‘See that? That’s my wedding ring. Now I’m in no doubt my husband is fucking you, but don’t get any ideas it’ll go further than that.’

‘We’ll see,’ Starr smiled knowingly. ‘Now I must go and show that daughter of his what London’s all about.’

By the time Bertie and Colin left, it was nearly one o’clock and there was still no sign of Starr and Fleur. Malachi was clearly worried and refused to go to bed, insisting that Lizzie went up and got her rest as she had filming early the next morning. Lizzie got into bed but couldn’t sleep, wondering what on earth that little bitch was doing with her beloved stepdaughter. She looked forward to the following week when Starr would finish her part in the film and go off travelling around Europe. There was no chance of Malachi following her; to him she was no more than a distraction.

Unable to fight her tiredness, Lizzie dropped off to sleep but was promptly awoken by the bell ringing. Springing out of bed, she pulled on her robe and headed for the stairs, just in time to catch Malachi leaving the living room and heading for the door. He opened it and Fleur practically fell into the house. Lizzie rushed down and helped bring her into the living room. The young girl looked terrible; her eyes were rolling and her hair a mess. Most alarming was the huge burgundy stain down the front of her dress; Lizzie hoped it was only red wine, not blood.

‘Fleur what happened?’ Malachi panicked. ‘Baby can you hear me?’

‘Starr left me,’ she slurred and Lizzie could smell the alcohol on her breath. She looked at Malachi. ‘She can’t tell you anything tonight, let’s wait until the morning.’

Malachi carried Fleur up to bed and he slept on the floor with her to make sure she remained okay. Lizzie got up at six the next morning to drive to White City, but before she left, she checked in Fleur’s room to find the young girl sitting up in bed, gripping her aching head.

‘Are you okay?’ Lizzie asked.

‘I’m sorry,’ was all Fleur could say.

Malachi heard the voices and awoke with a start, sitting up and ruffling his short, blonde hair.

‘What’s going on?’ he asked.

‘Can you tell us what happened?’ Lizzie asked, sitting upon the bed.

‘We went to Sabrina’s,’ Fleur explained. ‘Starr met a man and she left me alone, telling me to get a cab home. I was drunk, I’m sorry. I didn’t have any money for a taxi so I walked home.’

‘You walked all the way home from Chelsea?’ Malachi spat. ‘I’ll kill her.’

Lizzie had one more thing to clear up before she could leave for work.

‘Fleur, the stain on the front of your dress, it’s not blood is it?’

‘No, Starr knocked a glass of red wine over me. She’s horrible.’ She looked at Malachi. ‘Papa please don’t bring her here again.’

‘Don’t worry poppet,’ he said through gritted teeth. ‘I want nothing more to do with Starr MacKenzie.’

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Two months later and the filming of ‘The Fallen Woman’ was finished, and Lizzie could enjoy a well-earned break. Faberge wanted her to be the face of their new perfume ‘D’Amour’ and she began shooting the commercials in August, but until then, she intended on re-decorating the house. They could easily afford the best painters and decorators in the business, but with Malachi in Spain filming, Lizzie was bored and wanted to do it herself. She started with the room Fleur stayed in when visiting, and set about covering the boring magnolia walls with vibrant yellow and pink wallpaper by Laura Ashley, to make it more appealing to the young girl in the hope she’d stay more often.

With Radio One playing *I Feel Love*, and Lizzie bopping along to it, she didn’t notice when the front door bell rang. It was only when the caller pressed it for a second time – a long persistent ring, that she downed her paint brush and headed for the door. On opening it, she received the shock of her life to find Starr MacKenzie standing there, dressed casually in a pair of cut off denims, t-shirt and converse sneakers. She may have looked like a scruff but her beauty was so breathtaking it felt like Lizzie was seeing her for the first time.

‘What do you want?’ she asked.

‘To see you,’ Starr replied, stepping over the threshold and pushing her way in.

‘After what you did to Fleur I never want to see you again,’ Lizzie said. ‘Get out.’

‘Okay,’ Starr snapped cockily, placing one hand on her hip. ‘Leave the door open. Let the entire neighbourhood hear what I’ve got to say.’

Reluctantly, Lizzie closed the door and turned to give this horrid girl the audience she so craved.

‘You’ve got five minutes,’ she said.

‘Alright, here goes. Your husband has gotten me pregnant. If I don’t get a hundred thousand dollars *plus* the payment for an abortion, I’m going to the papers.’

‘Oh really?’ laughed Lizzie. ‘Well I think you should talk to Malachi about that, not me.’

‘No, I’m talking to you because you owe me.’

‘Me? And what makes you think that?’

‘You owe me because you’re my mother you bitch.’

## **Chapter 32**

Lizzie stood stunned, unable to move, speak or barely breathe. While she was perfectly aware that somewhere out there she had a twenty year old daughter, she point blank refused to believe it could possibly be this vile creature who she’d instantly hated.

‘What’s the matter *mom*?’ Starr asked. ‘Cat got your tongue?’

‘H-How can you be my daughter?’ Lizzie uttered.

‘Because you gave birth to me on April twenty ninth 1957, then gave me away.’

Lizzie had to turn away from her. She had to take stock of this whole situation. In her mind she questioned anyone she’d ever told about Mary Ann; it was only Max and Bertie, even Lyn didn’t know. It had to be someone back in Liverpool – some distant family member who’d paid this girl to pretend to be her daughter so she could extort money.

‘Would you get out of my house please?’ was all she could say.

‘Why should I? I’m family.’

Lizzie turned to look at her, searching her face for some semblance. She had the pouting, Gallagher mouth but that could have been a coincidence. But it was those eyes, those cold, emotionless eyes that seemed to bore right through you. Twenty years on she could recall looking into George’s eyes and being terrified of him.

‘But you’re American,’ she said, trying to hold onto her dignity.

‘My parents emigrated when I was one year old. We went to live in California and that’s where I grew up.’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t believe you. Now please, tell me who’s setting me up and I’ll deal with them.’

From out of her back pocket, Starr pulled a piece of paper that Lizzie immediately recognised to be a birth certificate. Starr read it aloud;

‘Birth name, Mary Ann Gallagher, born Twenty ninth of April 1957, Southport, Merseyside. Mother’s name Elizabeth Gallagher, schoolgirl aged fifteen years. Father unknown.’

‘Y-You could have got that from anywhere,’ Lizzie protested, even though, deep down a part of her was beginning to accept it. In a life filled with disappointment, the greatest one was staring her in the face. Her beautiful little girl, her Mary Ann, who she’d dreamt of being reunited with one day, was this spoilt little bitch. Adoptive parents often did lavish their kids, illogically feeling guilty for the child’s circumstances. But they’d turned her into a monster

‘I only found out myself two years ago. I had a motorcycle accident and needed a transfusion. Guess what, I find out neither mom or dad are the same blood type as me. That’s when the bombshell got dropped.’

‘You might be adopted, but I’m not your mother.’

‘Is your real name Elizabeth Gallagher?’

‘Yes.’



‘And did you have a baby girl in April 1957?’

Lizzie looked down in shame.

‘Yes, I did.’

Suddenly a thought struck her. She could still recall that day so clearly in her mind; holding Mary Ann before she was taken away from her, trying to remember everything about her, for the last time marvelling at her feet, her funny little feet with the extra toe.

‘Take your right shoe off,’ she demanded.

Starr frowned.

‘What?’

‘Take your right shoe off.’

With a wriggle of her ankle, the sneaker slipped off and she stuck her foot out. There, as clear as day were five normal sized toes, and a little extra one on the end. Lizzie felt faint, slumping back against the wall. It was true; her daughter had come to find her and it was Starr, the girl she’d despised the moment she met her.

She ran into the living room and slumped on the sofa, holding her head. Too shocked to even cry, she could only rock herself back and forth. In her mind Mary Ann was like Fleur, pretty and quiet and sensitive and when they met they’d have an instant affinity and could be friends, and yet she’d be quite happy if she never saw Starr MacKenzie again.

Starr followed her in and sat close by her in a chair. That hardened expression never once leaving her face.

‘So why did you give me up?’ she asked.

‘I had no choice. You were born in a convent; they took you away when you were six weeks old.’

‘And you never came back for me?’

‘I did but they told me you had already been adopted out. That’s when I came to London.’ She looked at her daughter and frowned, the tears flowing freely, wishing she could have been someone else. ‘How did you find out who I was?’

‘I hired a private detective. I wanted to find out what my mother was really like. It’s a bit of a head-trip finding out she’s a movie star.’

‘Are you not happy with your adoptive parents?’

‘I’m more than happy. Mom and dad have treated me like a princess from day one.’

‘What are their names? What made them emigrate to America?’

‘They’re David and Irene MacKenzie. Dad worked for Ford as a designer, but got a job with a boat-maker in LA so that’s why we moved out there.’

‘And they’re from Liverpool?’

‘Yep.’

Lizzie still couldn’t digest this news. It seemed like a bad dream she would awake from soon.

‘So that’s why you badgered Wade for the part. So you could meet me?’

‘Sort of. I also wanted to get to know Malachi. Someone that hot cannot be passed by.’

‘So you set out to seduce your mother’s husband?’

‘Hey lady there wasn’t much seducing gong on. Malachi jumped on me the first day of filming.’

Where once Lizzie would have felt total devastation and a wish to end her life, now she just felt bitter dismay at how awful life could be. She felt a fool for ever imagining her little girl to be some sort of angel. Mary Ann...Starr, had two parents, and it was quite apparent Uncle George’s genes were more than prevalent in her.

‘I don’t know what I was expecting from you,’ Starr shrugged. ‘Some glamorous film star, but actually you’re quite boring in the flesh. No wonder Malachi cheats on you.’

‘Do you hate me because I abandoned you?’

‘No. You did me a great favour. What would I have been if I’d stayed with you? Some bastard growing up in the back streets of Liverpool with a teenage mother. No thank you. I like my life as it is. But I do think you owe me some sort of compensation and I want you to help me get rid of this baby.’

‘Are you genuinely pregnant? Is it really Malachi’s?’

‘Yes and yes. I can’t make it as an actress with a baby in tow. All I want is the money for an abortion and a hundred thousand dollars to set me up in a nice condo back home. Then I won’t have to freeze my butt off modelling bikinis just to pay the rent. I can concentrate on my acting.’

‘Think carefully before you have an abortion,’ Lizzie said quietly. ‘I had one and it left me infertile.’

‘Sounds good to me. Who wants kids?’

‘I do. I’ve wanted children from the day I first held you in my arms. You have no idea how much it broke my heart when you were taken away from me. All I wanted from then on was the chance to be a mother, but it wasn’t to be.’

‘Hey, them’s the breaks. Anyway, I have a massage booked so I’m going now. But ring me, Malachi’s got my number.’

‘And what if I refuse to give into your demands?’

‘Like I said, I’ll go to the newspapers and tell them how the classy Elizabeth Maine is really a little whore from Liverpool who got knocked up at fifteen.’

‘It wasn’t like that Starr. I wasn’t some sort of slut.’

‘Oh no? Madly in love were you?’

‘I was raped. By my uncle.’

‘Your uncle?’ she grimaced. ‘Ugh, your uncle is my father? Does he know?’

‘Yes he knew, but he’s dead now, I’m sorry you had to find that out.’

‘Who cares? Hey, you’re such a cold bitch he probably had no other choice but to rape you. Ciao.’

She got up and strutted out of the house. Lizzie sat shaking, disturbed that her baby daughter was nothing more than a female version of George. A part of her could not help but feel guilty for Starr’s attitude – underneath all that bravado she obviously felt abandoned and was determined to make her mother’s life hell. She felt so sad that this was the final nail in the coffin of her prospects of motherhood. She had no desire to get to know Starr and there were never going to be any other babies.

Desperate for someone to talk to, Lizzie changed out of her decorating clothes, showered, threw on a dress and left the house. She drove into the West End and Her Majesty’s theatre, where Bertie and Jeremy Walsh were overseeing rehearsals for ‘Confessions’, their latest production. Bertie was in the stalls doing paperwork, not even watching while a young actress gave her all up on stage, belting out a song that made her sound like Ethel Merman. Lizzie slipped in beside her friend and said nothing, just started sniffing, trying to hold back her tears.

‘What’s up?’ Bertie asked, not taking his eyes off the paperwork.

‘My daughter turned up this morning and demanded I pay for her to have an abortion.’

The paperwork was dropped to the floor and Bertie gave her his full attention, his jaw dropping down to the ground.

‘What?’

‘Starr MacKenzie is my daughter. She deliberately sought me out, seduced my husband; could have got my stepdaughter raped or murdered, then reveals to me that she’s expecting Malachi’s child and wants me to pay to get rid of it.’

‘We can’t talk here,’ Bertie panicked. He stood up and started flustered around.

‘Jez! Jezza?’ he called out. Jeremy appeared. He was a funny little man who was even more camp than Bertie.

‘Jez we have an emergency, can you take over?’

Jeremy became equally anxious although he didn't even know what the problem was. Bertie ushered Lizzie out of the theatre and a couple of doors down to Maxwell's, the private club to which he belonged. At this time of day it was empty except for a couple of other men. Bertie got Lizzie a white wine spritzer and himself a Campari.

'Please tell me this is some sort of joke,' he said, squashing into a booth beside her. 'That horrid creature cannot be your daughter.'

'She is, and she's blackmailing me into giving her money, otherwise she'll tell the papers.'

'Well how can you be sure it's her?'

'She has Uncle George's eyes and more to the point Mary Ann's birth certificate. I then remembered my baby had six toes on her right foot and I hoped and prayed when I asked Starr to take her shoe off she'd refuse, but she didn't and lo and behold, she had six toes. She's my daughter all right; I'm just so disappointed. All my life I've envisaged this little angel, instead I get the Devil's child.'

'So she's come looking for you on purpose?'

'Yep. She wants to get her twisted revenge on me for abandoning her.'

'And you say she's pregnant?'

'That's what she reckons. My only chance of having a grandchild is going to be aborted.'

Bertie paused and gripped his chin, obviously thinking hard, cooking something up.

'Now call me a mad old queen, but I think I have a plan that might work.'

'Oh yes?'

'Why don't you pay her to have the baby, then you take it and bring it up as your own?'

Lizzie laughed out loud.

'Are you serious? How on earth would we get away with that? And who's to say she'd agree to it? And what about Malachi?'

‘What about Malachi? The bastard screwed the little bitch and got her pregnant. I think he owes you big time.’

‘But I’m in the public eye Bertie. People are going to know I’m not pregnant.’

‘Okay, say you and her go away somewhere. You could have our villa in Marbella. When she’s about six months gone you hide away. If you do have to go out, you stick a cushion up your frock in case someone starts asking questions. Then she gives birth, pisses off and you come home to England. You then rave to the papers about how this is a miracle baby and you didn’t even know you were pregnant. Your name goes on the birth certificate and no one’s any the wiser.’

It all sounded too good to be true for Lizzie. If it could work it would be wonderful. But Starr was a cold-hearted little bitch who was unlikely to comply.

‘I really need to talk to Malachi,’ she said. ‘Fuck it, I’m going to fly out tonight and confront him.’

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Sometimes it paid to know people in high places and from her days as Alessandro’s girlfriend, Lizzie had retained Mykonos Dimitrious as a friend. He was a Greek shipping magnate who did little work and dedicated his time to bedding beautiful women and jetting around the world attending the best parties. Lizzie called him on the off chance, telling him she wanted to go and see Malachi and without even being asked, he offered her his private jet and a pilot. Lizzie accepted and by ten o’clock that night she was in Barcelona, heading for the ranch just outside the city, where Malachi was filming a romantic drama. As she drove, she rehearsed in her mind what she was going to say to him – she was perfectly aware that she might arrive to find him *in flagrante* with some little floozy, but she didn’t care. She was used to Malachi’s flings; she just needed him to be a father to his child.

She arrived as the sun was setting, and the crew were packing up for the night. Malachi was alone, standing on the veranda having a cup of coffee and watching the sunset. He was dressed in a denim shirt and jeans, and seeing him with the sunlight in his hair and that craggy face tanned

and smiling, still made Lizzie go weak at the knees. He was a bastard, but she was glad he was hers.

As she pulled up on the gravelled path, Malachi spotted her and smiled, waving and coming over to the car. Lizzie wound down the window and stuck her head out.

‘We need to talk,’ she said.

‘Cool,’ he nodded. ‘We’re all heading off to a party on the beach, why don’t you join us?’

‘Malachi, doesn’t it seem odd to you that I’ve flown hundreds of miles on the hoc to see you? I don’t want to go to a party.’

‘Okay, well let’s go back to my apartment then.’

He said his goodbyes to the rest of the cast and crew and got into the car beside his wife. He directed her to his apartment; it was in a complex close to the sea where everyone involved in the production was staying. Despite being a big star nowadays, his temporary home was a basic studio with a balcony overlooking the pool. Lizzie noticed a pair of red frilly knickers tucked down the side of a sofa but decided to say nothing.

‘How long are you staying?’ he asked, pouring them both a martini as Lizzie went to sit out on the balcony. There was something alluring about sitting in the late evening Spanish sun, and she quite liked the idea of staying at Bertie and Colin’s villa – even if it did mean sharing it with Starr.

‘As long as it takes to sort things out,’ Lizzie replied.

Malachi emerged from the French doors, laying the drinks on the table. He sat before Lizzie and took out his cigarettes, lighting one of them for her without even being asked.

‘So what’s the urgency?’ he asked.

‘I might as well start from the beginning. When I told you about the abortion and then losing Max’s baby, I never told you the full truth. When I was fifteen I was raped by my uncle and got pregnant. My mother sent me to a convent to have the baby. It was a little girl and they took her

away from me to be adopted. That was when I came to London. I never found out what happened to my baby until this morning when she turned up and told me she was pregnant.'

Malachi's jaw dropped in the same way Bertie's had and Lizzie smiled to herself, knowing the worst was to come.

'Why didn't you tell me you had a daughter?' he asked.

'I didn't think it mattered. I thought I was never going to see her again. But I have and she's pregnant, wants an abortion and wants you and me to pay for it.'

'Why me? What's it to do with me?'

'It's your baby. When you were having your fun with Starr MacKenzie, you were impregnating her with my grandchild.'

Malachi started to sweat, running his hand over his face, obviously lost for words.

'Starr is your daughter? How can you prove it?'

'Oh she can. She has her birth certificate and she's even showed me that she has six toes on her right foot, just like my baby did. She's my daughter and what a charming child I gave birth to.'

'So she wants us to pay for an abortion?'

'Yes and she also wants a hundred thousand dollars, otherwise she's going to the papers and telling them all about me being her mother.'

'Well we'll have to give it to her then?'

'I don't want to. I want to make her another offer. I want her baby.'

'Are you mad?'

'No. I've never had the chance to be a mother and I certainly don't want to be a mother to Starr. I'll never be able to equate her with the beautiful baby girl I gave birth to. I'll love *her* till the day I die, but I hate the person she's become. But she's carrying my flesh and blood and she doesn't want it and I do. I'll be a mother to my grandchild.'



‘And you really think Starr will agree to that?’

‘That’s the problem. I need your support Malachi. I want you to be a father to this child.’

He smiled and reached out, taking her hand and squeezing it.

‘If it makes you happy I’ll give it a try. We just need to make Starr an offer she can’t refuse.’

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When Starr turned up at the summit arranged by Lizzie and Malachi, it immediately became obvious that she was indeed pregnant. She bore the same grey pallor Lizzie had done when she’d been pregnant twenty years ago. She remembered being sick every day for the first three months and actually lost weight, and Starr was clearly a chip off the old block. They welcomed her into the dining room and when Lizzie offered her a cup of hot water with a slice of lemon in, she actually seemed grateful for her mother’s foresight into knowing exactly what she needed.

‘My aunt Moya always swore by that when I was expecting you,’ Lizzie said. ‘I was sick every day.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Starr grimaced. ‘The quicker this thing’s out of me the better.’

‘That’s what I want to talk to you about,’ Lizzie approached. ‘How would you feel about having the baby and giving it over to us?’

‘I’m sorry? Are you having a laugh?’

‘No. Whether you like to admit it or not, this is my grandchild, and I want a baby of my own.’

‘Well go adopt someone else’s. I do not want to have a child. I don’t want to ruin my figure.’

‘Having you didn’t ruin my figure!’ Lizzie protested. ‘It improved it. I was flat chested before I gave birth.’

‘I’m at the beginning of my career and I’m not going to take time out to have a kid. No way.’

‘And whereabouts are you in your career Starr?’ Malachi asked. ‘Had lots of glittering offers have you?’

‘No, but Fred my agent reckons Sports Illustrated are interested.’

‘How would you feel if I said I could get you onto Beverley Miller’s books?’

‘You’re just saying that.’

Beverley Miller was probably Hollywood’s most powerful agent. She was an old acquaintance of Malachi’s – they’d had a fling when she’d been holidaying in Miami and he was a twenty-one year old beach bum. They’d remained in touch ever since and Malachi knew if he persuaded her to take on Starr, they’d cinch the deal. A shot of the Sellars charm and she’d relent.

‘I’m not,’ he tapped his top pocket. ‘In here I have Beverley’s number and it’s all yours if....’

‘So if I have this baby you can promise me that you’ll get me onto Beverley Miller’s books?’ Starr snapped.

‘Yes.’

‘And also,’ Lizzie chipped in. ‘We’ll buy you that condo too.’

‘So if I was to agree, what would be the deal?’

‘Well I have a commitment to Faberge to make some commercials for their new perfume, but after that I have nothing planned. Bertie has a villa in Spain that he says we can use. So, if we move in there when you’re six months, people here in England will have no idea what’s going on. I’ll probably get my agent to deliberately drop hints to the press that I’ve gone away because I’m pregnant. You have the baby; as soon as you’ve recovered you can fly back to LA. I’ll bring the baby back to England, claim that I had some miracle pregnancy and register it in my name.’

‘You’re asking a lot of me,’ Starr pouted. ‘I never wanted to get pregnant.’

‘You told me you were on the pill!’ Malachi laughed.

‘Okay okay, I didn’t think I’d get pregnant. I can’t make a decision right now.’

‘And,’ Lizzie said finally, taking a deep breath. ‘If you decide you want to keep the baby we won’t stand in your way. You can keep your condo and Malachi will support you.’

‘Okay,’ she hissed. ‘I won’t agree to do anything until I sign on the dotted line for my apartment *and* I have a telephone conversation with Beverley Miller. Then I’ll decide.’

## **Chapter 33**

### **Spain – February 1978**

Once again having people in the know proved useful to Lizzie. Colin’s sister Bernadette was a midwife and she’d welcomed the chance to leave her family of six behind in Wicklow for a few months to stay with Lizzie and Starr during the latter part of the pregnancy. Unless it was a matter of life or death, no other medical staff could be involved, so it was up to Bernadette to do all the examinations and check ups, and ultimately deliver the baby when it arrived. Lizzie and the amiable Bernadette hit it off straight away and she was glad of her company. Starr had no desire to get to know her mother and spent her days sitting around the pool sunbathing and complaining about her expanding stomach, stretchmarks, and having to put up with not going out and partying in Marbella.

Only Colin, Bertie and Malachi knew this baby was Lizzie’s grandchild. Even Lyn didn’t know the truth. Despite being friends for twenty years, Lizzie had never told her close friend about having a baby at fifteen. She wasn’t sure why, with the life she’d led, Lyn would have understood more than anyone, but Lizzie just couldn’t bring herself to say it. Somehow, now knowing Starr, she felt even more ashamed and was determined to keep quiet. As far as Lyn and Maggie Calvin were concerned, they were adopting the baby because it was Malachi’s and Starr didn’t want children.

With few visitors coming to the villa, Lizzie could fill her days painting – her latest hobby. She would take her canvas and watercolours up to the roof terrace and paint vistas of the nearby village, and at the same time, gaze down at her lazy, selfish daughter sitting by the pool wearing a permanent scowl. There was something deeply spiteful about Starr and Lizzie wouldn’t put it past her to have the baby and run off with it to sell to someone else. The thought of this filled Lizzie with the deepest dread; she’d begun to think of this baby as her own and even though she tried not to get excited, it was hard to stop imagining her future finally with a child to look after.

On February nineteenth Bernadette popped out as normal to get the English newspapers. Lizzie liked to keep abreast of the news back home, even though Lyn and Bertie constantly called to keep her up to date. Malachi was due over in two days time, ready to bring the baby home with her, and she was looking forward to seeing him. It was an overcast day and Starr was complaining because she couldn't sunbathe and dreaded the thought of spending time with two middle-aged women. She escaped to the spa room in the basement and spent hours sitting in the Jacuzzi. Lizzie made coffee for herself and Bernadette and awaited her return.

Bernadette returned with the *Mirror*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Express*. Even though it was Sunday, the papers were a day behind, so the news was old anyway. Like an old married couple, the two women settled down to coffee and croissants, and read the papers. Lizzie idly flicked through the *Mirror*, when a headline caught her eye '*Liverpool Man Murdered in Homosexual Attack*', anything that mentioned her home city still interested her and she read on, and gasped in horror at what she discovered.

*Liverpool factory worker Christopher 'Kit' Hammond was found murdered in the early hours of Thursday in what police believe is an instance of 'queer bashing'. Christopher 37 had left well-known gay haunt Spencers in the Dock area of the city and was not seen again until a passer-by found his battered body in a nearby alleyway. Merseyside Police are looking for anyone who may have witnessed the attack.*

Lizzie could not help but shed a few tears. Kit had been her oldest friend and saviour when she'd been disowned all those years ago. Bertie's suspicions about him being gay were right. That explained why, despite being close as hormonal teenagers, he'd never once touched her.

Bernadette noticed her distress and reached out, touching her arm.

'You okay there Lizzie?' she asked in her sweet Irish accent.

'Yes I'm fine,' she sniffed. 'I've just read that one of my oldest friends has been murdered.'

Before Bernadette could even reply, a scream resonated around the entire villa. It was Starr, and Lizzie panicked. What if something had gone wrong? The baby was due any day now, but what if it was born dead or something? The two women rushed out of the room and down to the spa area. They found a naked, wet Starr standing in the Jacuzzi gripping her fat stomach.

‘Is the baby coming?’ Bernadette asked, rushing to her side.

‘I think so,’ she winced. ‘It hurts so much. Get this fucking thing out of me.’

She was taken up to one of the spare rooms, and Bernadette fetched her medical bag. In it she had all the things needed for a straightforward birth. If complications set in, Starr would have to be rushed to hospital and they would have to face the consequences. Lizzie sat by her daughter’s bedside, listening to her moan and complain every time she had a contraction and thought back to *her* birth, when the nuns told her to stop making so much noise as the pain of childbirth was punishment for her sins.

And now that very child was in the throes of labour and to Lizzie’s horror she felt no concern for her welfare, all she could concentrate on was the baby. It was almost as if Starr was nothing but a receptacle for the child that should be Lizzie’s. She could barely breathe; terrified that something would go wrong or Starr would decide that she adored her baby on seeing it.

By nine fifteen that evening, Starr had screamed and yelled for America and Lizzie was convinced the people in the neighbouring villa fifty yards away would have been able to hear and would call the police. Finally, with an ear splitting yell, the baby was delivered; so covered in mucus and goo that Lizzie couldn’t even see what sex it was. Bernadette scooped it up, wiping its mouth and nose with a towel and it started to scream heartily. For a moment Lizzie was transported back twenty years, remembering those tiny bird like cries emanating from Mary Ann’s mouth. Her eyes still filled with tears for the baby she lost – even though she was there in the room with her.

‘You’ve got a handsome baby boy,’ Bernadette declared. ‘Let me cut the cord. I’ve also set up my weighing scales and we’ll see how much he weighs.’

She took him to the other end of the room and Lizzie craned her head, trying to see him, her arms aching to hold him.

‘A healthy seven pounds four ounces,’ Bernadette said, returning with him. ‘Now, who’s going to hold him?’

Lizzie looked at Starr; after all, he was her baby.

‘Do you want to hold him Starr?’ she asked, remembering what it was like when your baby was born and all you wanted to do was hold it.

‘No,’ she winced. ‘I want my mom and dad. I want to go home to my mom and dad.’

Bernadette gave a small shrug and passed the baby to Lizzie. He was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen; still bloody and messy but she could make out his perfect hands and feet, a downy layer of light brown hair on his head, and when his eyes flashed open, they were the deepest blue. She felt the same passionate and consuming love for him that she’d felt for his mother twenty years before. But she was going to keep this baby, and she knew he wouldn’t grow up to be a disappointment to her.

‘Do we have a name for young sir?’ Bernadette asked.

‘Christopher,’ Lizzie replied resolutely. ‘He’s going to be Christopher Albert Sellars.’

## **Chapter 34**

### **London 1985**

Lizzie didn’t have many things to thank Malachi for, but one of them was bringing Fleur into her life. Most women dream of the day they help their daughter prepare for her wedding, but with Starr, that was never going to happen. Today Fleur was getting married and with Juliette drying out in a clinic in Paris, Lizzie had stepped in to do the mother of the bride duties. It filled her with pride to help Fleur into her beautiful white gown, a garland of white flowers around her head. She looked like an angel and Lizzie did all she could to stop the tears flowing.

Most of all, she had Malachi to thank for her darling Christopher. Today he was being his half sister’s page boy and looked so adorable in his little outfit – brown velvet knickerbockers, cream shirt and brown velvet waistcoat. Topped off with his light brown curls and huge hazel eyes, he was the most scrumptious thing Lizzie had ever seen and she couldn’t stop taking photographs.

Fleur was now twenty-three and marrying a young man called Scott Meade; he was the son of the artist Vyvian Meade and he was following in his father’s footsteps with a promising career as a sculptor. The Meades were an old aristocratic family and Lizzie couldn’t help but think back to

her own first wedding. She remembered the day she married Max, thinking they would be together forever, and it still broke her heart on realising she hadn't seen him in fifteen years. She never told Malachi, but she still avidly followed her ex-husband's career. He'd stayed true to himself and had made some truly thought-provoking and controversial films over the years, and even though Nicholas died many years ago, Max never took the title of the Earl of Tynedale, and she could guarantee Annabel, his second wife, wasn't encouraged to call herself Countess Bowers either.

But today wasn't the day for sad reflection; it was a day for joy. Fleur was madly in love and couldn't wait to marry her young man, and Christopher looked like a little prince. Lizzie was just a little concerned that there was no sign of Malachi – he'd been due back from LA more than four hours ago and before leaving had promised that no matter how jet lagged he was, he would walk his daughter down the aisle.

Lizzie kept checking her watch; in ten minutes the car to take Bertie and the two bridesmaids would be arriving to pick them up. Bertie was supposed to be going to the wedding with Colin, but his partner had stayed out all night and not wanting to go alone, Bertie had asked Lizzie if he could come along with her. Like Malachi, Colin was terribly unreliable and Bertie could do so much better.

The doorbell rang and pandemonium broke out. Lucy, one of the bridesmaids looked out of Lizzie's bedroom window and announced the car was there. Lizzie asked her to take Joanna, the flowergirl and Christopher out to the car and she would join them in a minute. She then rushed down to the dining room where Bertie was enjoying a glass of sherry.

'Darling can you do me a big favour?' Lizzie asked.

'Anything,' he smiled sadly. Colin's behaviour was clearly starting to get to him.

'Could you give Fleur away? I've no idea where Malachi is and when I do find him I'm going to cut his balls off!'

Bertie gripped his chest, his eyes filled with tears.

'Me? Act as father of the bride? Oh Lizzie it would give me the greatest pleasure. Thank you.'

The ceremony was held at St Barnabas Church in Bloomsbury and it looked more like a fashion shoot than a wedding. Fleur was a model, and so were most of her friends; and Scott cut a dashing, Byronesque figure with long, dark, curly hair and a swarthy complexion. They made Lizzie feel old and frumpy even though she was only forty-four and was still considered one of the sexiest women in showbiz. The honour of this made her laugh considering she'd done very little since Christopher's birth. She'd waited long enough to be a mother, and now she had the chance, no starring role beat spending time with her darling son.

Just as Scott and Fleur were exchanging their vows, the door to the church opened and everyone looked round. Malachi entered, looking dishevelled and flushed. His suit wasn't on properly and his nose was red – a sure sign he'd been drinking. Lizzie sighed in disappointment. To think there were whispers about him becoming the next James Bond should Roger Moore decide to retire. Right now, Malachi looked more like Compo from *Last of the Summer Wine*!

Smiling apologetically, he half ran down the aisle and sat beside Lizzie. He smelt like a brewery and hadn't even bothered to shave.

'Where have you been?' she snapped.

'I got held up at the airport.'

'You got stuck in the bar you mean? You could have made an effort for your daughter's wedding.'

'I've got a lot on my mind, okay? Now shut up, we're disturbing the service.'

The reception was held at Meade House, just outside of Chiswick. After the speeches, Lord Litchfield took the official photographs and then the party started. As was becoming the norm these days, the youngsters gravitated to one room dancing to Duran Duran and Wham! whilst the older members of the party gathered in the largest drawing room where they could enjoy conversation without shouting over the top of each other. Christopher ran from one room to another, wanting to join in with the bigger kids but at the same time needing the reassurance of his parents being there.

Bertie made a beeline for the piano and did an impromptu performance, while Lizzie made an attempt to stop Malachi from finishing a bottle of vintage scotch.



‘What is the matter with you?’ she cried.

‘I bumped into Starr in LA,’ he replied, swigging back another glass.

Lizzie froze. Surely not; surely Starr wouldn’t be so cruel? Not after all these years of making no contact. Beverley Miller had hardly turned her into the next Meryl Streep, but she’d made a string of mid-budget action flicks. She was making a name for herself, why would she want to saddle herself with a seven year old?

‘What did she have to say for herself?’ Lizzie asked quietly.

He shook his head and poured another glass.

‘I have been a fucking idiot,’ he said. ‘A right fucking idiot.’

‘Why?’

He took her by the arm and led her out of the patio doors into the garden. Christopher was down the bottom, climbing trees with Joanna the flowergirl. Lizzie still didn’t know what Malachi’s news was and she couldn’t shake the terror at the thought of losing Christopher. For a moment she actually contemplated killing Starr to stop her taking him away from her.

‘I never touched her again after the night she left Fleur in the disco,’ Malachi whispered. ‘Little did I know she’d only finished her period two days before.’

‘I don’t understand.....’

‘I fucked the little bitch a couple of times, she had a period, then she goes out with my daughter and that night picks up an Israeli student and takes him back to her hotel. Two months later she comes to our door telling you she’s pregnant by me.’

‘You mean Chris isn’t yours?’

‘No. I’ve loved and supported that kid for the past seven years and he’s nothing to do with me.’

‘Malachi I don’t know what to say,’ she replied, although the part of her that hated him felt this was his just desserts for being a cheating pig. This news made no difference to her. Christopher was still her flesh and blood no matter who his father was.

‘I don’t know why I didn’t notice it before. I’ve got blue eyes, so has Starr and yet Christopher’s eyes went brown by the time he was six months old. And where did that dark curly hair come from? No one in my family has curly hair. Does anyone in yours?’

‘No, although when I was young and I used to envisage Mary Ann....Starr, I used to see her with curls.’

‘I feel so stupid. All he is to me is my wife’s grandson.’

‘Malachi don’t talk like that. He’s *our* son. We’ve brought him up from the moment he was born. I love him like he’s my own.’

‘That’s the difference though Lizzie. He’s your flesh and blood. He’s nothing to do with me.’ He turned and walked off. ‘I can’t stay around here. I’m going to get a drink somewhere quiet.’

Lizzie was left stunned. For the past seven years she’d been convinced she was raising her husband’s son, and all the time Starr had been fooling Malachi. Falling pregnant by this student had obviously given her the perfect excuse to blackmail her mother. Lizzie looked down the garden at Christopher, who was sitting on a big branch with the pretty little girl who had now torn her bridesmaid’s dress. In profile, she could see he had the beginnings of a rather large, Jewish nose and his skin always had an olive tint not normal in someone with parents of Irish descent. She felt sorry for Malachi but in a twisted way it pleased her. Christopher was entirely hers and that felt good.

A hand on her shoulder disturbed her thoughts. She thought it was Malachi come back to say he was sorry; she was shocked to find it was a very ashen faced Bertie.

‘Lizzie could you come to Belgravia Police Station with me please?’ he asked quietly. ‘Colin’s been arrested.’

‘What for?’

‘I don’t know, they wouldn’t tell me. They only managed to find me here because they found an invitation in his jacket. Apparently he’s so drunk he can’t speak.’

‘Oh Bertie,’ she sighed, rubbing his arm. ‘Let me gather Chris up and I’ll be with you.’

The three of them left together and took a taxi over to Belgravia, and the brand new police station that stood close to Victoria Coach station. The worry of Colin and his behaviour was getting to Bertie, and he was starting to look his fifty-five years. He deserved some peace and quiet at his age, not a partner who was behaving like a teenager.

Lizzie was concerned that the reception of a police station was no place for a child of Christopher's age, but fortunately it was empty. She found a seat, pulling Christopher onto her lap, while Bertie went off to find Colin. She looked down at her drowsy son; his pageboy outfit dirty, his curls littered with leaves. She remembered the terror she'd felt on thinking Starr wanted to take him away from her and it made her start to cry. Christopher was her life and she knew for a fact that to lose him would be the one thing to push her over the edge again.

They waited for ages, Christopher falling asleep and Lizzie reading every Metropolitan Police leaflet on the table before her. Finally Bertie emerged, shame-faced and propping up Colin who was unable to walk unaided.

'Lizzie can you go out and get us a taxi please?' he asked.

'Yes of course.'

Carrying her sleeping son, Lizzie stepped out onto Buckingham Palace Road, and within moments hailed a black cab. It took all of Bertie's effort to lever Colin into the taxi, and Lizzie asked the driver to take them back to Bertie's house in Pimlico. Christopher slept through the entire journey, and on getting back, Lizzie put him down to sleep in one of the spare rooms, and laughed when she came back down to find Bertie doing the same thing with Colin on the sofa. With a sad shake of the head, Bertie left his partner and went into the kitchen, followed by Lizzie. He fetched a bottle of whisky and poured them both a glass, slumping down at the table opposite her.

'What did he do?' she asked.

'He was caught having sex in the toilets in Victoria Station. The least they're going to charge him with is Indecent Exposure. My name's going to be dragged through the papers and I'm going to look like a complete fool Lizzie.'

‘Oh Bertie,’ she sighed, laying her hand upon his. ‘It seems such a shame; you’ve been together so long.’

‘But I feel as though I’ve put up with enough from him. He treats me like an idiot because he knows I’ll take it. Well not anymore, I’m chucking him out.’

‘I don’t know,’ she mused. ‘Seems like we’ve both got awful taste in men.’

Bertie stuck to his word and as soon as Colin sobered up, he packed his bags for him and ordered him out. Within days he was on the phone to Lizzie complaining that he was lonely and she had to talk him out of asking Colin to come back. She had her own man worries; Malachi was hardly ever home and when he was around he barely spoke to her and totally ignored Christopher. It was as if by discovering he wasn’t the child’s father, he’d switched his feelings off completely.

One day after dropping Christopher off at school, Lizzie returned to find Lyn’s Audi parked outside the house. She wondered what her friend wanted at this ungodly hour. Spotting Lizzie parking, she got out of the car and waited on the doorstep; the grave expression on her podgy face alarming Lizzie.

‘Are you okay?’ she asked, walking up the path. ‘What’s happened?’

‘I think we should go inside.’

Lizzie took her into the house and made her a cup of coffee. Lyn was so tense she didn’t even sit at the kitchen table and preferred to remain standing.

‘You’re scaring me Lyn,’ Lizzie fretted, sitting before her. ‘What’s going on?’

‘William’s girlfriend has a friend called Claudia Chadwick. She’s a budding actress – aren’t they all? William informs me that Claudia was in LA with Malachi all the time he was out there and now she’s living with him in Notting Hill.’

Lizzie laughed at this absurdity of this rumour.

‘How can they be living together? Malachi lives here.’

‘You told me yourself the other day that he hardly ever comes home. The worrying thing is that Claudia is showing off an engagement ring....given to her by Malachi.’

‘That’s impossible, he’s married to me.’

Lyn shrugged.

‘Looks like he’s planning to divorce you.’

Lyn had to leave as she had a meeting to attend, and Lizzie remained seated at the kitchen table, stunned. This story sounded too absurd even for Malachi. She’d had her suspicions he was carrying on with someone, but that was just Malachi’s way. It was hardly his style to propose to a girl - commitment wasn’t his thing.

When he came home that night, she was expecting him to be sheepish and apologetic, but instead he strode in, ruffling Christopher’s curls and asking Lizzie if they could talk in private. She left Christopher eating his supper, and shut the kitchen door behind her, walking up into the dining room.

‘I want a divorce,’ he declared before she even had the chance to speak.

‘Is this to do with your new floozy?’ she asked.

‘How did you know?’

‘I have my spies. Too old for you now am I?’

‘Come off it Lizzie, the love between us died a long time ago. I only stuck around for Christopher’s sake, and now I know he’s not mine I’ve got nothing to keep me here.’

‘So ten years of marriage means nothing then?’

‘It was a blast but I’m ready to move on. Claudia is everything I’ve ever wanted in a woman.’

‘A woman! From what I hear she’s young enough to be your daughter. You’re pathetic Malachi.’

‘Just accept it Lizzie. I feel like a spare part around here most of the time anyway. It’s you and Christopher against the world. I’ll just go and get my things and I’ll be gone.’

So that was it. Within fifteen minutes, Malachi was gone and Lizzie was once again abandoned. She’d gone beyond crying or hitting the bottle or trying to kill herself. What was the point? Besides, she had Christopher to live for – he was far more important than Malachi or any other

man. She calmly went into the kitchen and informed her son that his father was going to live somewhere else and this was met with an indifferent shrug.

Feeling empty, let down and facing an uncertain future, Lizzie bathed Christopher and put him to bed. She then returned to the living room and called the only person who understood her.

‘What is it dear-heart?’ Bertie asked.

‘That bastard Malachi has left me. Do you fancy coming over and sharing a bottle of merlot?’

‘I’d love to.’

‘And tell you what, why don’t you pack a few things and come and stay with us? That house is far too big for you on your own.’

## **Chapter 35**

### **London – September 1987**

Lizzie was summoning up all her courage to press ‘play’ on the video recorder. Thames Television had sent her a copy of the first episode of her new series ‘Redemption’ to view, and she was nervous about seeing herself. She’d never shared this information with anyone, but she absolutely hated watching herself on screen - even back when she’d been a young starlet. ‘Redemption’ was somewhat of a comeback for Lizzie. Since Christopher’s birth she had worked sporadically, able to live comfortably on her past earnings. But with her son at school all day and two evenings a week at his guitar and piano lessons, she found herself bored and yearning to work. Maggie had secured her an audition for ‘Redemption’ and she’d got the part straight away. In a role not dissimilar to Buffy Adams, she played Sonia Hunt, a beautiful and ruthless magazine publisher who loses her fortune and has to go and live with her brother who is a vicar. It had been enormous fun, stomping around the set, dressed in designer gear, spitting venom. The fees were enough to see Christopher through school *and* university, but it was just the thought of watching herself hamming it up that worried her. She thought back to her idealistic days, a protégé of Simeon Hanson. What would he say if he were alive to see her in rubbish like this?

At forty-six, she was still exquisitely beautiful, as slim and yet curvaceous as ever. The only change in her appearance was that, when Malachi left, as many women do, she had chopped off her hair. It was greying in places and she decided ash blonde was much more tasteful than the honey blonde she'd sported in her youth. The Princess Di cut only heightened her classy, cool image and even she found it difficult to see any traces of Lizzie Gallagher when she looked in the mirror now.

Deciding she couldn't face the video, she put down the remote control and picked up the *Guardian* instead. Not that the news was particularly comforting. Lizzie hated Margaret Thatcher with a vengeance and it seemed every day brought another evil plan from the Iron Lady. One headline did attract her interest though, tucked away in the corner;

*Film Director's Wife Killed in Car Accident*

*Annabel Bowers, wife of independent film director Max Bowers was yesterday killed in a car accident whilst on holiday on the Cote D'Azure. Countess Bowers 42, was a successful make up artist prior to her marriage. She is survived by her husband and daughter Liza 13.*

Lizzie felt nothing but sadness for Max. She had spent many years resenting Annabel for marrying him and having his child. But she knew this was irrational as all the girl had done was fall in love with him, exactly as she had. She also pitied Liza, she was at an age when a girl needed her mother.

There was a snuffling sound and she turned to find Bertie coming down the stairs, still in his pyjamas; he looked pale and ill and should have been in bed.

'Bertie you look dreadful,' she said. 'You need to get to the doctor, you've had this flu on and off for over a month now.'

'It's just a summer cold,' he sniffed, coming to sit beside her. 'I just need some vitamins.'

'Well take care of yourself love. It's not like you to be ill.'

Bertie went back to bed, and Lizzie steeled herself to watch the video. She was saved by the bell when the phone started to ring. She reached over and picked it up – it was one of those new, cordless phones and she expected the reception to be awful.

‘Lizzie darling,’ Maggie crowed, her voice as Glaswegian as it had been twenty years ago. ‘Are you doing anything this lunchtime?’

‘No, do you want to see me?’

‘Yes. I’ve got Sidney Melville coming here. He has a project he wants to run by you. How do you fancy it?’

‘Okay, but I’ve got to leave at three to pick Chris up from school.’

‘Get you, the dedicated mother,’ Maggie laughed.

Maggie Calvin was now in her late sixties but continued to be a major player in the film and television industry. She had been widowed for some time, and her sons had left home so she filled her spare time with rescuing Labrador dogs. At this present time, the house was filled with six big, fat, yellow dogs. Lizzie had considered adopting one of them for Christopher, but she wanted to be sure her son would be committed to looking after it.

Sidney Melville was probably US television’s biggest mogul. No one knew how old he was, but there were rumours he was pushing eighty. Like a lot of Hollywood people his face had been lifted and plumped to almost comic proportions, and he looked like a rather startled fifty year old. He claimed to be allergic to animal fur and was not appreciating the big dogs gambling round the garden.

‘Could we please go someplace else?’ he asked. ‘I can’t concentrate when my sinuses are hurting so much.’

They moved out to the garden where the dog dander would be dispersed more easily. Maggie made a jug of Pimms, and while Lizzie only sipped at hers because she was driving, Sidney was enjoying this very British drink and was downing it enthusiastically.

‘Now Elizabeth,’ he said, trying to laugh but the tightness of his face prevented it. ‘I happened to see a preview of your new series Redemption and I have to say I was very impressed.’



‘Thank you Mr Melville.’

‘Fox are looking to make a new soap. I’ve been working closely with them and I’ve written a draft script. It’s called Diamonds, and it’s set in Manhattan, and it’s about a family of diamond merchants - the Whitwells. The head of the family dies and his much younger, British wife, Corey, takes over. Much to the dismay of the rest of his family.’

‘Are we talking Alexis Carrington?’ Lizzie laughed.

‘Sort of. Corey’s a ball-busting bitch but she’s got heart. I’d like you to play her.’

‘Me! But would this mean moving to New York?’

‘Yes. Is that a problem?’

‘Well yes, I have a nine year old son at school here.’

‘There are some very fine elementary schools in New York. I’m sure we could get him into one.’

‘Darling why don’t you take the script home and read it?’ Maggie suggested. ‘Don’t make a decision here and now. Mull it over.’

‘I’ll do that,’ Lizzie mused. ‘I haven’t just got myself to think of now.’

That evening, once Christopher had gone to bed and Bertie had dragged himself to the theatre, Lizzie settled down with the script for the pilot episode of ‘Diamonds’. It was unintentionally hilarious – very camp and cheesy, but she couldn’t put it down, wondering what was going to happen next. Corey Whitwell was a bitch but her redeeming feature was her love for her teenage son, something Lizzie could empathise with. Most of the scenes took place in the bedroom or the boardroom and it was obvious that Corey was supposed to be devastatingly beautiful, with all the men falling at her feet. Lizzie felt flattered that Sidney had even considered her for it.

She was tempted to say yes, but had to find out what Christopher thought about it. The following evening after school, she took him to Chico’s, his favourite ice cream restaurant just off Kensington High Street. She plied him with knickerbocker glories and Coca Cola and hoped all that sugar wouldn’t make him hyper.

‘Darling, how would you feel about moving away?’ she asked.

‘Where to?’ he replied, still more interested in his ice cream.

‘America.’

His beautiful hazel eyes lit up and a huge smile beamed across his face.

‘Disneyland?’

‘No, New York. But I could take you to Disneyland.’

‘Wicked.’

‘So you don’t mind going?’

‘No,’ he shrugged. ‘As long as you’re with me mummy.’

Lizzie’s heart melted and she reached out, stroking his cheek. He would never know how happy he made her. Even if he’d said he wanted to stay in England she would have turned Sidney down flat. Christopher came first.

She drove home and all the time fretted about going to New York. She wanted to go, but was worried about leaving Bertie. He hadn’t been well for some weeks and she was convinced it was a combination of over-work and a delayed reaction to the shock of splitting with Colin. He had plenty of other friends, but no one else shared the bond they did after thirty years together and she hated the thought of being so far away from him.

On arriving home she found Bertie in the kitchen cooking chicken for dinner, looking decidedly brighter. Christopher went off into the living room to watch television, while Lizzie dithered around, wondering how she was going to broach the subject of her impending departure.

‘Are you okay Bertie?’ she asked, trying to deflect the attention away from herself.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘No. Well, sort of. I’ve had an offer but it would mean leaving you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I’ve had an offer to take ‘Ship Ahoy’ to Broadway. But it would mean staying out there. It’s very British humour and Jez and I will have to adapt it for an American audience.

Lizzie gasped in delight.

‘Does that mean you’re moving to New York?’

‘Yes. Don’t look so pleased.’

‘I’m pleased because I’ve had the offer to go there too. Sidney Melville wants me to star in his new soap opera. Bertie we can go together, oh how fantastic! It’s obviously meant to be.’

She ran into the living room and picked up the phone, asking Christopher to turn down the television. She called Sidney Melville at the Hilton Park Lane, where he was staying at for the rest of the week.

‘Sidney Melville,’ he said in that nasal voice of his.

‘Sidney it’s Elizabeth Maine. I’ve spoken to my son and thought it over and I would love to accept the role of Corey Whitwell.’

‘Fantastic!’ he crowed. ‘Fantastic. Let’s meet up and exchange contracts. Do you have any stipulations?’

‘Yes. That while I’m in the show you never give a part to Starr MacKenzie.’

## **Chapter 36**

### **New York – August 1989**

Everyone was trying to concentrate on filming, but the buzz around the studio was electrifying. It was Emmys night and Lizzie was nominated for Outstanding Actress in a Drama for her performance as Corey Whitwell in ‘Diamonds’. Both the show and the character had taken the world by storm and Corey was an antidote to Alexis Carrington of *Dynasty*. Lizzie brought her usual warmth and compassion to the role, and while Corey was tough-talking and sometimes ruthless, women could empathise with her bad luck with men and her love for her son. Because of filming, Lizzie wasn’t able to attend the ceremony and had to work on a scene where she fought her arch enemy, Nadia Kaminsky, in a swimming pool. The scene was being held off until after the award had been announced over in Los Angeles, so Lizzie remained in her trailer with just a cameraman, ready to record her acceptance speech should she be lucky.

Lizzie was enjoying life in the Big Apple. She and Christopher shared a huge penthouse apartment on Fifth Avenue, and downstairs lived Bertie and Wilhelm – his partner of the past year. Unlike the brutish Colin, Wilhelm was a gentleman, and Bertie confided in Lizzie that they were companions rather than lovers. Bertie worried her sometimes; he was losing weight and had a sniffle he couldn't shake off for very long. She would nag him to go to the doctors, but he would insist everything was okay. 'Ship Ahoy' was a huge success but Lizzie was convinced he was over-working.

It was boring being shut away in her trailer, feeling an idiot dressed in full Corey get up. The cameraman was equally bored, and he sat reading the New York Times and occasionally glancing at his watch. Lizzie found a copy of the *National Enquirer* on the floor and flicked through the gutter rag. She smiled to herself on seeing a double page spread dedicated to her errant daughter, telling all about the miscarriage she had suffered after falling pregnant to actor Stephen Appel (and ending his marriage in the process). She ranted about how she longed to be a mother and Lizzie couldn't help but think back to eleven years ago when she'd been so eager to get rid of Christopher. Starr had the compensation of being voted 'Playmate of the Year', and it seemed odd how her life was mirroring her mother's – a baby given away, miscarriage and a Playboy career.

The door to the trailer burst open and Demi, the runner rushed in; an excited look upon her face.

'Elizabeth you've won!' she exclaimed. 'You've won the Emmy.'

'Oh my God,' was all Lizzie could gasp, knowing she would be live on television within thirty seconds. The cameraman sprung into life and as arranged, Lizzie picked up an old Emmy that belonged to Chuck Ryan, one of the scriptwriters, and had to act as if someone had just rushed in and handed it to her. She looked into the camera and switched Elizabeth Maine on. The cameraman counted her down and she began to speak.

'I'd like to say a big thank you for this award,' she gushed. 'The last award I won was in 1960 so I'm a bit rusty. But I'd like to thank the same person now as I did then, Max. Without him I would never have started acting properly. I'd also like to thank my wonderful cast and crew and hope the public go on enjoying Diamonds.'

That was the end of her speech and the cameraman stopped rolling. Lizzie was convinced she'd done appallingly and was now worried that she'd looked a complete idiot all over the USA.

'How was I?' she asked.

'Hot as ever honey,' the cameraman replied with a shake of the head. 'Hot as ever.'

The award winning actress left the set at two a.m. Her hair was still damp from the fight scene and she ached all over. She got home to find Christopher and Ellen, the nanny had gone to bed. Ellen was a very sweet girl from Harlem who was studying journalism at college and stayed with Lizzie and Christopher, helping out while Lizzie was at work. Lizzie was rather shocked on settling down on the sofa with a mug of hot chocolate, to find the phone ringing. She picked it up, speaking quietly, not wishing to wake the others up.

'Hello,' she whispered.

'It's me,' replied Bertie. 'I heard you walk past the door. Can I pop up and see you?'

'At this hour? It must be serious.'

Within moments, Bertie was at the front door. He was in his pyjamas and his face looked pinched and ashen, his eyes sunken. Lizzie was terrified that he was gravely ill and had left it too late to do anything about it. She welcomed him in and sat him on the sofa, giving him a sip of her hot chocolate.

'Congratulations by the way,' he struggled to smile. 'I cried like a proud father when you won. The world's your oyster now dear.'

'I take it you haven't come up here at this time of the morning to congratulate me on my Emmy?'

'No,' he replied, head hung low. 'I had a phone call from Colin today. It shook me up.'

'Don't let him get to you darling,' she urged. 'He's a waste of space, and you've got Wilhelm now.'

'It's not that simple. He's in a hospice in Tottenham. He wanted to make his peace with me before he dies.'

‘What’s wrong with him?’

Bertie turned to look at her, tears filling his eyes. She could hear the word before he even said it.

‘AIDS.’

‘AIDS?’ she uttered.

‘He was diagnosed HIV positive just after I came here - he didn’t have the decency to tell me. Now he’s developed full-blown AIDS and he’s got days rather than weeks. I’m so scared Lizzie.’

‘W-Well it doesn’t mean you’ve got it does it?’ she panicked, denying how ill he looked; it was just a coincidence.

‘Look at me Lizzie. I’ve always got a cold; I’ve a rash on my chest that won’t go. I’m losing weight. I’m certainly showing the symptoms.’

‘No,’ she protested, unable to control her sobs. ‘No, there’s nothing wrong with you.’

He laid his hand upon her knee, trying to placate her.

‘Let’s hope you’re right,’ he said. ‘But I’ve got to have the test tomorrow, just in case.’

‘I’ll come with you.’

‘No, I’d rather be by myself sweetie. I need to get my head together.’

Bertie went home and Lizzie remained on the sofa all night, crying herself to sleep. She couldn’t bear the thought of losing Bertie. She refused to accept that he could possibly be dying. After something happening to Christopher, losing Bertie was her worst fear. She remembered the utter desolation she’d felt all those years ago when they’d split up over Digger O’Malley. Being without Bertie was like losing a limb.

The next day at work she was greeted with champagne and streamers in celebration of her win and it took her finest acting skills to feign excitement and gratitude. All she really wanted to do was be at home or with Bertie at the clinic. She couldn’t help but think of the unfairness of it all.

AIDS had been painted as a disease caught by the promiscuous, and Bertie was the least promiscuous person she knew. He'd probably had sex with less people than she had.

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The test was not mentioned again until it was time for the results to come in. In the longest week of her life, Lizzie lived in fear of what might be; while Bertie carried on as if nothing had happened. Even when her salary was put up to five hundred thousand dollars an episode, Lizzie felt nothing. She was one of the highest paid women on American television and yet she would have given it all up to be assured that Bertie was healthy and they would grow old together as she'd always planned.

On first of September, Lizzie received a copy of her first ever *Vogue* front cover. She looked sexy and alluring in a silver, halter-neck dress and the whole article was in celebration of the sexy older woman, and featured shots of her, Joan Collins, Linda Evans, Stephanie Beecham and other attractive forty and fifty-somethings from the world of television. It was a dramatic contrast to Lizzie's first ever photoshoot for the Eden catalogue, wearing cheap, slutty underwear.

September first was also the day Bertie got his results, and Lizzie didn't know how to approach it; whether to come home from work and ask, or to wait for him to come to her. She didn't have to make that decision. When she wrapped at six p.m., instead of her usual driver waiting to take her home, Bertie sat in his Chrysler, the expression on his face giving nothing away. Lizzie climbed in beside him and turned to him, trying to read him.

'Bertie please don't keep me in suspense.'

'I've had the most wonderful news Lizzie,' he said in a strangely quiet voice, laying his hand upon her knee. 'My best friend in the world gets more beautiful by the day and I always had this fear that we'd grow old together, and she'd look like a goddess while I'd look like an old fag who'd seen better days. Well that isn't going to happen. I'm going to die while I'm still young and beautiful.'

It took a few moments for her to digest what he was saying, but a slow, creeping dread started to fill her, causing a patter of cold sweat to cover her skin. Her heart started to thud in her chest; her

mouth went dry. She knew exactly what he meant and it felt like the hardest blow to her stomach.

‘Oh Bertie,’ she cried. ‘Bertie no.’

‘I could have a year left darling,’ he said. ‘I’ll be in my sixties by then. One can’t be too greedy, can one?’

‘No,’ she sobbed. ‘No Bertie, you can’t leave me.’

‘I’m afraid that decision’s been taken out of my hands,’ he replied pragmatically. ‘I’d have loved to have seen what a fine young man that son of yours grows into but it’s not to be. I’ve got to go back and tell Wilhelm now. He’s in no danger, we’ve never done anything more than kiss.’

‘How can you be so cool about it? It’s horrible.’

‘I know it is, but I’ve got to die of something. One thing I do stipulate though is that I want to die in England. Even if it means you all shove me in a hospice or something. I don’t mind. I just don’t want to die in America.’

‘Isn’t there something we can do? Drugs or something?’

‘No darling. The docs are trying out this drug called AZT that slows the symptoms, but I think mine are too far gone to even consider that.’

‘I can’t take this in,’ she sniffed. ‘I love you so much Bertie.’

He took her hand and brought it to his lips, kissing it.

‘My darling Lizzie, you don’t know the amount of times I’ve wished I was straight. I would have married you when you were young and made you so happy.’

‘But you have,’ she replied meekly. ‘You have.’

## **Chapter 37**

**New York – July 1991**



Lizzie could think of better ways to spend her fiftieth birthday. She was about to drop a bombshell on Sidney Melville that would send shock waves throughout televisionland and she would probably never work again. It was time to renew her contract on 'Diamonds', and instead of accepting what would no doubt be a gigantic offer, she was going to tell him she wanted to leave the show for good.

They were meeting in Chapters, an exclusive members only restaurant in Manhattan. Lizzie was early and sat at the bar enjoying a bourbon and dry. She'd made a mental note to watch her drinking. Just lately she'd been turning to whisky as a way of helping her get to sleep, blocking out her worries about Bertie back in England. Rather than drink herself to madness once more, it would be more practical to go home and nurse her dear friend in his final days.

Sidney finally arrived, accompanied by Cindy, his latest girlfriend, a vacuous blonde a third of his age; and along with them came Ryan Wragg, his attorney. 'Diamonds' had made Lizzie a millionairess and there had been plenty of rumours in the press of Fox offering her a million dollars an episode. None of that mattered to her. She had enough money to keep her for the rest of her life and she just wanted some time to herself.

There were the usual platitudes and air kissing before they settled down to lunch. With the exception of Lizzie, they were all on some sort of diet, and the food that did arrive consisted of a few leaves and various breads. Lizzie couldn't eat due to nerves and ordered another Jack Daniels.

'Before we start anything,' she began, not wanting anyone to be led into a false sense of security. 'I'd like to tell you that I'm not renewing my contract.'

Sidney said nothing; Cindy was too busy checking out Tom Cruise in another corner of the room and Wragg gave a nervous laugh, convinced Lizzie was bluffing to try and get more money.

'Look if this is about money,' he said. 'Wait till you hear the offer we've got for you. We.....'

'It's nothing about money,' she replied. 'My son has been accepted into the Guildhall School of Music; he's a gifted pianist and I want him to develop his talent. I want to go home to England.'

Sidney looked to Wragg, expecting him to come up with something. When he didn't, he took matters into his own hands.

‘Name a music school in New York. I’ll get Christopher into it. I have connections.’

‘I’m sure you do Sidney, but I really need to go home. I’m fifty years old today; I have been working since I was sixteen. I need a break. Now, Christopher starts in September which means I’m happy to film Corey’s final scenes when shooting starts next month and that’s it.’

‘You Goddam ungrateful bitch,’ Sidney spat, causing everyone in the restaurant to look round. ‘I made you.’

‘I think you’ll find it was *you* who begged *me* to join your show,’ she replied calmly.

‘Well don’t expect to be able to come back. That bitch Corey is going to be blown to smithereens by Nadia Kaminsky. I swear to God.’

‘And I will enjoy filming every moment,’ she answered. ‘Your understanding of my wish to further my son’s education is so heart-warming.’

Lizzie went home and cooked dinner for herself and Christopher. He was thirteen now and nearly six inches taller than her. He’d reached that gawky stage where boy’s bodies start changing and they become uncomfortable in certain situations. After four years of American education, he had a slight New York twang to his speech and Lizzie didn’t like this. She’d spent so long perfecting her own cut-glass English accent, she wanted her son to speak like a refined young man naturally.

‘Mom is it okay if I go and stay with Dean this weekend?’ he asked, wolfing down his food as if it was the last meal he’d ever have.

‘I suppose so,’ she sighed. ‘Although I thought Dean’s mother might like to have him to herself once in a while. You two are always together.’

‘Didn’t you have a friend when you were my age?’

‘Yes I did actually,’ she replied with a smile, thinking of Kit. ‘I had a friend called Kit, well Christopher actually. You’re named after him.’

‘Do you still know him?’

‘No, he died just before you were born.’

‘That’s sad. Is it okay if I play on my computer?’

‘Yes, go on, leave me on my birthday.’

He laughed, leaning over the table and kissing her on the cheek.

‘Love you mom.’

He left the room and Lizzie set about clearing the plates away. She felt sorry for Christopher, going back to London and leaving Dean Foster, his best friend. Dean was a preppy type who got nothing but A-grades and she knew her son looked up to him. Both of his parents were Wall Street traders and they must have seemed so much more respectable and appealing than an actress mother and a father who now made straight-to-video movies, and was more famed for his colourful love life. Not that Christopher ever saw Malachi. Maintenance was non-existent and the couple of times she’d run into her ex-husband at parties, there was never any mention of the little boy he had believed to be his for seven years.

Lizzie settled down with a glass of bourbon and switched the television on to watch *Letterman*. Starr MacKenzie was his guest, promoting her new film ‘No Defence’. Lizzie’s daughter was suddenly a superstar, ‘No Defence’ was a run of the mill thriller about a woman who escapes prison, poses as a high society model and murders all the men in her path. What made it special was that it was the most explicit mainstream Hollywood movie ever made. There were rumours that some of the sex was un-simulated and in several scenes Starr was full-frontal nude.

The previous week the *National Enquirer* ran an article about Hollywood look-a-likes and for the first time ever; someone had spotted the resemblance between them. Starr was the spitting image of Lizzie at thirty-four and it seemed this was not going un-noticed.

The phone rang and she was tempted to ignore it, convinced it was Sidney Melville or Ryan Wragg either spitting fire or offering her two million dollars an episode. Christopher, however, had other ideas and pounced on the receiver outside his bedroom.

‘Mom it’s Wilhelm,’ he called.

Lizzie's blood ran cold; was this the call she'd been dreading? Had Bertie died before she'd even had the chance to say goodbye? She picked up the phone closest to her, thanking Christopher and waiting until she heard him put his down.

'Wilhelm,' she said gravely.

'He's not long for this world,' the elderly man sniffed. 'He wants to see you.'

'I'll be right over.'

'I understand if you can't....I mean, flights and everything.'

'Tell Bertie to hang on, I'll be there as soon as I can.'

By six a.m. the next morning, she and Christopher were boarding a flight at JFK to take them to London. For the sake of her son, Lizzie had to remain strong, but inside she was dying. The thought of losing Bertie was too painful for her to even contemplate. She'd try to think of anything else, but then a voice in her head would remind her of why she was returning to the UK and the sob would make her catch her breath. As if he realised, Christopher reached out and grasped his mother's hand, and without saying a word, reassured her.

They were staying with Lyn, and by the time they reached Clapham, Christopher was almost asleep. Lizzie helped him up to Lyn's spare room to flop out. When she returned downstairs, she found Lyn in the kitchen.

'Coffee darling?' she asked.

'No,' Lizzie replied quietly, and for a moment she was frozen to the spot. She hadn't seen Lyn in six months and she looked like a different person. She'd had liposuction to remove the fat and had hired a personal trainer to keep her in shape. Breast augmentation had restored her bust, and plastic surgery had made her face look ten years younger. For some reason all Lizzie could think of was Bertie. How she wished Bertie were here. He'd pull Lyn's hair back, looking to see whereabouts her ears were pinned.

Lyn turned to face her and Lizzie burst out crying. Her friend rushed to her, holding her tightly against her still soft, welcoming body.

‘Come on,’ she whispered, rubbing Lizzie’s back. ‘Let it all out now. You’ve got to be strong for him.’

‘I’m going to miss him so much,’ Lizzie sobbed. ‘My poor Bertie.’

Lyn eased her away and looked at her, wiping her tears from her cheeks.

‘Go to him, he needs you. Say goodbye for me too eh?’

For his final resting place, Bertie had insisted Wilhelm rent them a flat just three doors down from the place he and Lizzie used to share in Pimlico. He’d written to her confessing that he’d done so because his happiest years were spent there and he wanted to feel close to her in his dying moments. Seeing the shabby little townhouses on Warwick Row brought back so many memories for Lizzie, and a part of her wished she could go back to being that naïve young girl with her life ahead of her.

Wilhelm greeted her with a hug and offered her a drink. She declined and said she just wanted to see Bertie.

‘He isn’t a pretty sight,’ Wilhelm told her in his soft, New York accent. ‘You are prepared aren’t you?’

‘Of course,’ she smiled. ‘Let’s just go to him.’

Bertie wanted his room to be filled with roses and candles and Wilhelm had fulfilled his wish. Before even opening the door Lizzie could smell the sickly scent and she knew she’d never be able to tolerate roses again. Wilhelm pushed the door open and she entered. The room resembled a chapel; the curtains drawn, making it dark, the only light coming from the flickering candles. Lizzie couldn’t hide her gasp of horror when she finally came to see Bertie. He was so small and thin, the bed seemed to swallow him up. His face was that of a skeleton, just bone covered in skin and a faint scattering of beard. His once beautiful, twinkling eyes now bulged horribly and his drawn back lips exposed his now rotten teeth and receding gums. Although physically repulsed by him, he was still her Bertie underneath and Lizzie was determined to act as though nothing had changed.

While Wilhelm took a seat in the corner, Lizzie knelt by the bed, taking Bertie's frail hand within her own.

He slowly turned his face to hers and attempted to smile. She saw tears in his tired eyes and it took all her strength to stop herself from crying too.

'Lizzie,' he whispered. 'My darling Lizzie you made it.'

'Did you really think I'd be anywhere else?' she sniffed.

'I love you,' he said softly. 'I always have.'

'And I love you too. You're the best friend anyone could have.'

'You deserve happiness Lizzie,' he said, his voice fading. He stared up at the ceiling and she felt a change in his hand. She couldn't define it, but she knew it had happened.

'Bertie!' she cried. 'Bertie!'

She grasped his thin shoulders, shaking him but his body remained lifeless, his eyes remaining staring up at the ceiling. He was gone. Lizzie collapsed across him, a cry roaring from her mouth like a wounded animal. She had never felt so much pain in her life; not when she gave Mary Ann up; not even when Max left her. She could hold onto the hope of seeing them again, but not Bertie. She was never going to see Bertie again. She felt Wilhelm kneel beside her, the gentle wobble of his plump body as he too wept. Lizzie refused to let go of Bertie, holding onto his thin, wasted body as if she could breathe life back into him.

Wilhelm stood up, taking her by the shoulders and easing her away. She turned and fell into his arms, weeping desperately. He led her into the living room and sat her down on the sofa, concerned that she was going to have some sort of seizure. He sat beside her, holding her tightly, trying to stop her shaking.

'At least he's out of his suffering now,' he said, trying to reassure himself as much as her.

'I can't live without Bertie,' she wailed. 'I want my Bertie back.'

'Bertie will always be here with us,' he gave a sad chuckle. 'Whenever you see an old woman wearing too much make up you'll hear him calling her mutton. Whenever you speak to someone

he hated you'll see him kissing their cheeks and then waiting till they'd gone and saying how he wished they would drop dead. Bertie will never be gone.'

Wilhelm waited until Lizzie had quietened down some, then got up and went to Bertie's Davenport. He pulled open one of the drawers and took out an envelope, returning to Lizzie and passing it to her.

'He wrote this to you some time ago. He told me to give it to you when he was gone.'

'Thank you,' she replied, placing it in her trouser pocket. Numbness had started to blot out her feelings. It was that automatic pilot that enables a person to cope with grief.

'What are you going to do Wilhelm? I can't leave you on your own.'

'I'm going to call the funeral home and they'll come and take him away. Then, if it's okay with you I'd just like to shut myself in here with our photo albums, a big bottle of scotch and just cry myself silly till I fall asleep in a drunken stupor.'

'As long as you're okay,' she replied. 'Please don't think you've got to deal with this on your own. I'm here for you.'

He took her hand and raised it to his lips, kissing it.

'You're every bit the wonderful girl Bertie said you were. He was blessed to have you in his life.'

Lizzie waited with Wilhelm while the funeral directors took Bertie's body away. It saddened and disgusted her to see them wearing rubber gloves and protective clothing as if he was some sort of piece of nuclear waste rather than a human being. Once he was gone, she and Wilhelm had a drink to absent friends and cried on each other's shoulders. Lizzie then left and, not able to face going back to Lyn's, found herself wandering down Rochester Row, stopping at a pub in Artillery Way. It was the sort of spit and sawdust pub rarely seen in Central London these days. The old men sitting around nursing their pints didn't even seem to notice Elizabeth Maine had entered their pub; it was only the barman who gave a faint smile of recognition.

She ordered a large vodka and tonic and downed it in one. She then got another and found a table to sit at. However much she tried, she couldn't stop picturing Bertie in that bedroom, looking

like a concentration camp victim, and the only thing that helped blot it out was more alcohol. Six vodkas later, she was so drunk she couldn't think of anything except how she was going to get back to Lyn's. She forgot that she was richer than Midas and could only think of getting a bus – taxis were for the wealthy. Stumbling onto a number 88, she was too out of it to even notice the puzzled passengers, some of whom were convinced they were being secretly filmed. Why else would Elizabeth Maine get on a bus?

After her divorce from Marcus in 1987, Lyn moved into a house in Clapham. William was now married and living in Highgate, but Samantha was still with her mother, choosing to go to university in London so she could stay at home. She was away on holiday at the moment and on returning home, Lizzie found Christopher making full use of her computer, playing Dungeons and Dragons. Lyn was horrified to see Lizzie drunk and sat her down in the living room, making her a cup of black coffee.

'Please don't hit the bottle again,' she pleaded. 'Christopher needs you.'

Lizzie glanced over at her mop-haired darling boy and started to cry again.

'He's the only thing that keeps me going,' she slurred. 'My baby.' She looked at Lyn. 'Why couldn't they be straight Lyn?'

'What are you talking about?' Lyn frowned.

'I had a friend called Kit when I was a child. He was gay and he was killed for it. And now Bertie. If Bertie had been straight he wouldn't be dead.'

'Come on Lizzie, don't talk like this. You're the least homophobic person I know.'

'I hate it,' she spat. 'I don't want any more gays in my life. I swear if Christopher becomes gay I'll kill myself.'

'Go to Lizzie bed. If Bertie's looking down on you he'd be mortified to hear you speaking like this.'

After kissing Christopher goodnight and giving him a soppy, lingering hug, Lizzie allowed herself to be taken up to Samantha's bedroom by Lyn. Like a child, she sat on the edge of the bed while Lyn removed her shoes. She then helped her under the covers, sitting by her, stroking



her brow. As typical when drunk, Lizzie felt the need to confess – secrets seemed so pointless now.

‘Lyn I need to tell you something,’ she rasped.

‘And what’s that?’

‘Christopher isn’t just Starr MacKenzie’s son. He’s my grandson.’

‘What are you talking about Lizzie?’ Lyn half smiled.

‘Before I came to London I had a baby. My uncle raped me and I got pregnant. The girl found me out when she was older, told me she was pregnant by Malachi and I took the baby. My Christopher.’

‘Lizzie get to sleep, you’re rambling.’

‘Don’t ever let her near my son. Don’t let her near my boy.’

‘Who?’

‘Starr. Starr MacKenzie, my daughter.’

Lyn laughed.

‘Whatever you say Lizzie. Now get to sleep.’

Exhausted by her grief, Lizzie drifted off to sleep almost as soon as Lyn shut the door. She didn’t sleep for long and awoke with a start, convinced it had all been a nasty dream and Bertie was okay. Then reality sank in and she started crying again. She turned onto her side and felt something digging into her skin. Reaching down, she pulled out the envelope Wilhelm had given her and she’d forgotten to open. Switching on the bedside lamp, she sat up a little, her head swimming. The drunkenness was wearing off now and was replaced with a painful thudding in her ears. She opened the envelope and pulled out a letter, smiling on seeing Bertie’s beautiful, swirling handwriting. He had obviously written it before he deteriorated. Wishing she had her reading glasses, she held it close to her face.

*My darling Lizzie*

*By the time you read this, I will have gone off to that big cottage in the sky. I just wanted to write a little note to you while I still can to let you know how much I love you and how grateful I am to Mr Hope for introducing us all those years ago back in the Carlton. I'm not going to bother telling you what I've left you and Christopher; that can be dealt with at the will reading. I just want to get my feelings off my chest so I can die at some sort of peace with myself.*

*I've never told you this, but I have spent many years hating myself for what happened with Digger. If I hadn't let him seduce me, you would have gone on in blissful ignorance, married him and had your baby, and even though you would have eventually found out what a low life he was, at least you'd have been a mother. Instead I helped break your heart and you had no choice but to have an abortion that left you unable to have another child. I know Christopher is the light of your life but you should have had the chance to have a baby with Max, who you adored. So, the only way I can try and make up for my crimes is by giving you the happiness you deserve.*

*I have given Wilhelm strict instructions to invite Max to the funeral. When you get the chance, talk to him. Get back with him Lizzie. You have never loved anyone like you loved Max and I can guarantee he feels the same way about you. The pair of you belong together and I won't be able to rest until I look down from Heaven and see you walking down the aisle again.*

*Goodbye my darling Lizzie. I hope we meet again some day. You'll be a raddled old ghost of about a hundred and I'll be restored to my boyhood beauty! I will die a happy man because I knew you. My only regret is that I had to leave you so soon.*

*Enjoy the rest of your life and I know that son of yours will grow into a handsome young man you can be proud of. Take care my dear Elizabeth and remember, Max loves you.*

*Forever yours - Bertie x*

## **Chapter 38**

St Michael's Church Pimlico was packed to the rafters with mourners, all come to say goodbye to Bertie. It made Lizzie proud to see so many people here to say goodbye to her wonderful friend. Faces from stage and screen, and the many people Bertie had touched with his warmth

and humour over the years had come to honour him. Lizzie was one of the chief mourners, along with Wilhelm; a maiden aunt Bertie sometimes visited and indeed Ramona – the wife he'd married many years ago and never saw again. She'd read about his death in the paper and had come to pay her respects. She was a typically fat American who had abandoned her dreams of stardom when the first of her four children came along. She was still with Cornelius, the Jamaican and they sat with Lizzie at the front of the church.

In typical Bertie fashion, he'd requested his coffin be brought in to *This is my Life* by Shirley Bassey. Lizzie tried hard not to look at the wooden box adorned with lilies and orchids; to imagine Bertie in there filled her with horror. Instead she looked around the chilly church just to see who had attended. Well, one person in particular actually, and she spotted him immediately. Her heart flipped on seeing Max again. He sat beside a beautiful young woman and for a moment Lizzie wondered if she was his new partner, then she noticed the Oriental slant to her eyes, and the refined features and she realised it was Liza, his daughter. Lizzie tried hard not to stare too much, but it made her smile to see how little Max had changed; his hair had receded quite a lot and the lenses in his glasses seemed a little thicker, but he had not gained weight or looked particularly weathered. To her he was still her Max.

The service began; Bertie had insisted that he didn't want too much emphasis on religion, so there was lots of music and singing. Laura Bales, one of his favourite musical stars sang 'Bright Lights Big City' from 'Ship Ahoy' and after that Wilhelm spoke a few words about the man he loved and how much he was going to miss him. After that everyone sung *Over the Rainbow*, as Bertie wanted to be remembered as a 'Friend of Dorothy', but Lizzie found it hard to sing, knowing all the while she would be expected to speak next. How could she talk about Bertie without bursting into tears?

She shook as she approached the lectern. Her heart beat like a drum and she'd never been so afraid to speak in public in her entire life. She took the stand, placing her speech before her, not that she needed it, she knew exactly what she wanted to say.

'I'm here today,' she began. 'To give thanks for the life of my darling Bertie Preston. We met over thirty years ago when we were both unknowns working in a hotel in London. We hit it off straight away; I was a naïve fifteen year old and thought Bertie fancied me!' There were titters around the church and Lizzie continued. 'He went on to become the best friend anyone could ask

for. Nearly everything that has happened in my life, Bertie has been there for me. And I know I took much more than I gave and I want to say sorry Bertie. I can't believe I'm never going to see you again. I'll not have you to bitch with or confide in,' she had to pause, tears filled her eyes and her sobs prevented her from talking. She tried to take a deep breath and continue. She didn't want Christopher to see her cry. 'I know that however long I've got left in this world, I'll never find another friend like Bertie,' she couldn't say anymore, the grief became too much for her and she had to steady herself by holding onto the lectern. She cried so hard she felt faint, and was grateful when she felt a pair of hands grasp her shoulders. She looked up through her tears and saw it was Max; he held her tightly and led her back to her seat, squeezing in beside her and holding her until the tears ebbed away. The church fell eerily silent and Lizzie was the only person who could be heard. The vicar quickly stepped in and tried to continue after such a dramatic episode.

After the burial, those who wanted to went back to Maggie Calvin's house for tea and the reading of Bertie's will. The ever-shy Christopher clung to Samantha Levy's side and Lizzie wasn't sure if he fancied the beautiful older girl or he simply felt comfortable with her because he'd known her all his life. Lizzie kept recalling Bertie's last wish – for her to get back with Max, and she knew she had to try and fulfil it. It was likely her ex-husband had moved on and had no room in his heart for her, but she knew if Bertie was looking down and didn't see her at least try, he would send a thunderbolt to get her.

Max was in the garden, chatting to his daughter. She was such a stunning girl, tall like her father and yet with that delicate Oriental beauty her mother must have possessed. Taking a deep breath, Lizzie approached them. Max spotted her and smiled.

'How are you feeling?' he asked.

'A lot better. Thank you for rescuing me. I bet Bertie was looking down and laughing at me.'

'I shouldn't think so. Bertie knew how much you loved him.' He stopped as if he felt bad about forgetting his manners. 'I'm sorry, Lizzie this is Liza my daughter. Liza this is Lizzie, my first wife.'

'I love you in Diamonds,' Liza smiled, her voice quiet and very posh. 'I couldn't believe it when daddy told me he'd once been married to you.'

‘That was a lifetime ago,’ Lizzie blushed.

‘Anyway,’ the young girl said. ‘I’ve got to be off, the shoot starts at six.’

‘Okay darling,’ Max replied. ‘Thank you for coming with me.’

Liza kissed her father upon the cheek and bade Lizzie farewell. She then left, making her way out back through the house.

‘Is she a model?’ Lizzie asked.

‘Photographer,’ Max smiled proudly. ‘She started while she was at school. Then last year she got a commission for Tatler and dropped out after her GCSEs. She’s making quite a name for herself.’

‘Clever girl.’

‘I like to think so.’

He paused and it made Lizzie smile as his eyes discreetly scanned her body.

‘You look wonderful,’ he said. ‘Short hair suits you.’

Lizzie involuntarily reached up and touched the back of her head.

‘I don’t think there are many women of my age who can get away with long hair.’

‘You’ll always look twenty-one to me Lizzie,’ he said softly.

Just like that day many many years ago when Lizzie was stuck for words and could only look at him and blush, so she did now. And, just like that day back on the set of ‘Nightstalker’, she was rescued by Lyn, who stuck her head out of the patio doors.

‘Come on Lizzie,’ she called. ‘They’re about to read the will.’

Lizzie looked up at Max and smiled.

‘Maybe I’ll see you later,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘I’d like that a lot.’

For the first time on this horrible day Lizzie felt hope in her heart and her head swam with happiness at being reunited with Max. He may have been pushing sixty and greying and receding, and all the other things age brings, but to her he would always be that handsome Assistant Director she met on the set of 'Nightstalker'.

The will reading was taking place in Maggie's library. Piers Holden, Bertie's lawyer had also called in Lyn, Wilhelm, Christopher and Ramona. The jolly, fat American woman squeezed into a Queen Anne chair next to Lizzie, grasping her hand and telling her that her speech was moving, suggesting they go for lunch some time.

Holden cleared his throat, eager to begin the reading. Lizzie looked at her son; the expression on his face was one of bewilderment, she didn't know why he found it surprising Bertie had left him something in his will. Bertie adored him.

'This is the last Will and Testament of Albert Aloysius Preston. I Albert Preston of sound mind would like my estate to be distributed thus; to my beloved partner Wilhelm Morten I bequeath my properties – a flat in New York, a house in Malaga and my country apartment near Bournemouth. To my dear friend Lyn Beckford Levy, I bequeath the sum of one hundred thousand pounds. Dear Lyn, please do not spend this on plastic surgery, you are a beautiful woman and stay as you are. To my youngest chum and surrogate son Christopher Albert Sellars, I bequeath all of my pianos. You are a fine musician and I want you to make the most of that talent and your mother proud.' Lizzie looked at the expression of delight on her son's face and she smiled, reaching out and stroking his cheek. Bertie owned several Steinways; a baby grand and the old thing he'd owned when they first met but was probably worth a fortune now.

Holden continued.

'To my wife Ramona Preston, if she can be located, I bequeath the sum of five thousand pounds and a thousand pounds for any children she may have. Finally, to my darling Elizabeth Sellars, I bequeath the sum of one million pounds, as well as the publishing rights and royalties to all my musicals, all of which will go to Christopher Sellars on Lizzie's death, and subsequently any children he may have. I would like any remaining money and the sale of my assets to go to the Terence Higgins Trust to help with the research into a cure for HIV and AIDS.'

Lizzie was left speechless. Bertie had left her so much, but not the one thing she wanted more than anything – himself. Once the reading was over, everyone returned to the gathering and Lizzie saw that some people had left. For a moment she feared one of them was Max, until she spotted him talking to Maggie near the fountain in the garden. Like a nervous teenager, she felt hesitant about joining them, but she took a deep breath and braced herself, walking across the grass, still shaking from the knowledge Bertie had left nearly everything to her.

‘How did it go?’ Maggie asked.

‘Great,’ Lizzie replied, feeling now was not the time to be talking about money. ‘Christopher’s over the moon, Bertie’s left him all of his pianos.’

‘Likes music does he?’ Max asked.

‘He’s music mad. He’s just won a place at the Guildhall School of Music, that’s why I’m leaving Diamonds and coming back to London.’

‘To stay?’ he practically gasped.

‘Yes,’ Maggie complained playfully. ‘She reckons she’s ready to retire. She doesn’t realise her commission helps feed my Labradors!’

Talking of the dogs reminded Maggie that they were locked in one of the stables and would be getting lonely. Lizzie was glad she was gone, so she could be alone with Max. He too seemed relieved that he could finally ask the question that had been bugging him for so long.

‘Is Christopher adopted?’ he whispered.

‘Sort of,’ she replied. ‘He’s my grandson, but he doesn’t know it. He thinks he’s my son.’

‘Your grandson?’ Max gasped. ‘You found your daughter?’

‘Yes,’ she grinned. ‘But I couldn’t possibly tell you about it here. Buy me dinner tomorrow night and I will reveal all.’

He smiled that cheeky smile, those blue eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

‘Now that sounds like an offer I can’t refuse.’

## Chapter 39

Lizzie felt as nervous about her date with Max as she did her very first date with Bobby Duff when she was sixteen. Being reunited with him at the funeral had made her realise how right they felt together and how important it was everything went properly this time. He had seen her during the worst times of her life and it was vital he realised she was over her demons and could be trusted.

She started her day by booking a facial at Blakelys on Sloane Street. Lianne, her therapist cooed at how beautiful and supple her skin was for a woman in her fifties, then proceeded to smother it with expensive creams and potions, trying to convince Lizzie to buy a pot of their latest wonder serum, a snip at three hundred pounds for 33ml! Lizzie politely refused, but she did leave the salon feeling refreshed and relaxed. She headed for Harvey Nichols, deciding to treat herself to a new outfit. She knew it was all quite ridiculous, Max was hardly a stranger, but it was all part of the excitement. She didn't even know where he was taking her; he'd just said he'd pick her up from Lyn's at seven thirty.

Just as she was about to enter the shop, the door opened and a pushchair emerged. Jumping back a little, Lizzie was about to berate the owner when she looked up and recognised the beautiful young woman with flowing blonde hair and a serene, heart shaped face.

'Fleur!' she gasped.

'Lizzie,' the girl exclaimed, wheeling the child out of the shop and onto the pavement. Lizzie followed and they embraced. Lizzie hadn't seen Fleur since she'd divorced Malachi in 1985. It was so lovely to see the girl who'd been more of a daughter to her than her real one.

'You look wonderful Lizzie,' she said, still possessing a slight Gallic lilt to her voice. 'How are you and how is Christopher?'

'We're very well, except we lost Bertie.'

'Yes I read that in the newspapers. I'm very sorry, he was a lovely man.'



‘He was, yes,’ Lizzie replied, sniffing back the tears that still came so easily. ‘Your brother would love to see you.’

‘I know, and I’m so very sorry for losing touch,’ she glanced down at the pushchair. ‘As you can see, I’ve been busy.’

A pretty little girl of about three, with blonde curls secured at the side with a little clip sat smiling up at Lizzie.

‘This is Erin,’ Fleur told her; she then ran her hand over her stomach. ‘And this is Bump.’

It was only then that Lizzie noticed her stepdaughter’s bulging stomach.

‘I see what you mean,’ she laughed.

From out of her bag Fleur got a card, passing it to Lizzie.

‘Ring me, please. I’d like to see you and Christopher. He’s got a niece he doesn’t even know about. And I’ve missed *you* Lizzie, you were always so kind to me.’

‘Bless you,’ Lizzie smiled, running her hand up and down Fleur’s arm. How she wished Starr had turned out like this. Fleur would always be her Mary Ann, not that American witch. ‘Maybe I could be a surrogate granny to Erin and bump.’

‘I’d like that,’ Fleur nodded. ‘Anyway, I must rush. Scott’s got a show on at the Tate tonight. I’ve got to rush home, get Erin settled then make myself beautiful.’

‘You already are,’ Lizzie smiled. ‘I’ll see you soon, I promise.’

The two women embraced once more and Fleur went on her way. Lizzie looked at the card in her hand, it read ‘*Fleur Meade – Interior Designer*’, then gave various numbers. Lizzie held it tightly, happy that Fleur was another person who had come back into her life.

Evening came and Lizzie’s nerves reached fever pitch. She sat on Lyn’s sofa biting her nails, Christopher glued to the computer as usual. She worried about her son’s mental development; he was such a solitary soul. She hoped at his new school he would meet a boy he could be friends with and actually go out and play instead of being stuck in front of a screen.

Lyn was at the dining table bashing out her latest novel on her old electric typewriter. She didn't trust computers – convinced she would lose her work if it crashed. The noise was deafening and Lizzie wished she could just have some silence. She hoped she looked okay. She'd brought a floaty, white skirt and shirt by Jean Muir and wondered if it would be appropriate for wherever Max was planning on taking her.

'Darling this man has been in the toilet after you've done a dump,' Lyn suddenly shouted across the room. 'Why on earth are you so concerned about creating the right impression?'

'I was young and beautiful then,' she replied. 'Look at me now, I'm fifty and saggy and I'm getting wrinkles. You saw pictures of Annabel, she looked like a porcelain doll.'

'Yeah and I bet all the time he was screwing her he was thinking of you.'

'Lyn!' she exclaimed, worried Christopher was listening. Fortunately he was plugged into his Walkman and couldn't hear a thing. Lyn really could be an embarrassment at times.

The bell rang and Lizzie practically jumped out of her skin. She got up, smoothing down her outfit and re-touching her hair before opening the door. Max stood there in a casual suit and no tie, a nervous smile on his face.

'You look lovely,' he said.

'Thanks,' she blushed. 'I've had this for ages.'

'Don't believe her Max!' Lyn called out. 'She spent six hundred quid on it in Harvey Nicks today.'

Max laughed and held out his arm to Lizzie. She took it and he led her out of the door. A nippy little convertible Mazda stood shuddering in the middle of the road.

'For a socialist, sports cars are awfully frivolous Max,' Lizzie chuckled, getting in.

'They're my passion and you know that,' he replied, sitting beside her. He looked slyly at her. 'Well, one of them.'

It was a beautiful summer's evening and when Max drove them through Wandsworth and down the A3, Lizzie realised they were heading out of London, and had a vague suspicion as to where.

When they were married - and happy - they had gone for a drive one Sunday and ended up pulling into a lay-by and making love. Afterwards, tired, happy and hungry they'd gone to a local pub and had sandwiches and beer and danced in the beer garden to Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders' *Groovy Kind of Love*. To be revisiting somewhere that held such tender memories meant Max was serious about her and this filled Lizzie's heart with joy.

As if they'd never been apart, conversation flowed easily and en route, Lizzie told Max everything about Starr and Malachi and Christopher. It saddened him that the little girl Lizzie had pinned all her hopes upon had turned out to be such a disappointment.

'Do you feel anything for her?' he asked.

'Not really no. I always read articles about her, so I guess I'm curious. But I don't love her. I love Christopher and thank her for having him. But that's it. I do have one regret though.'

'What's that?'

'That he isn't ours.'

'Sometimes with Liza I'd wonder what our child would have been like. Would it have been like her?'

'She's a very beautiful girl.'

'She is,' he smiled proudly. 'We're both lucky to have such lovely kids.'

As Lizzie anticipated, he drove her to the Swann Inn just outside of Guildford. It was a large family pub with a beer garden that ran down to a brook. The sandwich menu had been replaced with a whole range of Thai dishes, but very little else had changed. Business tonight was quiet and this pleased Lizzie as it meant she wouldn't get hassled. She found them a table outside on the green and waited while Max ordered their food and drinks. How lovely it was to be back in England, with the normality of pubs and unpredictable weather. She had to return to New York in three weeks to film Corey's final scenes, then she would be free. She wanted to remain in London, concentrating on Christopher, and working with Jeremy Walsh to keep Bertie's musicals going.

Max joined her, passing her a vodka and tonic.

‘Please say you’ll just sip this,’ he laughed.

‘Of course I will,’ she replied. ‘Those days are long since gone.’

‘Glad to hear it.’ He sipped his beer and squinted his eyes from the sun. ‘You know there were times I hated myself for abandoning you, but I just couldn’t cope anymore.’

‘You did me a favour. The shock of you leaving finally got me back on the straight and narrow - after a nervous breakdown of course. But I was heading for that regardless of you being around.’

‘You don’t hate me? I was always frightened you would.’

‘I could never hate you Max. I thought you hated me.’

‘Never, you should have known that. I loved Annabel greatly, but I never stopped thinking about you.’

‘I was glad you found happiness again. What was Annabel like?’

‘She was lovely,’ he sighed. ‘We were very happy together, and Liza was just the icing on the cake.’

Their food arrived and talk moved to the present. Max telling her all about the series he was making for the BBC, tracing the history of Independent Cinema. He sounded just as enthusiastic as he had back in 1958, working on his first film.

After dinner they settled back and enjoyed the setting sun and the gentle sound of the brook as it flowed.

‘So,’ Max asked tentatively. ‘Is there anyone in New York?’

‘There are millions of people in New York,’ she replied facetiously, knowing exactly what he was hinting at.

‘You know what I mean.’

‘No Max, there is no one. There’s been no one since Malachi. What about you?’

‘No, I’ve had to be careful not to upset Liza. I don’t want her to feel I’m trying to replace her mother,’

‘I understand that. It’s the same with me. If I were to date again he’d have to get on with Chris as well. But I’ve given up on men. They’re all bastards.’

‘Thanks.’

‘You’re the only one who didn’t treat me badly, and look how I thanked you.’

‘You had every reason to crack up Lizzie. I should have been more of a man and stood by you.’

‘Then you wouldn’t have married Annabel and had Liza, so don’t look on it like that.’

‘I suppose not. Another drink?’

‘Yes, I’d like a tonic water please.’

Max went back into the bar and Lizzie looked at her watch. It was almost ten o’clock and she was saddened the evening was coming to an end. She never wanted to be away from Max again, and yet there was no guarantee he’d want to see her again - he’d given no clues. After losing Bertie, she wasn’t sure she could withstand rejection from Max.

He returned with the drinks and sat back down. Within a few moments the opening bars of Phil Collins’ version of *Groovy Kind of Love* started up in the bar, pumping through the speakers in the garden. Max smiled and sipped his beer.

‘They didn’t have the original version on the jukebox I’m afraid,’ was all he said.

‘I’m surprised you remembered,’ she laughed.

‘Would you like to dance Mrs Sellars?’ he asked.

‘I’d love to Mr Bowers, and it’s Ms *Gallagher*.’

He took her hand and she stood up, he grasped her around the waist and she put her arms around his neck. They danced to the slow version of the song that had been theirs when they were young. Lizzie was so happy she could cry. The fame, the money, none of it meant anything

without love, and to be with Max was the most perfect thing that could happen. Even if he never wanted to see her again she would remember this night forever.

He laid his head upon hers, swaying her gently.

‘I still love you,’ he said softly.

‘I love you too,’ she replied, barely able to choke back the tears. How long she had waited to hear him say those words.

‘When you come back from New York how do you feel about maybe giving it another go?’

She pulled away and looked up at him, the tears flowing freely.

‘Do you mean it?’

‘Yes,’ he smiled. ‘What’s the point of us being apart? We belong together.’

‘Oh Max,’ she sighed. ‘Oh Max yes, let’s give it another go.’

She hugged him once more and as the song drew to its close, she looked up at a beautiful silver star that was glinting in the sky and simply mouthed the words;

‘Thanks Bertie.’

## **Chapter 40**

### **London – May 2007**

Lizzie closed the *News of the World*, shaking her head in dismay. Yet another picture of her son falling out of a nightclub with that little scrubber Marsha Bell adorned page three. For the life of her she couldn’t see what Christopher saw in the glamour model who was more famous for talking about her ex-lovers than actually modelling. It was a shame really as she was actually a pretty girl underneath all the horrid make up she wore, but she was a mess both inside and outside and it worried Lizzie that Christopher had inherited her tendency to attract ‘wrong-uns’.

Ironically, a few pages on was an article about her birth daughter's decision to pose in *Playboy* at the age of forty-nine. Starr was still a stunningly beautiful woman. Those icy blue eyes shone out as brightly as ever, but Lizzie suspected her wrinkle free face was down to botox. Back in 2001 Starr had adopted Chinese twin girls, never having had another child of her own after Christopher. Lizzie wondered if she ever followed her birth son's career. Christopher's band, Line Out was massive on both sides of the Atlantic and Starr couldn't have failed to put two and two together and realise who he was. He'd hardly hidden the fact he was Elizabeth Maine and Malachi Sellars' son.

Max lowered the *Sunday Times* and looked over at his wife. Just by the expression upon her face he knew she was fretting over Christopher.

'Why do you torture yourself by reading those horrible tabloids?' he asked. 'You know half of it's not true.'

'Unfortunately there's the pictorial evidence,' Lizzie tutted. 'I wish they'd split up.'

Max put the paper to one side and leaned forward onto his knees, a concerned look on that craggy face.

'Darling do you think you could amuse yourself for a month or so?'

'Why?' she asked.

'I've had an offer by Channel Four to make a documentary on the Spanish Civil War. They want to me to go out there in two weeks time and I'll be gone for a month.'

'Oh Max you're seventy four years old, can't you take it easy? And what about La Boheme? I had to fight tooth and nail for those tickets.'

'Take Lyn. You know it's always fun taking Lyn to the opera, she just talks all the way through it.'

'Exactly. Thank *you* Lord Bowers.'

They were interrupted by the phone ringing. Lizzie leaned over and picked it up, hoping it was Christopher to say he was splitting with Marsha.

‘Hi is that Elizabeth?’ a tentative voice asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Hello, it’s Michelle Sharp.’

Michelle was Maggie Calvin’s granddaughter. She had taken over the agency when Maggie died in 2002. Lizzie hadn’t seen her since the funeral.

‘Hello Michelle. How are things with you?’

‘Busy as ever. I seem unable to juggle everything like gran did.’

‘You’ll learn lovey, don’t worry. What can I do for you?’

‘I’m sorry to trouble you on a Sunday, but I’ve been away in Prague. I came home to find a message from a guy at Fiesta Films. He thought I still represented you and they’re interested in you taking a part in Eastwood Avenue.’

‘Eastwood Avenue!’ Lizzie exclaimed. ‘But I haven’t acted in sixteen years! Why me?’

‘I don’t know. Do you fancy meeting him? You don’t have to agree to anything.’

‘Oh go on,’ she laughed. ‘But let him pay for lunch. It’s all his idea after all.’

‘Great,’ Michelle gasped. ‘I’ll let him know.’

Lizzie put down the phone and turned to her husband, furrowing her brow.

‘Why did I just agree to that?’

‘What’s that darling?’

‘They want me for a part in Eastwood Avenue. I haven’t acted since 1991 and I’ve no intention of starting again.’

‘Well I say go for it,’ Max urged her. ‘You used to love acting and you’re still a cracking looking woman.’

‘You would say that,’ she smiled. ‘You’re biased.’



The meeting was set up for one week later at Whitakers, a restaurant just off the Strand where many theatrical types met for lunch. Gary Wallis was one of the producers of Eastwood Avenue and Lizzie felt terribly old to see he wasn't much older than Christopher. Eastwood Avenue was shown every afternoon at five thirty and had a cult following amongst the elderly, idle, students and housewives. It centred around an ordinary avenue in West London, with all the usual affairs and backstabbing that soap operas were made of. It was quite light-hearted and this pleased Lizzie; she couldn't have taken the browbeating of *Eastenders*.

Michelle joined them for lunch, and with her shock of dark, red hair and that pinched face Lizzie was reminded just how much the young girl resembled her grandmother. She was a very amiable young woman and Lizzie wondered how long it would be before she got eaten by the sharks in this business.

'Now Elizabeth,' Gary began, once he'd wolfed down his goats cheese tart. 'I've got you here to make you an offer. You don't have to accept but I want you to consider it.'

'Yes.'

'I don't know how familiar you are with the show. But there is a pub called the Wishing Well. I want you to take over as the landlady.'

'Me! Landlady of a pub?'

'Yes,' he laughed nervously. 'I know it goes against the classy image. But your character, Sylvia Burke was a beauty queen back in the 1950s and married a gangster. He's now dead and she takes over the pub, but his old adversaries are always on the prowl, trying to cause trouble for her.'

'And where is she from?' Lizzie asked.

'She's a cockney. She's a sexy older woman that all the older men in the Avenue fancy. How does that sound to you?'

'Why did you ask me?'

‘You’ll laugh at this, but we came up with the character of Sylvia and couldn’t think of an actress; then the other day my girlfriend was watching a repeat of Diamonds on UK Gold and I saw you as Corey and I just knew it had to be you.’

‘I see. Well I’m very flattered, but I haven’t acted in years. I’m not sure if I can commit to a soap opera.’

‘We’d offer you a six month contract initially, then we can take it from there.’

‘You realise Elizabeth has other commitments,’ Michelle chipped in. ‘She has a tour of ‘Ship Ahoy’ to oversee soon.’

He nodded a little too enthusiastically.

‘That’s fine, we can write the script around her. What do you think Elizabeth?’

‘Well it all sounds very nice, but I have to talk it over with my husband first.’

‘Of course. Take as long as you want, but if you do join us, you won’t regret it.’

By the time Lizzie got home, she’d made up her mind that she was going to do the show. It was true that ‘Ship Ahoy’ was going on tour, but she had very little input into Bertie’s musicals – Jeremy Walsh did such a good job of the hiring and firing, he could work alone. Max was itching to go off and make his film, and very soon Christopher would be embarking on a world tour with Line Out. Lizzie hated feeling like a spare part and at least this would give her something to do rather than hang around Lyn’s house smoking fags and drinking too much coffee. Perhaps one last fling with stardom would be fun.

Back home in Barnes, Max was in the conservatory polishing his camera equipment ready for the coming weekend. Liza had provided him with his first grandchild, a boy named Freddie, and the very proud Max had appointed himself official photographer at the Christening. Lizzie made them both a cup of coffee and sat with him, explaining what had happened over lunch and the offer she’d been made. Max listened intently, supportive as ever. But when she informed him she’d decided to accept, he shocked her by disagreeing.

‘But Lizzie you can’t do it,’ he said, feigning concern.

‘Whyever not?’ she replied.

‘You can’t do a cockney accent.’

And with that, they burst out laughing.

## **Epilogue**

Elaine blew out her cheeks and shook her head.

‘Wow, that’s quite a story,’ was all she could manage. It had been a very intense two days, with lots of tears and laughter from Lizzie, and at times Elaine had felt more like a therapist than a writer. ‘I’m not sure we can publish. There would be several lawsuits issued against you.’

‘We could always change names.’

‘I guess so. But I think it’s best we just keep this personal. Starr MacKenzie used to room with one of my friends, and by all accounts she’s not the sort of person you cross. I can only give you my sympathy for being her mother.’

‘But I hate living a lie,’ Lizzie whined. ‘I want to tell the truth.’

Elaine switched off the Dictaphone and leaned forward onto her knees, looking intently at this woman she’d come to like and admire over the past weekend. Lizzie was a warm, loving person who had lived a tough life and yet had not let it spoil her.

‘At the end of the day it doesn’t matter what the public think of you. You’ve fought hard to get where you are today. There is only one person I think deserves to know the truth and that’s Christopher.’

Lizzie’s blood ran cold.

‘But what if he wants to go off and find Starr or something?’

‘Why should he? The world knows Starr MacKenzie is a vile bitch. He’s got a wonderful, loving mother in you and I think he has his own issues to sort out don’t you?’

‘Oh yes, Marsha.’

‘Yes, Marsha. I’m taking her back to the States with me. I’ve been neglecting her for long enough. She needs to come home and sort her head out. But I do think you need to speak to your son.’

‘I guess you’re right. I just hope he doesn’t hate me for it.’

‘What? Hate you for sparing him from being aborted? For loving and caring for him and protecting him from his real mother? I don’t think you’ll have anything to worry about.’

Elaine left and Lizzie was glad they had settled their differences and had forged a friendship. Lizzie made her promise to keep in touch, updating her on Marsha’s progress. While she wasn’t the young girl’s greatest fan, she could sympathise with a lost soul who’d chosen the wrong path. After a cigarette and another cup of coffee, she phoned Max over in Madrid and had another little cry, glad to hear his voice, recalling the time when they were separated. She never wanted to be apart from him again.

Straight afterwards she called Christopher on his mobile. From the noise in the background, she could tell he was still at the studio.

‘Darling could you come over please?’ she asked. ‘I need to talk to you.’

‘Mum, what I do in my private life is none of your business,’ he snapped.

‘It’s not just that. Please Chris, do this one thing for me. Just come over this evening.’

‘Oh alright. I can’t stay late though, we’re still rehearsing.’

Lizzie paced the floor with nerves, smoking a chain of Marlboros and trying to avoid hitting the vodka. Christopher arrived about half an hour later. He stank of cannabis and she wished he wouldn’t smoke it so much. He was so grumpy sometimes and Lizzie wondered if he would ever grow out of the teenager stage, but she then thought of Starr; twenty years older than her son and yet still flaunting herself like an eighteen year old. Perhaps it was genetic.

‘Elaine’s taking Marsha back to the States,’ she said. ‘She’s going to try and help her sort herself out.’

‘Good,’ was all he said.

‘Chris why didn’t you come out to me? Are you gay? Is it a phase?’

He looked down and blushed and Lizzie found this endearing. He was twenty-nine, a rock god and yet blushing like a boy.

‘You don’t know what it was like for me,’ he said quietly. ‘It all happened at once.’

‘What did darling?’

‘Dean. You remember my friend Dean back in New York? He and I....well it was nothing, just a bit of kissing. Then Bertie died, and that day you got so drunk and was telling Lyn that if I turned out gay you’d kill yourself. It’s stupid because I know you’re not homophobic but it became like a block. I could never face up to it. I’ve never had a relationship with a man, just the occasional fling.’

‘Like the boy Marsha found you with?’

‘Yes.’

‘You are careful aren’t you?’

‘Mum, Bertie’s death taught me all I needed to know about safe sex thank you very much. I’m sorry anyway.’

‘No I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have got so drunk that day and frightened you. I’m a bad mother.’

He looked at her and smiled, squeezing her hand.

‘No you’re not. You’re a fantastic mother.’

Lizzie’s heart beat rapidly. She knew it was now or never.

‘Talking of which,’ she began. ‘There’s something I need to tell you.’

The End

Also by Karen Mason....

## **SUMMERSET**

A tale of forbidden love and a quest for revenge against a backdrop of social change. When London teenager Lou O'Connell comes to the Sussex village of Summerset after World War II, her life changes forever. As the daughter of the local publican, she becomes the belle of the village, pursued by most of the local young men. Her heart, however, belongs to Andrew McDonald, the husband of Briggy Sheridan, daughter of the much hated brewing family who not only own the pub, but most of the village. Lou and Andrew's passion spans decades, kept secret from everyone around them. Lou becomes a successful writer and rich in her own right, but when she makes a shocking discovery about her own heritage, she becomes hell-bent on seeking revenge and claiming what is rightfully hers.

## **Two Become One**

Farrah O'Rourke has spent her adult life breaking the law, opening an illegal rave club and marrying a gangster - she likes nothing more than living on the edge. Recently widowed she is struggling to get on with life when a bombshell is dropped upon her – she's the twin sister of Antonia Smedley, the Mayor of London's wife and one of the most loved women in the world. Former supermodel Toni - fashion icon and patron of many causes is catapulted to fame when her husband Jonathan becomes Mayor of London. Adored for her beauty and compassion no one knows her apparently perfect marriage is a sham. At just 38 she is diagnosed with terminal cancer and has one final request – to be reunited with the twin she was separated from as a baby. How did these two identical women end up living such different lives? As Farrah struggles with her sister's legacy, bringing up a family alone and avenging the death of her beloved husband, a face from the past returns to rock her already tumultuous world.

## **Winner Takes It All**

The sequel to *Summerset*. Louisa Cusack has died, leaving behind a family struggling to cope without her. Her son Christian has made Sheridans the brewery into a global success, but when he becomes desperately ill, it is up to his daughter Alex to take over the reigns. Meanwhile, Tom Montague, the disowned grandson of the Cusack's nemesis, Sorchia Sheridan D'Arbo, has been accepted back into the family fold with a mission to infiltrate the Cusacks and destroy Sheridans. Will Alex rise to the challenge of running Sheridans and will Tom and his evil cousin Jackson succeed in their plan to gain back what they feel is rightfully theirs?

## **The True Tale of Jezebel Cole**

World famous novelist, Patty Belleville, has gone missing. Her books about Jezebel Cole, the high-class prostitute have made her a household name, but when she releases *Two Hearts*, a romantic novel that flops, she decides to disappear. Her three daughters, Sasha, Rorie and Dana all have their own theories as to what has caused their mother to run away, but when a face from Patty's past returns, he reveals to Sasha that her mother ran away once before, shortly after writing the original version of *Two Hearts*. Convinced this is more than a publicity stunt, Sasha hires a private investigator to find Patty and along the way uncovers some horrifying secrets about her mother's childhood that may just provide the key to why she has gone missing now.

## **ONLY YOU**

Violet Spencer is a pioneer amongst women. For fifty years she has been the head of House of Valentine - one of the world's biggest cosmetics brands. But in tough economic times, sales are suffering, and Violet is determined to turn House of Valentine's fortunes around, so she can pass her legacy onto her beloved children.

Violet decides to go back to grass-roots and sets about launching 'Valentino' - her new budget brand. She looks back over her life, recalling her rise from the humble Battersea shop-girl working in Boothby's 'the Harrods of the South', who's determined to provide ordinary girls like her with quality cosmetics, to the wealthy matriarch she is today; on the way surviving a sham marriage, family battles, tragic loss, and the painful secret she has kept from her eldest daughter.

Will this magnificent woman overcome the odds once more and restore House of Valentine to its former glory? Or will she, at seventy-seven accept that the time has come to retire?



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