



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Lizzie frowned as she looked at the long line waiting to get into Buddha Bar. It was half-past eleven, and their peak time was not for another hour. A huge bouncer, the size of a sumo wrestler, was standing at the door, deciding who would get in. Suzanne had warned Lizzie that she would wait thirty minutes tops because it was ninety degrees outside, and the humidity was high. It made Lizzie question the leather pants she had worn, but she had nothing else to choose from. Her entire wardrobe consisted of gabardine pants and calf-length skirts. She had taken dull to a whole new level.

The bouncer ignored some preppy-looking men and their dates and went straight to Suzanne and Lizzie. “You girls can go in,” he told them. First, his eyes assessed Lizzie’s gold-bustier, and then they traveled south, looking at her leather-clad legs with sincere male appreciation. Then he turned to ogle Suzanne, much to her annoyance.

Suzanne grabbed Lizzie by the hand and rushed past the huge man, entering the club. Lizzie’s eyes were round as saucers as she took in the exotic interior. Jellyfish floated in suspended aquariums high above the seating areas. Suddenly, both women did a double-take. A designated all-glass smoking room stood before

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them. Inside, people were puffing away on the mayor's banned cigarettes.

Even though Suzanne loved Asian decor, she thought Buddha Bar seemed like a futuristic nightmare. However, seeing how Lizzie was enamored of the place, she kept her feelings to herself and hoped the club lived up to its hype. Suzanne stood before a massive statue of a buddha sitting under a skylight. "Now, that would look fantastic sitting in a large house, but my apartment is the size of a pea pod," Suzanne lamented.

Unfortunately, that was the sad truth. Lizzie felt terrible for Suzanne because she and Ali's apartments were significantly larger when compared to Suzanne's brownstone studio with its small sleeping loft. "Would you really want a large buddha if you had space?" Lizzie asked Suzanne.

"In a heartbeat. But not this huge," Suzanne answered, laughing. "A smaller version would be fine. Haven't I ever told you about my fascination with the Orient?"

"No, I don't remember you mentioning it. So when did it start?" Lizzie asked, highly interested in this newly discovered side to Suzanne.

"It began when my parents bought me a vintage geisha doll from Japan. The gofun doll wore a silk kimono with an obi tied around its waist. Since that first doll, I've collected Asian art over the years, but unfortunately, I have nowhere to display it." Suzanne's voice was tinged with sadness as she imagined her collection showcased on glass shelves in a large and airy room. "I want to travel to Japan someday and see the sights." Suzanne began taking photos of the giant buddha. "I've decided to name him Christian. He's my new cellphone wallpaper."

"That doesn't sound very Asian. Why did you pick that name?"

"Because I adore Christian Dior clothing. He's my favorite designer."

That made sense to Lizzie as they made their way to the main bar to order cocktails. "The prices for drinks are outrageous,"

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Lizzie whispered to Suzanne, who merely shrugged her pretty bare shoulders.

“It’s Manhattan and the meatpacking district. What did you expect?”

“I know. I know. You warned me that the prices were sky-high, but it would be worth it to meet some great guys.”

Lizzie was drinking a Black Buddha when a man sat down in the seat next to her. The stools were so close together that their legs almost touched. Lizzie stole a glance at him. He was very handsome in a bad boy way. Lizzie tried not to stare, but his raw masculinity was pulling her in like a lodestone. Even his package was bulging, which made her think of sex. In addition, he sported black wavy hair and at least a day’s worth of dark stubble, which only added to his appeal. Lizzie usually went out with bookish men who hung out in museums and read musty tomes, but her heart secretly yearned for a man like him.

Hoping to generate some interest, Lizzie gave him what she thought was a seductive smile, and the man smiled back at her. Then to her happy surprise, he asked Lizzie if he could buy her a drink. She gladly accepted and decided that her man-bait outfit was working. She was smoking hot tonight!

Suzanne slowly drank a martini that cost a whopping sixteen dollars. In case she didn’t meet anyone, she intended to nurse it for a while. Inwardly, Suzanne cringed at the muscular-looking goon hitting on her friend. The men she was attracted to had style and class, but it seemed that tonight Lizzie was taking a walk on the wild side.

While Lizzie sipped her drink, she couldn’t help noticing that the man with the sexy bedroom eyes was now giving her the once-over. His eyes came to rest on her cleavage, which was popping out of the gold-spangled bustier.

“So, babe, how much do you charge?” he asked her.

“Charge for what?” Lizzie had no idea what he meant by that.

“To enjoy the pleasure of your company, sweet thing.” Lizzie was thrilled. She decided he must be asking her out on a date. Men

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used all kinds of pickup lines, but that was a new one. Lizzie's eyes sparkled with happiness, and her bust gleamed ivory under the red glass chandeliers. When the man's hand rested on her shoulder, she shivered from his touch.

"Do you have a name to go with those gorgeous green eyes?" Lizzie had become so flustered that she couldn't recall her name.

"It's, uh... Lizzie. Lizzie Stein."

"It's nice to meet you, Lizzie. I'm Jack Ginsberg." Dammit! Why had he given the redhead his real name?

Lizzie finished the remainder of her drink, and Jack ordered her another. She drank the Black Buddhas like greased lightning, needing the courage the liquor provided. It had been far too long since her last date, and she didn't want to say or do anything that might turn Jack off in any way.

While she tried to think of her next move, Jack took the initiative and bent his head to Lizzie's. She felt Jack's tongue lick the seam of her lips, which opened on automatic pilot for him. He tasted and caressed Lizzie's mouth, making her dizzy with desire. Not caring that others were watching, Lizzie threw caution to the wind and wrapped her arms around Jack's neck to get more of his kisses. Suzanne stared at her friend in shock. Lizzie must have lost her mind. She was making out with a total stranger!

As Lizzie sipped her third drink, Jack's hand roamed to her sequin-covered breasts. Typically, Lizzie would have slapped his hand away, but she wasn't thinking clearly. The three drinks packed quite a punch, despite the fruity flavor. "This oriental stuff is beginning to weird me out, and I want to get to know you better," Jack told her. "Let's get out of here so we can be alone."

Lizzie had allowed Jack to cop a feel and in a public place. "You're coming on a little too fast for me, Jack. After all, we just met."

"I can be nice and slow"—Jack paused to run his hand up Lizzie's thigh, and she gasped, but it was a gasp of pleasure. "If that's how you like it, babe." Had she heard him correctly? Jack's arm was around Lizzie's waist, pulling her closer to him, and she

stared at his mouth, which was shiny from their kisses. He whispered huskily into her ear, “How much would you charge me to see what’s under all that glitter? I can be very generous when the mood strikes me.”

False bravado fueled by too much liquor made Lizzie lose all common sense. Here was her golden opportunity for a boyfriend and great sex. Jack was coming on a bit strong, but he was so damn hunky that she didn’t care.

“Do you think you can afford me, big boy?” Lizzie purred, trying to sound sexy. “I don’t come cheap.” It had been quite a while since she’d flirted either drunk or stone-cold sober.

Jack removed his arm from Lizzie, and a police badge materialized in its place. “Okay, Miss Stein, you are under arrest for solicitation of prostitution.”

“You can’t arrest me! Are you crazy?” Lizzie asked in a state of shock.

“Anything you say can be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to retain an attorney—”

Suzanne could not believe what was happening. The over-muscled idiot in the tight T-shirt had turned out to be a cop. And he thought Lizzie was a prostitute! Suzanne jumped off her seat and faced him. “How dare you try and arrest my friend! She isn’t a hooker, you moron. She hasn’t even had a date in over six months! Can’t you see that she’s drunk, thanks to you?” Then Suzanne took her clutch bag and hit Jack Ginsburg over the head with it.

“Ouch! Lady, I can arrest you right along with your friend. You can’t hit an officer of the law.”

Suzanne had taken some courses in law at John Jay College and used them to her advantage now. “This is entrapment and not enforceable in the eyes of the law. If you try and detain my friend, I will personally bring you up on charges.”

Jack stood there and looked at Lizzie. Tears were streaming down her face, taking her mascara with them, but Lizzie did not even care. The hunk of her dreams had humiliated her in front of

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everyone. She wanted to crawl into a hole and die. Suzanne took a tissue from her bag and wiped away the tears and makeup. Then she turned and glared at the cop with a look of pure hatred.

Meanwhile, the fine hairs on the back of Jack's neck were standing on end. Something didn't feel right about the situation, and he had to get to the bottom of it. Jack took a good hard look at Lizzie. With her makeup gone, she looked young and innocent. But he had met prostitutes who looked like angels and still spread their legs for many johns each night. He asked the two women to come outside with him so he could question them in private. A small crowd was gathering, and Jack needed to get them out of there quickly.

One man asked Suzanne how much she charged for a three-some, and she whacked him with her bag, which had become her weapon of choice for the evening.

Lizzie was clinging to Suzanne, and her throat was sore from crying, but she couldn't stop. "How could you think that I was a hooker?" she asked Jack Ginsberg between tearful sobs.

"For starters, look at that outfit you're wearing," he answered. "All the gold-glitter and those skintight black leather jeans. Gimme a break, lady. I'm a vice cop, and you fit the description."

Lizzie bawled and bawled some more, and Jack wondered how such a skinny woman could have that many tears in her. "I was lonely and looking for a boyfriend, and you pretended to like me."

Yes, he had done all that. But, it was part of the job when working undercover. "I offered you money," Jack reminded Lizzie. "When you eagerly accepted, that was the proof I needed."

Lizzie's alcohol-induced fog was beginning to lift at a rapid pace as she stood outside and breathed in the night air. "I was very attracted to you. As for the money, I thought that was some weird new kind of flirting. What my friend told you was the unfortunate truth. I haven't had a date in months." Lizzie looked at Jack Ginsberg through tear-stained eyes, and the hairs on Jack's neck

were now having a field day. “It took a lot of guts for me to come out tonight, and who did I have to meet—you!”

Lizzie was in full fighting form now, and she continued on her tirade. “Because you’re a cop, you think you know everything. Well, you wouldn’t know a hooker from a nun because that’s how I’ve been living! You are an awful, awful man!” It felt good to get some of the hurt and the anger out. “My girlfriend and I are merchandise buyers for Bloomingdale’s, you big jerk!”

Jack felt like the dirt beneath his shoes. She was telling the truth. Dammit. Jack had never screwed up before. There was one last question that he needed to ask. “But what about your hair? Only a working woman would dye her hair that shade of red.”

“Working woman!” Lizzie screamed at Jack. She knew what a working woman was. What an asshole! The booze hampered her aim, but Lizzie managed to kick the vice cop in his shin, and he yelped in pain. “This is my natural hair color. My parents always told me that my hair was beautiful.” Suzanne reassured Lizzie that her hair was lovely and not to pay any attention to the cop.

Jack didn’t know what to do. Lizzie was standing there in the moonlight, pale, freckled, and hurt. She looked beautiful without all the makeup hiding her delicate features. Truth be told, Lizzie resembled a young Nicole Kidman, even prettier.

Her girlfriend was right. It was entrapment, though Jack would die before admitting it. And to make matters even worse, he had enjoyed kissing Lizzie. Jack wanted more of those kisses, but now she hated his guts and with good reason. Wanting to make amends, Jack apologized and asked the women if he could drive them home. Lizzie looked at him as if he were some loathsome creature.

“Drop dead, scumbag,” she answered to his offer of a ride.

Rot in hell,” Suzanne spat at him.

Together, the two women walked off into the night. Suzanne was holding onto Lizzie’s waist to keep her from falling. She was teetering in her high heels as the liquor held her tightly in its grip.

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Jack Ginsburg was thirty-six years old, and he was lonely. Sure, he had one-night stands, but that was just fast sex to get his rocks off. For some crazy reason, Jack found Lizzie's freckles to be a huge turn-on. He wanted to kiss each one of them. But first, he had to woo Lizzie and gain her forgiveness so that she would go out on a date with him.